

International

In Japan, Trump leaves allies, enemies and staff guessing

Trump dials down trade tensions after Abe flattery

TOKYO: Trump came to meet Japan's emperor but it was the US president who played the monarch in Tokyo as he pushed a personal brand of foreign policy leaving allies, foes and staff alike wondering what on Earth to expect next. A master of self-promotion, Trump has for decades made sure that everything he does - from building skyscrapers to running the White House - is all about him. His diplomatic style in Japan, where he was given the honor of being the first foreign leader to meet new Emperor Naruhito, was no different.

At a joint press conference with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe yesterday, Trump took questions on some of the biggest challenges facing the United States and its close ally Japan. Then he freewheeled. On North Korea, he breezily dismissed worries about recent testing of short-range missiles, which both Abe and Trump's own advisors say violated UN Security Council resolutions. "My people think it could have been a violation... I view it as a man who perhaps wants to get attention," Trump said of North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un.

US intelligence agencies also state emphatically that Kim intends to hang on to his nuclear weapons, but Trump signalled he believes his own instincts better. He talks to Kim "a lot" about his preference for opening up North Korea to investment over amassing

nuclear weapons, he said, and he finds Kim "a very smart man." Trump will be criticized yet again in Washington for praising a dictator but he doesn't seem to care.

And on Iran, Trump induced even more diplomatic whiplash. Before Trump flew to Japan, the United States had announced it was sending 1,500 extra troops to the region, adding to the aircraft carrier group and nuclear-capable bomber planes already dispatched. Trump himself threatened "the official end" of the country if Tehran ever attacked US interests. Yesterday, Trump offered assurances that he can live with the Islamic republic's government, whose toppling has long been a dream for Washington hardliners.

"We're not looking for regime change," Trump said, explaining that he only cared about Iran not achieving nuclear power status. In fact, there was only one clear target in the president's sights yesterday: His own hawkish national security advisor John Bolton, whom Trump has repeatedly contradicted over North Korea and Iran, sitting a few feet away.

Japan tries charm

As Trump goes around the world tearing up treaties, slapping on trade tariffs and blowing hot and cold over what to do in places like Iran, different countries try different strate-

gies. European Union countries are divided and often confused over the upheaval in what had long been a cozy, almost family relationship with the United States. China, with ambitions of becoming the world's main superpower, has pushed back, triggering a trade war that shows no sign of quick resolution.

Japan has taken a different tack: Flattering and befriending the unpredictable American. Abe bent over backwards to make sure "Donald", as he called him at their press conference, was happy throughout the visit starting Saturday. "Because of the very close personal relationship with Donald, the bond of the US-Japan alliance has become unshakable, the closest in the whole world," Abe said.

He chose Trump to be the first world leader to get an audience with Naruhito, sated the US president's famous appetite for well-cooked meat, took a joint selfie on the golf course, and promised to buy 105 F-35 warplanes. Abe even arranged for Trump to enter Japan's most hallowed sumo ring and present a trophy to the champion wrestler. The trophy was meant to be from the United States, but, as Trump emphasized, it was really from him. "We did it personally. We bought that beautiful trophy, which they'll have, hopefully, for many hundreds of years," Trump said.



TOKYO: US First Lady Melania Trump and US President Donald Trump meet Japan Emperor Naruhito and Empress Masako during a welcome ceremony at the Imperial Palace yesterday. — AFP

What did Abe get in return? Trump dialled down trade tensions, for one, announcing that any serious discussions in negotiations on his

insistence that Japan open to more US products will be put off until after Abe gets through elections here in July. — AFP

Modi praises party workers amid violence, killings

VARANASI: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi praised his nationalist party's courage yesterday amid political clashes and killings after his latest landslide election triumph. Three workers from Modi's right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have been killed and there have been pitched battles between BJP activists and a rival regional party in West Bengal state since Modi secured a new five-year term last week. Thousands of supporters lined the streets of his political bastion of Varanasi, waving flags, chanting his name and throwing flower petals at his cavalcade, despite the 40 degree Celsius heat.

"Why are our workers being killed and attacked in Kashmir, Kerala or Bengal," Modi said. "It is shameful and anti-democratic," he added. A close aide of former BJP minister Smriti Irani was shot dead by gunmen on a motorbike in the Amethi district of Uttar Pradesh state on Saturday night. Irani won the Amethi seat from opposition Congress leader Rahul Gandhi.

