



Modi, Macron sign security deal with an eye on China

## 'Most hated man' gets 7 years in jail for defrauding investors



SEOUL: People watch a television news report showing pictures of US President Donald Trump (L) and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un at a railway station. — A FP

# US, China agree to pressure N Korea

## Pence says US efforts to isolate Kim have been vindicated

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump enlisted Friday the help of China's Xi Jinping to keep sanctions pressure on North Korea, amid fears that an audacious diplomatic gambit by the US president could lead to backsliding. In an evening tweet, Trump praised a possible future agreement with the communist North as "very good" for the international community as a whole, after the US leader stunned the world by accepting an invitation to meet Kim Jong Un before the end of May.

"The deal with North Korea is very much in the making and will be, if completed, a very good one for the World. Time and place to be determined," Trump wrote. During a telephone conversation, Trump and the ever-more-powerful Chinese president committed to "maintain pressure and sanctions until North Korea takes tangible steps toward complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearization," according to the White House.

As aides scrambled to catch up with Trump's decision-taken before consulting key confidantes—the White House sent mixed messages about conditions. "They've made promises to denuclearize, they've made promises to stop nuclear and missile testing," White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders said. "We're not going to have this meeting take place until we see concrete actions that match the words and the rhetoric of North Korea," she told reporters. Officials behind the scenes said this did not constitute a change of heart.

A day after the bombshell announcement that the US and North Korean leaders would meet, Vice President Mike Pence said the White House would keep "maximum pressure" on Pyongyang and claimed US efforts to isolate Kim had been vindicated. There has been limited reaction from Kim's regime, but South Korean President Moon Jae-in said news of the summit-announced by his national security advisor on a visit to Washington—was "like a miracle."

For his part, Xi urged the two leaders to begin talks as "soon as possible" and praised Trump's "positive aspiration." China has long been North Korea's most important ally but has been on board with the sanctions agreed at the United Nations. A cryptic report by South Korean news agency Yonhap said the South's envoys also delivered a "special message" to Trump from Kim during their US trip, but did not elaborate on what was said.

**'Huge gamble'**  
The UN Security Council has imposed tough economic sanctions aimed at choking off revenue to

Pyongyang's military programs after Kim's regime carried out a sixth nuclear test and advanced missile launches. China and Russia argue that sanctions alone will not push North Korea to change course and have repeatedly called for stepping up diplomatic efforts to achieve a solution. The summit announcement triggered a rise in global stock markets while world leaders voiced hope the meeting would deflate tensions that had been building dramatically in recent months.

Some observers questioned the US president's wisdom in granting Kim a long-standing wish for a meeting after only agreeing to temporarily halt nuclear tests. Bill Richardson, a former US ambassador to the United Nations who has negotiated with and traveled to the North, told AFP it was a bold move that is "worth taking" but also a "huge gamble". "This is not 'The Apprentice' or a reality TV event... It's a negotiation with an unpredictable leader who has at least 20 nuclear weapons and who threatens the United States," he said.

Republican Senator Cory Gardner said America's approach to North Korea still needs not just a drop

"but a whole bucket of reality." "There is no greater diplomatic tool or lever than the President of the United States," he added. "If this doesn't succeed how much is left of that diplomatic runway is a very good question."

### 'Little Rocket Man'

Trump has previously ridiculed Kim as "Little Rocket Man," imposing wide-ranging bilateral sanctions on the Pyongyang regime and also leading a drive for international sanctions through the UN. Pyongyang has hit back by calling Trump a "dotard". Pence stressed that the White House has made "zero concessions" to get Kim to the table and emphasized that the sanctions would remain in place.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel was among the world leaders to hail the announcement as a "glimmer of hope," saying North Korea's nuclear drive "has been a source of great concern for all of us." The International Atomic Energy Agency, the UN's nuclear watchdog, voiced hope the summit would produce "concrete progress" and a resumption of long-suspended nuclear inspections. Pyongyang's long race to develop a nuclear weapon capable of reaching the United States has proved a problem for successive US administrations. But the alarm bells have been ringing even louder since July, when Pyongyang conducted two intercontinental ballistic missile tests, declaring the entire United States now within range. — AFP

“They’ve made promises to denuclearize”

## UK to hold 2nd meeting on Russian spy attack

LONDON: Britain was to hold a second meeting of its national emergencies committee yesterday in response to a nerve agent attack on a Russian former spy. Home Secretary Amber Rudd was to chair the meeting of the committee, known as COBRA, at 1500 GMT to receive updates on the police case, the government said.

