

North Korea, trade, golf on President Donald Trump's agenda in Japan

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Washington: US President Donald Trump can expect a friendly reception in Japan, his first stop on a five-nation Asia trip that kicks off Sunday.

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He and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe largely see eye-to-eye on how to deal with the vexing problem of North Korea's weapons development, even if a solution remains elusive. America's trade deficit with Japan could be a point of contention, though Trump has aimed his recent rhetoric on trade at China, not Japan.

The two leaders will meet on the golf course Sunday before holding formal talks on Monday. A look at what's on tap:

NORTH KOREA

North Korea's rapid advances in missile development are making the potential threat much more real for both Japan and the United States. As it seeks to send missiles farther, North Korea has test-launched two over northern Japan and into the Pacific Ocean this year. While they were too high to be seen or heard on the ground, the Japanese government set off emergency sirens and warnings advising people to seek shelter. Abe has pushed for stronger U.N. sanctions on North Korea, and joined Trump in saying China should do more to pressure its neighbour. Trump and Abe are likely to agree that what is needed is more pressure, not dialogue, as they have in the past.

TRADE

One of Trump's first moves as president was to pull the U.S. out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a trade agreement that had been signed with 11 other countries after years of tough negotiations. While widely anticipated, it was a blow to Japan and the other TPP members. In line with Trump's preference for country-to-country trade deals, Vice President Mike Pence and Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Taro Aso have been leading an "economic dialogue" aimed at forging closer ties. Japan's trade surplus with the U.S. is much smaller than China's, and Japanese automakers, especially, have sought to mute criticism by setting up shop in the U.S. and hiring American workers. But Trump has complained about a weakening of the yen over the past five years that has aided Japanese exporters and other corporations with significant business overseas.

ABDUCTIONS

Trump's address to the U.N. General Assembly in September, in which he warned the U.S. might have to totally destroy North Korea, got attention in Japan for another reason. "We know it kidnapped a sweet 13-year-old Japanese girl from a beach in her own country to enslave her as a language tutor for North Korea's spies," he said. In so doing, Trump touched on an issue that Abe has made a priority to resolve: the Japanese citizens who were abducted by North Korea in the 1970s and 1980s. Five returned in 2002, but the fate of the others remains unclear. Trump plans to meet with the relatives of some of the abductees while he is in Japan.

FORE!

Golf diplomacy has become part of Japan's playbook on Donald Trump. Abe made a stopover in New York soon after the U.S. presidential election last November and presented the then-president-elect with a pricey Japanese Honma driver. Trump reciprocated with a golf shirt and other golf-related goods. The two hit the links at Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida after a summit meeting in Washington in February. They will be joined by top Japanese pro Hideki Matsuyama on Sunday at the Kasumigaseki Country Club outside of Tokyo. The prestigious club changed its policy to allow women to be full members in March after coming under pressure as the venue for golf at the Summer Olympics in Tokyo in 2020. Japanese TV showed Abe playing golf Friday in preparation for Sunday's outing with Trump.

- AP