

Singapore's foreign minister will make a two-day trip to Pyongyang starting Thursday, as preparations for a summit in the city-state between Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un accelerate.

The announcement came a day after the White House revealed that the historic June 12 meeting between the US and North Korean leaders will take place in a luxury hotel on Singapore's resort island of Sentosa.



AFP/File / GREG BAKER. Singapore's Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan will visit the North Korean capital at the invitation of the North, the foreign ministry said in a statement

The summit is due to be held following a rapid detente between Pyongyang and Washington — as well as South Korea — in a turn-around from a dramatic escalation of tensions last year, when the North ratcheted up its weapons programme.

Trump finally confirmed the summit last week following a visit from a top Pyongyang official in Washington, after having abruptly canceled the meeting as US and North Korean officials traded verbal barbs.

He has said denuclearisation, and a formal end to the decades-old Korean war will be on the table in Singapore.

Singapore's foreign minister Vivian Balakrishnan will visit the North Korean capital at the invitation of the North's foreign minister Ri Yong Ho, Singapore's foreign ministry said in a statement.

The minister, who will be accompanied by foreign ministry officials, will also meet the North's ceremonial president Kim Yong Nam, the statement said.

It did not give reasons for the trip but analysts noted Balakrishnan visited the US this week and met with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, and will be keen to keep both sides happy before the summit.

### **'Extremely fragile'**

"We've reached a point where the summit is extremely fragile and can easily be tipped out

of balance,” Graham Ong-Webb, a research fellow at Singapore’s S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, told AFP.

The US is pushing for a “complete, verifiable and irreversible” end of North Korea’s nuclear weapons and missile programmes, but observers believe there is a large gap between what Washington and Pyongyang define as “denuclearisation”.

Singapore has diplomatic ties with Pyongyang and the North has an embassy in the city-state, although Singapore does not have an embassy in Pyongyang.

The Southeast Asia financial hub of 5.6 million people also has good relations with the US. Part of its appeal as summit host was its the fact it has one foot in the East and one in the West, as well as being modern, efficient and secure.

The island resort of Sentosa, which was selected by American diplomats, is connected to the Singapore main island by a single causeway that can be easily closed off to traffic, sources familiar with the arrangements told AFP

Singapore authorities on Tuesday marked out a part of the island surrounding the Capella hotel as a special security zone for the days around the summit.

Balakrishnan is the latest senior foreign official to visit the North as summit preparations heat up — last month, top diplomats from China and Russia made trips to Pyongyang.

Since the inter-Korean detente began at the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics in February, there has also been a flurry of diplomatic activity between the North and South.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in and Kim have held landmark summits twice in recent weeks.

AFP

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*The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Kootneeti Team*

## Singapore top diplomat to visit Pyongyang before Trump-Kim summit

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