

THE TIMES

## Kim orders North Korea envoys to build trust with US



Sentosa Island is connected to Singapore via a causeway. Picture: AP

Richard Lloyd Parry, The Times, 12:00AM June 7, 2018

Kim Jong-un is said to have upbraided his senior diplomats and ordered them to “build trust with our long-time enemy” after Donald Trump temporarily withdrew from their planned summit in Singapore next Tuesday. If authentic, the memorandum written by Kim suggests a radical new approach to diplomacy on the part of the dictator and would boost hopes for a lasting peace on the Korean peninsula as well as speculation about the prospects for significant reform within the totalitarian dictatorship.

Details of the document have been published on DailyNK, a news website run by defectors to South Korea who maintain telephone contact with people in the North.

According to an unidentified informant in Pyongyang, Kim criticised the “outdated diplomacy” of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs after angry outbursts published by North Korea’s state-run media on May 25. Mr Trump later cancelled the summit. “The use of traditional diplomatic tactics to gain dominance at the summit may create a dangerous diplomatic situation, and without building trust with our long-time enemy the US,” Kim wrote. “Trust is the bedrock of diplomacy and of the utmost priority.”

He added: "I expect that you will display unending diplomatic creativity."

North Korea's internal politics are notoriously opaque, with virtually no explanation of decision-making beyond statements published in the state media. These are generally formulaic and laden with praise for Kim and the ruling Korean Workers' Party, and with denunciation of the "imperialist" US and its "lackey" South Korea.

The words said to have been written by Kim do not completely abandon the language of confrontation, and speak of forcing the US to "wave the white flag", but they are striking in the importance that they attach to building good relations after years of confrontation over the North's nuclear missile program.

In April the KWP held a meeting in which it was announced that North Korea, as well as suspending nuclear and missile tests and shutting its underground nuclear site, would adopt a strategy that would prioritise economic over military development. Mr Trump agreed in March to meet Kim, but those plans appeared to have broken down last month. North Korea was infuriated by US Vice-President Mike Pence comparing its situation to that of Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi, who was overthrown and killed after giving up his nuclear program.

Deputy Foreign Minister Choe Son-hui called Mr Pence a "political dummy" and warned of a "nuclear-to-nuclear showdown". Mr Trump responded by calling off the talks, and it was at this point that Kim is said to have intervened with his diplomats.

Singapore's Foreign Minister will make a two-day trip to Pyongyang today to prepare for the summit, which will be held at a luxury hotel on Singapore's resort island of Sentosa.

Vivian Balakrishnan will visit the North Korean capital at the invitation of the North's Foreign Minister, Ri Yong Ho. The minister, who will be accompanied by Foreign Ministry officials, will also meet the North's ceremonial President, Kim Yong Nam.

Next week's historic meeting will be held at the Capella Hotel, press secretary Sarah Sanders tweeted. "We thank our great Singaporean hosts for their hospitality," she said. The highly anticipated meeting is scheduled for 9am (11am AEST).

Located 400m off the coast of the city-state, Sentosa Island is known for its high-end beach hotels, golf courses and amusement parks. A US advance team was spotted at the Capella Hotel last week meeting North Korean officials. The hotel is known for luxurious amenities, impeccable service and, above all, privacy for business and leisure. Two of the hotel's buildings were built in the 1880s for British officers based on the island.

Workers were painting the facade on Tuesday night and extra security was in place as red carpets were rolled out at the hotel's two entrances. Officials had also considered the Shangri-La Hotel, which hosts an annual international security summit and was the venue for a 2015 meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping and then Taiwanese president Ma Ying-jeou.

Mr Trump is expected to stay at the Shangri-La, which is near a major shopping district and less secluded than the island site.

The Times, AP, AFP