

Kim Jong Un and China's Xi Meet for Second Time in 2 Months

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un visited China and met President Xi Jinping, state media of both countries said on Tuesday, their second encounter in two months in a flurry of diplomatic engagement that has eased tensions on the Korean peninsula.

Their talks on Monday and Tuesday in the coastal city of Dalian come ahead of what would be a historic meeting between Kim and U.S. President Donald Trump that the White House has said could take place as soon as this month.

China has been keen to show it has an indispensable role in seeking a lasting solution to tension over North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons, concerned that its interests may be ignored, especially as North Korea and the United States establish contacts.

During the visit, announced only after it was over, Kim told Xi he hoped relevant parties would take "phased" and "synchronized" measures to realize denuclearization and lasting peace on the Korean peninsula.

"So long as relevant parties eliminate hostile policies and security threats toward North Korea, North Korea has no need for nuclear (capacity), and denuclearization can be realized," China's official Xinhua news agency cited Kim as saying.

Kim told Xi that the denuclearization of the peninsula was North Korea's "constant and clear position," and that dialog between North Korea and the United States could build mutual trust.

Kim was accompanied by his sister, Kim Yo Jong, who has played a leading role in recent outreach by the long-isolated regime.

Chinese state media showed pictures of Kim smiling in an outdoors meeting with Xi, and the two leaders strolling along a waterfront.

Xi hosted a banquet and told Kim of his backing of North Korea's "strategic shift towards economic development," Xinhua added.

"China supports North Korea's upholding of denuclearization on the peninsula, and supports North Korea and the United States resolving the peninsula issue through dialog and consultation," Xi said.

North Korean state media said Kim was "very pleased" that the relationship with China was reaching a high point, and North Korea would cooperate with China more actively as the situation on the Korean peninsula changed.

The two leaders "opened their hearts and had warm conversations," North Korea's state news agency KCNA reported.

The meeting was the latest in a series by North Korean leaders that has dramatically eased tension on the Korean peninsula, and follows Kim's recent historic summit with South Korean counterpart Moon Jae-in.

It also followed Kim's dramatic train journey to Beijing in March, his first known trip abroad since assuming power in 2011.

'GOOD THINGS'

Trump said on Twitter that he would speak with Xi by telephone on Tuesday morning in Washington, calling the Chinese leader "my friend."

"The primary topics will be Trade, where good things will

happen, and North Korea, where relationships and trust are building,” Trump said.

Kim used his official aircraft to make the short flight to Dalian, in what was his first known international flight since assuming power.

Kim’s father, Kim Jong Il, feared flying, fueling speculation that the younger Kim may not be willing to travel far to meet Trump. The venue for their summit has not been announced.

The demilitarized zone, or DMZ, between North and South Korea, and Singapore are believed to be the most likely contenders for the venue.

South Korea’s presidential office said the Chinese government notified Seoul about the Xi-Kim meeting in advance.

SECRECY AND SPECULATION

Intense secrecy typically surrounds high-level North Korean visits to China, and this week’s trip was no different.

Throughout the day on Tuesday there was speculation on Chinese websites that a North Korean leader was in China, though China’s foreign ministry said earlier it had no information and Chinese state media did not carry any reports.

Japanese public broadcaster NHK had shown images of two North Korean aircraft taxiing at Dalian’s airport, one an Air Koryo plane and another carrying a North Korean emblem.

Posts about unusual traffic jams and security in Dalian popped up on Chinese social media.

China is North Korea’s most important economic and diplomatic backer, despite its anger over Pyongyang’s repeated nuclear and missile tests. China has supported tough U.N. sanctions against the North, its Cold War-era ally.

But the two sides have stepped up engagement since Trump surprised the world in March by saying he would be willing to meet Kim, signaling the possibility of a major breakthrough in nuclear tensions with North Korea. {eo}

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