Another BJP worker was shot dead in West Bengal on Sunday night, triggering fresh clashes with supporters of the rival Trinamool Congress party, officials said. The two sides hurled home-made bombs at each other and about a dozen people were injured. A BJP activist was shot dead in West Bengal a day after election results were announced on Thursday. Other politicians from the ruling party and opposition were killed during the campaign in several states.

Varanasi, where many Hindus are cremated on wooden pyres beside the sacred Ganges river, is considered one of the religion's most holy cities. Modi offered prayers to Hindu god Shiva at the renowned Kashi Vishwanath temple where priests in saffron robes chanted hymns and blew conch shells.

Saffron balloons, flags and large Modi cut-outs lined the access road to the temple where police and commandos secured the district, packed with old houses and businesses. "We have come to see Modi and support him. Varanasi is blessed to have Modi as its MP," Deep Chand, a resident of the city, told AFP. "In just five years the city has seen so much development which was unheard of in the last 60 years. He has the support of every Indian and he's going to take the country to new heights." Modi is due to take the oath of office in New Delhi on Thursday. — AFP



VARANASI: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi waves to supporters at the Trade Facilitation Centre and Crafts Museum after offering prayers at the Kashi Vishwanath temple yesterday. — AFP

Lanka to relax emergency in a month: President

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's President announced yesterday he will allow tough emergency laws to lapse within a month because the security situation was "99 percent back to normal" following the Easter bombings. Maithripala Sirisena told Colombo-based diplomats from Australia, Canada, Japan, the US and European states that security forces were successful in getting at all those responsible for the April 21 bombings.

Trump meets kin of Japanese abducted by North Korea

TOKYO: US President Donald Trump yesterday told relatives of Japanese abducted by North Korea that their loved ones were "very much on my mind" and promised to work to bring them home. The US leader made the comments during a brief meeting with around a dozen relatives as part of a state visit to Japan, the second time he has met with the families of the missing. "The stories are very sad," he said at the somber gathering, surrounded by family members, some clutching framed photographs of their missing loved ones.

Japan suspects dozens of its citizens were abducted in the 1970s and 1980s by North Korean agents to train their spies in Japanese language and culture. The abductions are a potent and emotional issue in Japan, with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe even promising to meet North Korea's Kim Jong Un if it would help resolve the long-running question. "I can see why your great prime minister feels so strongly about it," Trump told the gathered family



TOKYO: US President Donald Trump meets family members of Japanese abductees by North Korea, with First Lady Melania Trump, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his wife Akie Abe at Akasaka State Guesthouse yesterday. — AFP

members. "I can tell you that it is very much on my mind," he added. "And we will be working together to bring the relatives, children, sons, your mothers, home."

Relatives of the missing thanked Trump for raising the issue in two rounds of talks with Kim, including a summit in Hanoi in February that broke down without an agreement. Trump's efforts were producing "concrete progress towards the resolution of the abduction issue," said Sakie Yokota, whose daughter Megumi is among the

missing. Megumi was kidnapped on her way home from school in 1977 aged only 13, and is the youngest among the 17 officially listed as abductees by the Japanese government.

In 2004, North Korea handed over cremated remains it claimed were Megumi's. However, Tokyo said DNA tests conducted in Japan proved the claim to be untrue. Her brother sat next to their mother during the meeting, holding a photo of his sister dressed in a pink and white

checked kimono. "We have the greatest trust in you and also in Prime Minister Abe," Yokota told Trump, who was sitting next to his wife Melania, along with Abe and his wife Akie.

'Break this deadlock'

Koichiro Iizuka, whose mother Yaeko Taguchi was kidnapped in 1978, urged Trump and Abe to "break this deadlock". "My mother has been separated from her son, as well as her family members, for the past 41 years," he said. "I sincerely hope Mr Prime Minister and President will break this deadlock... so as to bring about the return of my mother as soon as possible." In 2002, North Korea admitted to kidnapping 13 Japanese civilians, but the government in Tokyo believes at least 17 were taken to train Pyongyang's agents.

