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FLORIDA: US First Lady Melania Trump, right, and President Donald Trump, 2nd right, pose with Chinese President Xi Jinping, 2nd left, and his wife Peng Liyuan, left, upon their arrival to the Mar-a-Lago estate in West Palm Beach, Florida.—AFP

TRUMP, XI MEET AGAIN - IN SHADOW OF MISSILE STRIKES ON SYRIA

PALM BEACH: North Korea's nuclear ambitions and the US-China trade imbalance as well as other points of tension between President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping are being overshadowed by the US missile strikes on Syria. Nonetheless, the two leaders are meeting for a second day at Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate as planned yesterday.

Their first-night summit dinner wrapped up shortly before the US announced the missile barrage on an air base in Syria in retaliation against Syrian President Bashar Assad for a chemical weapons attack against civilians caught up in his country's long civil war. Before Thursday's night's dinner with their wives, Trump said he and Xi already had a long

discussion and had "developed a friendship," and then joked, "I have gotten nothing, absolutely nothing."

Xi apparently got something out of dinner, though. Chinese state media reported late Thursday that Trump has accepted Xi's invitation to visit China this year. The official Xinhua News Agency reported that Trump will travel to China at an "early date" in 2017, but gave no details. The White House downplayed expectations for a breakthrough on issues like trade and tariffs, insisting that the 24-hour summit is mostly an introductory meeting for the two leaders. Within Trump's administration, divisions remain over how to approach China.

Beijing: Tremendous problem

Still, North Korea was a top priority for Trump in the meetings with Xi. The American president told reporters traveling with him to Florida that he thinks China will "want to be stepping up" in trying to deter North Korea's nuclear ambitions. While Trump would not say what he wants China to do specifically, he suggested there was a link between "terrible" trade agreements the US has made with China and Pyongyang's provocations. He said the two issues "really do mix."

Trump has said the US will act alone if China doesn't exert more pressure on North Korea. The missile strikes on Syria bring more weight to that statement. Both as a candidate and president, Trump has

taken an aggressive posture toward China, labeling Beijing a "tremendous problem" and arguing that lopsided trade deals with China shortchange American businesses and workers. Last week, the president predicted in a tweet that his meeting with Xi would be "very difficult."

He also last week signed a pair of executive orders focused on reducing the US trade deficit, an apparent shot at China, which accounted for the vast bulk - \$347 billion - of last year's \$502 billion trade deficit. For his part, Xi was expected to seek assurances that Trump will not interfere in the territorial dispute over the South China Sea or question the "One China" policy by reaching out to Taiwan's leader again, as Trump did during the transition.—AP