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## **JAPAN WEIGHS MINISTER-LEVEL TALKS WITH NORTH KOREA: REPORTS**

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Channel News Asia (30 May 2018)

TOKYO: Japan is weighing high-level, direct talks with North Korea, potentially an August meeting between the two countries' foreign ministers, local media said Wednesday (May 30).

The idea, which Tokyo officials declined to confirm, was reported by major local media as preparations appear back on track for an unprecedented summit between US President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

The talks could take place on the sidelines of the ASEAN Regional Forum in August in Singapore, the Mainichi Shimbun newspaper said citing unnamed government sources.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga declined to confirm the reports.

"We are aware of the media reports. Nothing has been decided, including whether or not the minister would attend the ASEAN related meetings," he told a regular press conference.

Kyodo News agency, also citing unnamed sources, said Tokyo has sounded out Pyongyang on a proposal for Foreign Minister Taro Kono to meet his North Korean counterpart Ri Yong Ho.

Japanese officials, however, would first evaluate the outcome of the expected US-North Korea summit before pushing for the potential ministerial talks, Kyodo and Mainichi said.

The last ministerial-level talks between Tokyo and Pyongyang were in 2015, also on the sidelines of an ASEAN meeting.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has maintained a hard line against the North, calling for continued sanctions and a maximum-pressure campaign on Pyongyang.

But he has also said Japan will need to eventually hold direct talks with North Korea to resolve an emotional row over abductions of Japanese nationals by Pyongyang.

Trump had been scheduled to meet Kim in Singapore on Jun 12, but the meeting was thrown into doubt after the US leader said he was cancelling it.

Since then, meetings to prepare for the talks have resumed.

Abe will meet Trump on Jun 7 to discuss the talks and stress the importance of the abduction issue for Tokyo.

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Kaynak/Source: