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In Asia, Bush Rebukes China

By Ben Feller The Associated Press

BANGKOK, Thailand — With all eyes on Beijing, President Bush bluntly told China that America stands in “firm opposition” to the way the communist government represses its own people, a rebuke delivered from the heart of Asia on the cusp of the Olympic Games.

Bush balanced his chiding with praise for China’s market reforms and hope that it will embrace freedom, reflecting the delicate balance that Bush seeks to strike with the potent U.S. rival.

“We speak out for a free press, freedom of assembly, and labor rights not to antagonize China’s leaders, but because trusting its people with greater freedom is the only way for China to develop its full potential,” Bush said in perhaps his last major Asia address.

“And we press for openness and justice not to impose our beliefs, but to allow the Chinese people to express theirs,” the president said.

Bush’s brought his message to Thailand, a turbulent democracy. The marquee speech of his three-country trip hailed deepening ties between the U.S. and Asia. He pledged that whoever follows him in the White House will inherit an alliance that is now stronger than ever.

The president planned to quickly pivot from his speech to a full day of outreach toward the people of Myanmar, also known as Burma, who live under military rule across the border.

Yet heading eagerly to the Beijing Olympics himself as a sports fan, Bush faced pressures all around: a desire not to embarrass China in its moment of glory, a call for strong words by those dismayed by China’s repression, and a determination to remind the world that he has been pushing China to allow greater freedom during his presidency.





SUKREE SUKPLANG/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS President Bush and Thailand's Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej wrap up a joint statement and news conference on Wednesday at the Government House in Bangkok, Thailand.

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