

Donald Trump: US-North Korea summit back on for June 12

South Korea's President Moon says Kim Jong-un reaffirmed his commitment to 'complete' denuclearisation during talks.



Kim Jong-un embraces South Korean President Moon Jae-in after their surprise meeting on Saturday [Presidential Blue House via Reuters]

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un believes a face-to-face meeting with US President Donald Trump in Singapore next month could "put an end to the history of war" between the two nations, South Korea's president said.

Moon Jae-in also said on Sunday that Kim reaffirmed his commitment to "complete" denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula in talks they had at a surprise meeting a day earlier at the demilitarised zone.

"Chairman Kim and I have agreed ... our quest for the Korean Peninsula's denuclearisation and a perpetual peace regime should not be halted," Moon told reporters.

"He also expressed his intention to put an end to the history of war and confrontation through the success of the North-US summit and to cooperate for peace and prosperity."

Saturday's meeting was the latest dramatic turn in a week of diplomatic ups and downs surrounding the prospects for an unprecedented summit between the United States and North Korea, and the strongest sign yet the two Korean leaders are trying to keep the on-again-off-again meeting on track.

'Moving along very nicely'

A statement from North Korea's state news agency KCNA on Sunday also said Kim expressed "his fixed will" on the possibility of meeting Trump as previously planned.

Trump, meanwhile, signalled preparations for the June 12 summit with Kim were

going ahead, despite having called off the meeting last week.

“We’re doing very well in terms of the summit with North Korea,” Trump said at the White House. “It’s moving along very nicely. So we’re looking at June 12th in Singapore. That hasn’t changed. So, we’ll see what happens.”

Trump rattled the region on Thursday by cancelling his June 12 meeting with Kim in Singapore citing “open hostility” from Pyongyang.

But within 24 hours he reversed course, saying it could still go ahead after productive talks were held with North Korean officials.

‘Complete’ denuclearisation

While maintaining that Kim is committed to denuclearisation, Moon acknowledged Pyongyang and Washington may have differing expectations of what that means, and he urged both sides to hold working-level talks to resolve their differences.

“Even though they share the same resolve, there need to be discussions regarding the roadmap for how to make it happen, and that process could be tough,” he said, declining to define “complete denuclearisation”.

The Trump administration has demanded North Korea completely and irreversibly shutter its nuclear weapons programme. Kim and Trump’s initial decision to meet followed months of war threats and insults between the leaders over Pyongyang’s nuclear arsenal.

American officials are sceptical that Kim will ever fully abandon his nuclear weapons, and Moon said North Korea is not yet convinced it can trust security guarantees from the United States.

A senior South Korean official later said the two Koreas are discussing a possible non-aggression pledge and the start of peace treaty talks as a way of addressing Pyongyang’s security concerns ahead of US-North Korean negotiations.

War's end?

The Moon-Kim talks at the Panmunjom border village, which South Korean officials said lasted two hours, came after their April 27 meeting, the first inter-Korean summit in more than a decade that was also held at the same venue. At that meeting, they declared they would work towards a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula and a formal end to the 1950-53 Korean War.

Video and a photo released by South Korea's presidential Blue House on Saturday showed Kim hugging Moon and kissing him on the cheek three times as he saw Moon off after their meeting at Tongilgak, the North's building in the truce village, which lies in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) - the 4km wide buffer that runs along the heavily armed military border.

Andrei Lankov, from Kookmin University in Seoul, said North Korea's fear of what might happen next likely pushed Pyongyang back on track for the summit.

"Donald Trump is seen as a person who can start a war. And over the last say 48 hours - maybe more - they fear that Donald Trump's administration is going to cancel the summit and that this will lead to a new escalation of tensions and probably war. This fear has been decisive," said Lankov.

Stephen Nagy from the International Christian University said Pyongyang is seeking to benefit after achieving nuclear power status.

"I think it's the North Koreans who have driven this engagement. They've consolidated their strategic nuclear deterrent, they've decided that they can push through with negotiations - not only with the United States but also with South Korea and re-engage China. They have a clear pathway forward," he said.

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