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## **Britain Makes Overture to Repair Strained Ties With China**

**By STEPHEN CASTLE**

LONDON — After months of frosty relations with China, the British government took steps on Monday toward reconciliation, promising to relax visa rules for Chinese business people and some tourists and saying that it had no plans for more high-profile meetings with the Dalai Lama, the exiled Tibetan spiritual leader.

Ties between Britain and China have been strained since Prime Minister David Cameron met with the Dalai Lama in London last year, but two British delegations were in Beijing on Monday, one led by the chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, and the other by Boris Johnson, the mayor of London.

Britain is hoping not to miss out on economic opportunities in China, which other European nations are courting, and on Monday the pragmatic desire to compete for business took priority over political differences.

In remarks to the BBC, Mr. Osborne emphasized the growing importance and sophistication of the Chinese economy. “Many people think of China as a sweatshop on the Pearl River,” he said. “Yet it is at the forefront of medicine, computing and technology. It’s a very rapidly changing country.” Speaking on Monday to students at Beijing University, Mr. Osborne said that while other nations have been wary of allowing Chinese investment in strategic industries like water and aerospace, “we positively welcome it.”

A Chinese company has announced that it will be part of a group investing \$1.3 billion in Manchester Airport, and the British energy secretary, Ed Davey, said on Sunday that he was close to securing a giant wave of investment in nuclear and other technologies from China and elsewhere in Asia.

As Britain’s relationship with the European Union has grown a bit more distant, the Conservative-led government in London has given higher priority to faster-growing markets elsewhere, including China.

Mark Leonard, the director of the European Council on Foreign Relations, said that a lack of coordination among European Union governments made them easier for the Chinese to play off against one another.

“Every time a European leader meets the Dalai Lama, there is an attempt by the Chinese to punish them,” Mr. Leonard said. “Rather than having solidarity, what we have is a ‘beggar thy neighbor’ approach, where everyone sees an opportunity when another country is put in the deep freeze by the Chinese.”

The advocacy group Amnesty International expressed concern about the diplomatic turn in a statement, saying that Britain should respect its “stated commitment to respect and promote human rights in the countries with which it does business.”

Mr. Osborne’s visa plan highlights a problem faced by the government, which wants both to strengthen its economic ties with developing nations and to restrict immigration to placate domestic public opinion, especially on the political right.

Under the plan, priority visas for businesspeople would be processed in 24 hours, down from three to five days now. There would also be a pilot project to allow customers of approved travel agencies to apply for visas in a streamlined way akin to that used by the 26 European nations in the Schengen free-travel zone.

Qing Wang, a professor at Warwick Business School, said that Britain had been “shooting itself in the foot” with its existing, more cumbersome procedures. Many Chinese tourists “shy away from Britain due to the perceived ‘harsh’ and inflexible visa requirements compared to other neighboring countries,” she said by e-mail. Chinese students are deterred from choosing to attend British schools for the same reason, she added.

David Hanson, a spokesman for the opposition Labour Party on immigration issues, said that there was “chaos and confusion at the heart of the government’s immigration policy.”

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