

Chinese fear guerrilla assaults on torch relay

Just two days before the Olympic torch relay here, a paranoid Chinese delegation told Indian authorities that it fears guerrilla-style assaults by militant Tibetans and sought foolproof security for the event.

A high-level Chinese team led by former ambassador Sun Yuxi, who has been specially sent to India by a nervous Beijing, met Delhi government officials Tuesday to discuss security for Thursday's torch relay ceremony.

'They are so fear stricken that all types of baseless apprehensions are doing the rounds in their minds. They fear that Tibetans may attack the torch relay from hot air balloons. They asked if Tibetans can open fire from rooftops too,' a senior government official told IANS.

The Olympic torch is arriving in Indian capital Wednesday night, but officials are not ready to disclose where it will be kept overnight. Earlier torch runs in London, Paris and San Francisco were marred by widespread protests.

'We assured the delegation that nothing untoward is going to happen Thursday and the entire ceremony will conclude smoothly. Elaborate security arrangements have been made,' said the official who did wish to be identified.

'We told them that since India is a democracy, demonstrations are a routine affair,' the official said. 'Nothing, however, is allowed beyond Jantar Mantar,' in the heart of the capital. The relay route is barely two kilometres away.

The Jantar Mantar observatory is the official place earmarked for protests.

The authorities have decided to bring in only 3,000 school children to take part in the torch relay, down from the earlier figure of around 20,000.

The relay route, from Vijay Chowk near the presidential palace to the World War I India Gate monument, has been heavily barricaded.

The Chinese have accused the Dalai Lama and his 'clique' of fomenting unrest and violence in Tibet and have described him as a 'terrorist'. Beijing has accused him of trying to sabotage the Olympics in August.

The Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of six million Tibetans, however, has come out strongly in favour of the Beijing Olympics.

The Dalai Lama has lived in India since 1959 at the head of a government-in-exile that is based in the hill town of Dharamsala. India is also home to about 100,000 Tibetan exiles.

Many of the Tibetans in India, particularly the younger ones, routinely demonstrate in various towns and cities against Chinese rule in Tibet. Some of them created a stir by storming the Chinese embassy here last month.

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