A month later, five were allowed to return to Japan. Pyongyang insists the other eight are dead but has not produced cast-iron evidence. Taguchi is among those Pyongyang says died, in a traffic accident, but a North Korean defector has cast doubt on that account. Under an agreement brokered in Stockholm in May 2014, North Korea undertook to reinvestigate all abductions of Japanese citizens in what appeared to be a significant breakthrough on an issue that has long hampered Tokyo's relations with Pyongyang. But there has been little progress since then, despite new diplomatic momentum towards peace on the Korean peninsula. — AFP



KATHMANDU: Nepali security personnel carry the body of a victim killed in a blast on Sunday. — AFP

Maoists targeted by police over blasts amid strike

KATHMANDU: Nepalese police arrested suspected Maoist activists after three deadly bomb blasts in Kathmandu as a general strike disrupted daily life in much of the South Asian nation yesterday, police said. Amid a high alert after Sunday's attacks, which were blamed on an outlawed Maoist group, police blew up several suspicious packages. The group broke away from the country's main communist party, which is now in power, and called the general strike to protest against the death of one of its leaders in police custody.

Police said at least 13 officials from the Maoist group had been arrested on Sunday night and early yesterday in differ-

ent parts of the country. "Security agencies dealt with suspicious objects found in different areas, mostly outside the capital," said police spokesman Bishwa Raj Pokharel. While some schools and offices remained closed in Kathmandu, "the effect of the general strike is nominal in the Kathmandu valley but very few vehicles are working outside the capital," the spokesman added. Four men were killed and seven people injured in three explosions in Kathmandu on Sunday.

A blast inside a shop killed three people, one died in an explosion at a nearby house, whilst two men carrying explosives on a motorbike were among those injured. There was no immediate claim of responsibility but police said they suspected the Maoist group whose pamphlets were found in a house where one of the explosions took place. Nepal has enjoyed relative calm since the end of a decade-long civil war in 2006. But some former guerrillas have formed a new group accusing their former leaders of betraying their revolutionary cause. The group was banned after it was implicated in an explosion that killed one person outside a telecom company office in February. — AFP

Sirisena declared a state of emergency giving sweeping powers to the military to arrest and detain suspects a day after the bombings that killed 258 people and wounded nearly 500. The suicide bombings against three Christian churches and three luxury hotels were blamed on a local jihadi group, the National Thowtheeth Jama'ath which has since been banned under the emergency. "The emergency was declared to deal with the immediate security situation," Sirisena's office quoted him as saying. "However, it will not be necessary to extend this any further."

The emergency can be declared for a month at a time. Sirisena extended the period on May 22 and it will lapse in a month unless he uses his executive power to prolong it. Sirisena said he, as the minister of defence and law and order, was restructuring the security forces to ensure there will be no repetition of the terror attacks

that shattered a decade-long peace in the country. The attacks exposed serious security failures. Sirisena has ordered an investigation into why local authorities failed to act on precise intelligence from neighboring India that jihadists were about to hit Christian churches and other targets in Sri Lanka. The mainly Buddhist nation of 21 million people was about to mark a decade since ending a 37-year-long Tamil separatist war when Islamic extremists struck.

Sirisena reiterated to foreign envoys that Sri Lankan security forces have either arrested or killed all those directly involved in the Easter Sunday bombings. Police say just over 100 people, including 10 women are in custody in connection with the attacks. Security forces also detained a further 100 suspects in four days of cordon-and-search operations since Thursday, according to military officials. — AFP

Jakarta steamrolls bootleg alcohol during Ramadan

JAKARTA: About 18,000 bottles of bootleg alcohol were crushed by a steamroller in Muslim-majority Indonesia's capital yesterday as police warned tippers off booze during the Ramadan fasting month. Nearly 90 percent of Indonesia's 260 million people are Muslims who are advised to abstain from eating, drinking, smoking and sex between sunrise and sunset during Ramadan. Police laid out thousands of bottles collected in raids over the past few months in the capital Jakarta and then drove a steamroller over them in a messy annual display.

Jakarta governor Anies Baswedan called on residents to avoid circulating illegal liquor. "The job of the community is to reduce demand," he said at the booze-crushing event near the city's national monument. "But no matter how much supply is reduced, it's tough if there is still demand." Indonesian authorities typically make a show out of seizing and destroying large quantities of illegal alcohol to remind Muslims to abstain from boozing during Ramadan. Alcohol is typically forbidden for Muslims at any time of the year. But most Indonesians practice a moderate form of Islam and alcohol is available at bars and nightclubs in major cities and holiday destinations such as Bali. Many entertainment spots are closed during Ramadan, including in Jakarta. — AFP



JAKARTA: Indonesian workers destroy bottles of liquors seized in recent raids yesterday. — AFP