

Taiwan Vice President William Lai will transit in the United States when he visits Honduras next week, Taiwan's presidential office said on Thursday, amid tensions with China which always complains to Washington about such stopovers.

Beijing considers democratic Taiwan its own territory, ineligible for state-to-state relations, despite strong objections by Taipei which has been complaining about rising Chinese pressure to force the island into accepting Chinese sovereignty.

China regularly calls Taiwan the most sensitive and important issue between it and the United States, which does not have formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan but is the island's strongest ally and main weapons supplier.

Lai will travel to and from Taiwanese diplomatic ally Honduras via the U.S. cities of Los Angeles and San Francisco, in what is generally standard procedure for visits by top Taiwanese leaders to Latin America.

The U.S. government will give "courteous reception of a high standard" to the Taiwan delegation and Lai will hold virtual meetings with unspecified U.S. politicians during his stops, the presidential office said.

"Since the inauguration, the Biden administration has repeatedly demonstrated its firm support for Taiwan with concrete actions," the office said. "We believe the two sides will continue to stably deepen Taiwan-U.S. relations on all fronts."

Lai will attend the inauguration of new Honduran president Xiomara Castro, seeking to shore up ties as China ramps up diplomatic pressure against the island.

Taiwan's government has said it will work with Castro to deepen relations with the country, which is one of only 14 nations with formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan, although Castro has floated the idea of ditching Taipei for Beijing.

The United States has been eager for Honduras to retain relations with Taiwan, as it worries about growing Chinese influence in its backyard.

China has been stepping up pressure to win over Taiwan's remaining diplomatic allies, last month re-establishing ties with Nicaragua, and has openly said it is gunning to bring down

the number to zero.

*Reporting By Yimou Lee, Editing by Raju Gopalakrishnan*

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## Taiwan VP to make sensitive U.S. stopovers in visit to Honduras

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