The March 4 attack on Russian double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia in Salisbury, southwest England, is being treated as attempted murder. Around 180 troops, including chemical warfare experts, have been deployed in the city after investigators requested specialist assistance. Prime Minister Theresa May has said Britain will react with the appropriate response if a state was found to be behind the murder attempt.

Authorities are racing to determine the source of the nerve agent used against Skripal, who came to Britain in 2010 as part of a spy swap. Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson has been pointing the finger at Moscow. Security Minister Ben Wallace told BBC radio on Saturday that the government stood ready to respond "with the

full force of the UK's resources". He added that the attack was "a very serious incident with horrendous outcomes". "Someone has come onto our soil... has recklessly, brazenly, committed what looks like a very nasty crime, with a nerve agent prohibited, by most international laws... and has potentially put lots of people at risk," he said.

May was "expected to announce sanctions" against Russia "as soon as Monday", according to the Daily Telegraph newspaper. The Times newspaper said British officials were talking to their US and European counterparts about a co-ordinated retaliation, which could include "diplomatic, economic and military measures" if Moscow was behind the attack.

**'Time for cool heads'**  
Skripal was a former colonel in Russia's military intelligence who was jailed in his country for betraying agents to Britain's MI6 secret service. He was pardoned in 2010 before being flown to Britain. In Salisbury, police widened their searches to places frequented by Skripal, 66, and his 33-year-old daughter.

The former double agent and his daughter were found slumped on a bench in the city. They are in a critical but stable condition in Salisbury District Hospital. Nick Bailey, one of the first officers on the scene, is also being treated but is sitting up and talking after initially being admitted to intensive care. — AFP

## Putin won't change constitution to cling to power

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin, who is expected to be reelected for a fourth term in next weekend's ballot, has said he has no plans to change the constitution to stay in the Kremlin beyond 2024. Asked by US television network NBC whether he would follow in the footsteps of China's Xi Jinping, who is eyeing a limitless tenure, Putin insisted he had no such intentions. "I never changed the constitution, I did not do it to suit myself and I have no such plans to do so today," he said in an interview whose transcript was released by the Kremlin yesterday. Critics accuse Putin, who was first elected president in 2000 and is running for a fourth term in March 18 polls, of harboring ambitions to stay in power indefinitely. The constitution bars him from serving more than two presidential terms in a row.

In 2008, Putin became prime minister but maintained his grip on power, with his protege Dmitry Medvedev serving as president until 2012 when Putin returned to the Kremlin in the face of huge opposition protests. He rejected suggestions that he could not quit power because it would put him in danger, saying he heard "a lot of ravings on this subject". "Why do you think after me power in Russia will be necessarily taken over by people who are ready to destroy everything that I have done over the past years?" Putin said. He said he had been thinking about his potential successor since 2000. "It never hurts to think but at the end of the day it will be the Russian people who will decide that," he added.

### 'Creation not destruction'

Putin will run against a motley crew of seven challengers,

with his top critic Alexei Navalny barred from contesting the poll because of a criminal conviction his supporters call punishment for challenging the strongman. Putin declined to say whether he could pardon Navalny.

"Any man can be pardoned if he deserves this," said Putin. The Russian president, who never called Navalny by his name in public, referred to the 41-year-old opposition politician as "certain political forces". "What do I like in principle? It's that they expose problems and this is good, indeed it's right," Putin said. "But it's not enough for the country's positive development. Because concentrating one's attention on problems, it's not only insufficient, it's even dangerous because it could lead to certain destruction and we need creation."

### 'Not my friend'

Putin also denied having close ties to businessman and restaurateur Yevgeny Prigozhin, one of 13 Russians indicted by US prosecutors for allegedly running a secret campaign to tilt the 2016 US vote in favour of Donald Trump. "He is not my friend," Putin said. "I know such a man but I don't count him among my friends."

Dubbed "Putin's chef", Prigozhin is thought to be running a Saint Petersburg-based "troll farm" accused by Washington of interfering in the 2016 election. He has also been linked to a hugely secretive private military company, dubbed Wagner, whose mercenaries fight in Syria and were involved in a direct clash with US troops there in early February. "We don't support him in any way, we are not standing in his way or helping him. That's his personal initiative," Putin said. Putin denied that Russia has meddled in the US election, but said he would "not care" even if individual Russians had been involved. "I could not care less because they do not represent the state," he said, adding that Russia would not extradite them. Instead, Putin said, the US should sign a cybersecurity pact with Russia if it wanted Moscow to look into the matter in earnest. — AFP