

Donald Trump presses Japan over trade gap, expects 'good things' from North Korea

27/05/2019 16:58 by admin

Trump is on a four-day state visit to Japan meant to showcase the alliance between the two nations, but which has also been shadowed by trade tensions.

US President Donald Trump with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at Akasaka Palace, Japanese state guest house in Tokyo May 27, 2019. (Reuters Photo)

Tokyo: US President Donald Trump pressed Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Monday to even out a trade imbalance with the United States and expressed confidence, despite Japanese wariness, that "good things" would come from North Korea. Trump is on a four-day state visit to Japan meant to showcase the alliance between the two nations, but which has also been shadowed by trade tensions.

Trump explicitly linked trade and security, a connection that disturbs Tokyo, whose alliance with Washington stands at the core of its defence policies.

"It's all a balance sheet thing," he said. "When I talk about a security threat, I talk about a balance sheet. In order to have \$716 billion dollars a year in military expenditures, you have to have a lot of money coming in," he said, adding that Japan had bought "tremendous amounts" of U.S. military gear.

On Sunday, Trump tweeted that he expected big moves on trade would wait until after Japan's upper house election in July.

"Trade-wise, I think we'll be announcing some things, probably in August, that will be very good for both countries," Trump said on Monday. "We'll get the balance of trade, I think, straightened out rapidly." Abe, who has developed close personal ties with Trump since the U.S. leader came to office, stressed the closeness of ties.

"I am determined to demonstrate at home and abroad the very strong bond" he said of the alliance in Japan's new Reiwa era, which began on May 1 when Emperor Naruhito inherited the throne.

Earlier, Trump was greeted by Naruhito and his Harvard-educated wife at the imperial palace in Tokyo in a formal welcome ceremony broadcast live on national television.

He became the first foreign dignitary to be received by the monarch since the latter inherited the throne after his father, Akihito, stepped down in the first abdication by a Japanese emperor in two centuries.

Trump gave a slight bow and he and First Lady Melania Trump shook hands with the imperial pair before entering the palace, to be met by Abe and his wife, Akie, among others.

The president and emperor and their wives returned outside to walk a red carpet and stand under a hot sun while a military band played the national anthems of both countries.

Red carpet, policy differences

Trump then walked the red carpet again, waving at assembled school children and inspecting Japanese troops before a

military band played a formal salute as he stood solemnly on a raised platform.

Trump has made clear he was pleased to have the honour of the first reception with the emperor, who is hosting a lavish state dinner for the U.S. leader and his wife on Monday.

The two leaders have put on a show of friendship but have policy disagreements over trade and North Korea. Trump has threatened to target Japanese automakers with high tariffs in his effort to cut the U.S. trade surplus and get a two-way trade pact with Tokyo.

Trump has also spearheaded an expensive trade dispute with China. That trade war between the world's two largest economies has hurt markets worldwide and confounded U.S. allies, including Japan and the European Union.

Such allies share U.S. concerns about Chinese practices but object to Trump's hardball tactics. Abe and Trump are also set to discuss North Korea and Iran.

"I personally think that lots of good things will come with North Korea. I feel that. I may be right, I may be wrong, but I feel that," Trump said on Monday.

On Sunday, Trump had said he was not worried about a recent missile launch by North Korea. That put him at odds with his own national security adviser, John Bolton, who said on Saturday Pyongyang's recent short-range missile tests violated United Nations Security Council resolutions.

Japan shares Bolton's view

Abe is considering a trip to Iran next month, domestic media said, to try to soothe rising tension between Tehran and Washington. Trump said Abe had spoken to him on the subject.

"We'll see what happens," Trump said. "But I know for a fact that the prime minister is very close with the leadership of Iran, and we'll see what happens."

Also on Monday, Trump will meet families of Japanese citizens abducted by Pyongyang decades ago.

- Reuters