



**PRESSING FOR NEW RECORD**

There was little stress as 1,000 Indonesian masseurs performed simultaneous massage at a beach in Sanur, Bali, yesterday. The event was organised in an attempt to break the national record and to promote tourism in Bali.

PHOTO: EUROPEAN PRESSPHOTO AGENCY

# China puts low-key summit in spotlight

It will host forum; Xi will talk about Asian security

By **KOR KIAN BENG**  
CHINA BUREAU CHIEF  
IN BEIJING

A LOW-KEY multilateral forum founded by Kazakhstan to promote peace and security among Asian countries is set to get a boost when China hosts an upcoming summit in Shanghai.

Chinese President Xi Jinping will speak at the 4th summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (Cica) which opens on May 20. In his speech, he is expected to outline why Asian countries should take charge of regional security challenges.

Underscoring the summit's importance to China, Foreign Minister Wang Yi identified it as the country's two key diplomatic events this year, along with the Apec Leaders Summit in Beijing in November.

The two-day Cica summit is reported to have drawn a record number of leaders and delegates from some 40 countries and international organisations, including Singapore.

Chinese diplomats have talked up the summit as

a platform for China to outline a new paradigm for Asian security, which is expected to span non-traditional challenges such as environmental pollution, and traditional issues such as territorial disputes.

At a briefing on the summit on Thursday, Vice-Foreign Minister Cheng Guoping gave a big hint when he stressed that "Asian security should be handled in the Asian way", which calls for mutual respect and understanding, and finding common ground while shelving differences.

Observers say China's high-profile treatment for the summit reflects its eagerness to be more pro-active in regional security issues, which could spell implications on the role that the United States now plays in the region as a security guarantor.

Foreign policy analyst Zhang Mingliang cited as an example how China included a session on the South China Sea disputes at last month's Boao Forum for Asia, a first for the annual economic forum held on Hainan island.

"These events show that China's leadership wants to be more involved in regional security forums or bodies, which could have an indirect impact on the US' role," he told The Straits Times.

Professor Huang Jing, a Singapore-based analyst, believes China's expected central message at the summit - that Asian countries should take charge of regional security - is also a veiled warning to outside powers like the US.

"Besides diluting the US rebalancing to the Asia-Pacific, it is also to block big powers outside the region from getting involved in regional issues by saying Asian countries can solve the issues and reach a compromise ourselves," said Prof Huang of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy.

But Shanghai-based analyst Yang Cheng disagrees that China is seeking to use Cica as an alternate power structure against the West, particularly the Americans. He noted that the US is one of nine observers at the summit.

"If China wants to do so, it would be creating new infrastructures instead," Prof Yang of the East China Normal University told The Straits Times.

Instead, he believes China's enthusiasm has to do with other factors, such as its strong ties with Kazakhstan and the Chinese leadership's emphasis on building good ties with neighbours.

He said China sees a real need for Asian countries to deal with their own security challenges.

"Western countries often have the mindset that Asian countries are not good enough and need to be taught. But they tend to use one-size-fits-all solutions which may not be effective," he added.

Given its diverse membership, Cica is a suitable vehicle, said Prof Yang. Its 24 members are Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Cambodia, China, Egypt, India, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Pakistan, Palestine, South Korea, Russia, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan and Vietnam.

But analysts do not see Cica as being able to weaken Asean's central role in regional architecture and forums such as the security-based Asean Regional Forum.

Unlike Asean, Cica lacks trust-building mechanisms, said Prof Yang, adding: "Cica needs to learn from Asean, which remains very influential in South-east Asia."

kianbeng@sph.com.sg

## US condemns North Korea's racist remarks about Obama

WASHINGTON - The United States has condemned "ugly and disrespectful" racist comments directed at President Barack Obama by North Korea's official KCNA news agency comparing the US President to a black "monkey" in a zoo.

North Korean propaganda is known for vitriolic personal attacks on foreign leaders, but the KCNA despatch published last week - not long after Mr Obama's visit to South Korea - stood out for its use of highly inflammatory and abusive racist language.

"The way Obama looks disgusts me," said one worker at an ironworks factory.

"He looks like an African monkey with a black face... and protruding, hairy ears."

"And he acts just like a monkey in an African zoo... licking up the bread crumbs thrown by visitors."

Four people were interviewed in total and all their comments were similar in their racist nature, with one referring to Mr Obama as "sub-animal".

Said National Security Council spokesman Caitlin Hayden on Thursday: "While the North Korean government-controlled media are distinguished by their histrionics, these comments are particularly ugly and disrespectful."


Even before the May 2 despatch, KCNA had ramped up its rhetoric in the wake of Mr Obama's visit to Seoul, calling South Korean President Park Geun Hye a "prostitute" in thrall to her "pimp", Mr Obama.

Last month, it launched an aggressively homophobic tirade against the openly gay chairman of the United Nations Commission of Inquiry into Human Rights in North Korea, Mr Michael Kirby.


Although the language used to describe Mr Obama was exceptionally inflammatory, a number of North Korea experts have written books or theses that portray it as a country founded on race-based nationalism.


They point to prevalent propaganda painting the North Korean people as pure, innocently idealistic, and in need of protection from the rapacious and morally bankrupt outside world.

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