

A CONCILIATORY TONE AT G20

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Talking big: President Donald Trump in Osaka on Saturday. AP/Susan Walsh

President Donald Trump went to Osaka as tensions, especially trade ones, were on the rise between the U.S. and several other countries, both its friends and foes.

A day before the summit opened, he fired a salvo on India, saying India's tariffs are unacceptable. Mr. Trump had been critical of Japan's trade practices as well and has also launched a tariff war with China. Besides, the talks his administration initiated with North Korea have been stalled for months, while the U.S. was on the brink of a war with Iran a few days earlier. But at G20, despite these tensions, the world saw a more conciliatory Trump.

'Deal in the offing'

In two days, he held talks with a host of leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Vladimir Putin of Russia, Xi Jinping of China and Shinzo Abe of Japan. Before the crucial talks with Mr. Modi, he said that "a very big deal" with India was in the offing. "I think we were going to have some very big things to announce. Very big trade deal," he observed.

Later, both India and the U.S. said the leaders had a "productive" meeting on subjects such as trade, 5G technology, energy security and the Iran crisis.

In the case of Japan, Mr. Trump had repeatedly attacked Tokyo for the trade imbalance. In 2018, the U.S. had a trade deficit of \$67 billion with Japan while the total trade stood at about \$220 billion. At Osaka, Mr. Abe provided the U.S. President with a list of recent Japanese investments in the U.S. "We are very very happy about that," Mr. Trump told reporters about the list.

Mr. Trump's most remarkable turnaround was on China with which the U.S. had a \$378.6 billion trade deficit in 2018. After trade talks between the two sides collapsed in May, he had threatened to impose tariffs on the \$300 billion worth Chinese products that are currently spared in the tariff war. The U.S. accuses China of wrong trade practices, currency manipulation and technology theft.

The Trump administration has slapped 25% additional tariffs on \$200 billion of Chinese goods, prompting Beijing to retaliate. After trade talks failed, the U.S. had launched a global campaign against Chinese telecommunication giant Huawei.

Talks with Xi

In talks on Saturday, both Mr. Trump and Chinese President Xi agreed to resume trade talks. Mr. Trump said the U.S. would hold off on further tariffs and allow American companies to sell hi-tech equipment to Huawei, a key demand from China. In return, China would buy large amounts of U.S. farm goods.

The most surprising announcement, however, came on Saturday early morning when Mr. Trump tweeted that he was ready to meet North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in the demilitarised zone between the North and South Korea. Talks between the U.S. and North Korea have stalled after the Hanoi summit of Mr. Trump and Mr. Kim in February failed to produce any result. Mr.

Trump's sudden call for another meeting suggests that he's keen on pursuing the diplomatic route with North Korea despite the recent setback.

Attack on journalists

While the U.S. President dialled down tensions and appeared more willing to work with world leaders to resolve differences and disputes, there's one section of people he continued to attack even in Osaka — journalists. "Fake news is a great term isn't it," he joked with Mr. Putin, referring to his favourite attack on America's liberal media.

When journalists surrounded Mr. Trump and Mr. Putin with questions after their meeting, the former even quipped: "Get rid of them." And then he asked the Russian leader, "You don't have this problem in Russia, but we do," to which Mr. Putin responded, "We also have. It's the same."

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