Pence heads to Asia for Olymics opening and with stern message

2018-02-07

By Cai Hong in Tokyo and Pan Mengqi in Beijing |   
 China Daily |  
 Updated: 2018-02-07 10:47

   
As US Vice-President Mike Pence kicked off his East Asia trip on Tuesday, "ice-breaking" talks with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea are expected.  
Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was scheduled to meet with Pence on Wednesday, before Pence leaves for the Republic of Korea on Thursday to attend the Opening Ceremony of the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics the following day.  
Asked during a visit to Peru whether Pence might accept an invitation to meet the DPRK delegation attending the Games, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson would not rule it out, the AFP reported.  
"With respect to the vice-president's trip to the Olympics and whether or not there would be an opportunity for any kind of a meeting with North Korea, I think we'll just see," he said.  
Asked about Tillerson's comments, Pence told journalists in Alaska that he had not requested a meeting with people from the DPRK, but echoed the secretary of state in saying that "we'll see what happens", according to AFP.  
If there were an opportunity for a meeting, "President (Donald) Trump has said he always believes in talking," Pence said, while reiterating that he had not asked for one.  
Fan Jishe, a researcher of US politics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, believes Washington's firm policy toward the Korean Peninsula issue will hardly be affected by the Olympics, which is seen as a chance to ease tensions.  
The DPRK announced on Monday that Kim Yong-nam, president of the Presidium of the DPRK Supreme People's Assembly, will lead a delegation to Pyeongchang. He will be the highest ranking official to ever visit the ROK.  
"The US believes that DPRK is sidestepping the key issue, which is the denuclearization, therefore, US will not change its policy of putting 'maximum pressure' on DPRK accordingly," Fan said, adding that Pence's trip to Japan and the ROK is aimed at confirming the US' stance with its allies.  
"But my message, whatever the setting, whoever is present, will be the same," Pence said, adding that DPRK must once and for all abandon its nuclear weapons program and ballistic missile ambitions.  
Shi Yongming, an Asia-Pacific studies researcher at the China Institute of International Relations, said Abe's administration does not hope the nuclear crisis in Korean Peninsula will be resolved peacefully as Japan is attempting to profit from unstability in Northeast Asia so it can increase its military power.  
Shi expects that a possible statement issued after Pence-Abe meeting may not show possibilities in promoting peaceful talk but reinforce their tough attitudes.  
He said it is possible that the "ice-breaking" talk between DPRK and US could happen during the Games. "But the two sides are strictly sticking to their stance and neither is willing to loosen attitudes."  
Pence is expected to visit Japanese troop that takes care of the Patriot Advanced Capability-3 (PAC-3) interceptors stationed in the compound of Japan's defense ministry, according to the Kyodo News.  
He would also talk with Japanese Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Taro Aso on trade issues and visit the US Yokota Air Base on the outskirts of Tokyo.  
Contact the writers at caihong@chinadaily.com.cn  
 

http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201802/07/WS5a7a9c47a3106e7dcc13b523.html