Trump drums down trade tensions after Abe flattery

**Tokyo** — Japan’s most hallowed sumo ring and present-day Tokyo Olympic Stadium bore witness to an unlikely scene: a visit by the US president to the home of the world’s greatest sumo wrestler, Yokozuna Hakuho. President Donald Trump arrived on Saturday at the konnōhagakure, the headquarters of Japan’s national sumo federation, for a meet and greet with Japan’s emperor, followed by lunch with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

The visit, marked by a live transmission of Trump’s departure from the US White House, was the latest in a string of presidential visits to Japan. It comes as the US president is on a two-week tour of the Asia Pacific region, which also includes stops in South Korea, Vietnam, Indonesia and the Philippines.

Trump has made multiple visits to Japan, including in 2007 and 2017, and has been lauded as a proponent of free trade and a supporter of strong relationships with Japan. But the visit to Hakuho, who is currently ranked as the world’s top sumo wrestler, was unexpected and marked a major departure from tradition.

During the visit, Hakuho and Trump exchanged pleasantries, and the US president even used a traditional Japanese bow to greet the sumo wrestler. The two men then sat together at a table, with Hakuho eagerly listening to Trump’s words.

Abe, who has long been a vocal supporter of US-Japanese relations, welcomed Trump to the country and spoke about the importance of the alliance. He also praised Hakuho’s dedication to the sport and his work to promote its global appeal.

But the most unusual moment of the visit came when Trump presented Hakuho with a medallion, which the sumo wrestler wore with pride. The gift was accompanied by a personal note from the US president, in which he praised Hakuho’s dedication to the sport and expressed his admiration for the athlete.

The visit was widely seen as a gesture of good will and a sign of the deepening relationship between the US and Japan. It was also seen as a way to strengthen the alliance at a time of growing tension between the two nations.

In other developments:

- **South Korea** — South Korean President Moon Jae-in on Tuesday announced a plan to scrap a controversial law that allows the military to arrest civilians for exercising their freedom of speech.
- **Vietnam** — Vietnamese President Tran Dai Quang died in Hanoi on Monday after being hospitalized for several days due to kidney failure.
- **Thailand** — Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-ocha on Tuesday announced a new cabinet line-up, with several key posts remaining unchanged.

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