

International

Pompeo warns N Korea peace goal faces 'risks', sanctions to be kept

'We believe that Kim Jong Un understands the urgency'

BEIJING: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said yesterday that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un understands that denuclearization must happen "quickly", but he warned there are still risks that peace will not be achieved and sanctions must be maintained for now. Washington remained committed to the "complete, verifiable and irreversible" denuclearization of North Korea, Pompeo said, after the historic US-North Korea summit in Singapore drew criticism for its vague wording on plans for Pyongyang to give up its nuclear weapons.

"We believe that Kim Jong Un understands the urgency... that we must do this quickly," he said of the effort to have North Korea abandon its atomic arsenal. Washington's top diplomat travelled to Seoul to brief his South Korean and Japanese counterparts about the summit, and later flew to Beijing to talk with Chinese officials.

"We truly believe that we have a path forward after so many years that can bring peace," Pompeo told Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi. "There are still risks that we won't achieve that but I truly do believe that the world set the conditions properly" at the summit, he said, after Trump said his "deal" with Kim Jong Un had ended the North Korean nuclear threat. Any reduction in tensions on its doorstep is welcome for China, North Korea's closest ally, which accounts for around 90 percent of Pyongyang's trade. Beijing immediately hinted that the United Nations could consider lifting the punishing sanctions on North Korea that Trump credits with bringing Kim to the table.

Wang told Pompeo the summit "moved the peninsula's nuclear issue into the right track of peace and negotiation in line with all parties including the US and China as well as the hopes of international society". Earlier, Pompeo in-

sisted at a joint press conference with the South Korea and Japanese foreign ministers that there was no daylight among the allies on how to achieve the denuclearization of North Korea.

Contrasting the Trump policy with previous US administrations, Pompeo said: "In the past, they were providing economic and financial relief before... complete denuclearization had taken place." "That is not going to happen, President Trump made that clear." Pompeo's comments came after North Korean state media reported Wednesday that Trump had not only offered to stop military exercises during dialogue, but also lift sanctions imposed on Pyongyang, causing concern in Tokyo and Seoul. Trump said after his meeting with Kim—the first between sitting US and North Korean leaders—that Washington would halt its joint military exercises with South Korea, an announcement that caught Seoul, and apparently the Pentagon, by surprise. The US and South Korea conduct several large drills every year to maintain readiness for operations on the peninsula, a source of anger for Pyongyang, which considers them preparations for an invasion.

'Frank' discussions

South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha appeared to sidestep the issue at the joint press conference, saying the matter would be left to military authorities to discuss, and that the US-South Korea alliance remained "as robust as ever". Earlier, South Korean President Moon Jae-in acknowledged that "there may be very conflicting views" about the summit, but it had still helped mitigate fears of a nuclear war.

"In this way I believe it was very successful." He later said Seoul would carefully consider the future of the drills "if North Korea faithfully implements denuclearization measures and sin-

with Trump in the resort island of Sentosa.

Singapore said it spent S\$20 million (\$15 million) on the summit, a figure that drew the ire of some citizens. However, marketing experts say the coverage generated from the event could be worth more than 10 times that. "It places Singapore on the map for international audiences," said Oliver Chong, executive director, communications and marketing capability at Singapore Tourism Board.

Tourism contributes around 4 percent to Singapore's GDP per annum. Visitor arrivals hit a record 17.4 million last year boosted by China, its top market, and India. But just months ago, lifestyle magazine Time Out ranked Singapore among the world's least exciting cities. Andrew Darling, CEO and founder of communications agency West Pier Ventures, said it would cost more than S\$200 million to generate the kind of publicity Singapore has received so far by hosting the summit. Media intelligence firm Meltwater said the coverage over the three days around the summit equated to \$270 million of advertising, while the month leading up to it was worth \$767 million.—Reuters



PYONGYANG: North Koreans watch a television screen showing footage of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un attending a summit in Singapore with US President Donald Trump.—AFP

cere dialogue continues", according to his office. While it is not directly involved, Japan also considers the exercises vital. The "deterrence based on them (plays) an essential role for security in northeast Asia", Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono said after the "frank" trilateral talks Thursday.

Kono said Japan understood the pause in the drills to be contingent on North Korean steps towards denuclearization, adding that "no security guarantees have been given yet". Pompeo said the suspension of the exercises depended on productive negotiations in "good faith". Trump had raised eyebrows Tuesday by describing his own country's drills on the Korean peninsula as "provocative", a term used by the

North for the exercises. Pyongyang describes its nuclear weapons and long-range missiles as a shield against US aggression, and has in the past linked denuclearization to the removal of US forces from the peninsula.

'Sleep well tonight!'

Despite some concerns among allies and analysts, the Trump administration continues to tout the summit as a success, and Pompeo said earlier that he hopes to see "major disarmament" of North Korea by 2020. A bullish Trump declared the nuclear threat from North Korea no longer exists, and tweeted Wednesday that people "can now feel much safer than the day I took office" and can "sleep well tonight!"—AFP

Trump-Kim summit a PR coup for Singapore

SINGAPORE: As images of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un strolling by revelers at a rooftop bar the night before an unprecedented meeting with President Donald Trump circulated around social media sites, US citizens started asking 'Where is Singapore?'. 'Singapore', the tiny Southeast Asian city-state that played host to nuclear talks earlier this week, was the most searched term on internet search engine Google in the United States on Monday with over 2 million hits.

Related searches during those 24 hours included 'Where is Singapore', 'Singapore summit' and 'time in Singapore'. Blanket media coverage on Monday included Kim's surprise tour of the iconic Marina Bay Sands hotel and its surrounding gardens, and the first hours of the meeting

Australia punish soldiers in Afghanistan

SYDNEY: Australian soldiers who flew a Nazi swastika flag over their fighting vehicle in Afghanistan more than a decade ago were "wrong" and punished at the time, Australia's prime minister said yesterday, after a picture of the incident emerged. The flag was attached to a military jeep in the photo taken during a patrol in Afghanistan in 2007, according to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), which published the picture.

"The flag obviously was removed and the

personnel involved were disciplined," Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull told reporters in the Tasmanian state capital of Hobart, without specifying their punishment. "It was absolutely wrong and their commanders took action at the time," he said. Australia, a staunch US ally, has had troops in Afghanistan for 17 years fighting against the Taliban and other Islamist militants.

Their behavior between 2005 and 2016, including accusations that they used illegal force and showed a disregard for human life during missions, is being investigated by defense authorities. The swastika in the photo was the emblem of Germany's Nazi Party and later the country's national flag when millions of Jews were murdered by the state in the 1940s, a genocide known as the Holocaust, along with others deemed inferior. "It is completely unacceptable to use a flag of this nature," Australia's defense minister, Marise Payne, said in an emailed statement.—AFP