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## Seoul: US should lower 'threshold for talks' with NoKor

SEOUL (AFP) — South Korean President Moon Jae-in urged the United States to "lower the threshold for talks" with North Korea on Monday as his aides held rare talks with a Pyongyang general on ways to defuse tensions.

Moon has sought to use the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics that ended on Sunday to open a dialogue between Washington and Pyongyang in the hopes of easing a nuclear stand-off that has sparked global security fears.

Pyongyang mounted a charm offensive during the Games, sending athletes, cheerleaders and performers.

The North's leader Kim Jong-un also sent his sister to attend the opening ceremony before dispatching Kim Yong-

chol, a powerful general in charge of inter-Korea affairs for the ruling Workers' Party, to Sunday's closing event.

But there was no known interaction between the North and the US during the Games and Washington on Friday imposed what US President Donald Trump described as the "heaviest ever" sanctions on the isolated regime.

"I think the US needs to lower the threshold for talks and the North also needs to show determination for denuclearization," Moon said in a meeting with Liu Yandong, a Chinese envoy to the closing ceremony.

"It's important that the US and the North sit together as soon as possible," Moon said, urging efforts by Beijing to make that happen.

Moon, in a meeting with Kim Yongchol on Sunday, also urged the North to open dialogue with the US as soon as possible — to which Kim responded by saying the North was "very willing" to hold talks.

But the US has ruled out any possibility of talks before Pyongyang — which last year staged multiple missile and nuclear tests — takes steps toward denuclearization.

"We will see if Pyongyang's message today, that it is willing to hold talks, represents the first steps along the path to denuclearization," the White House said in a statement.

"The maximum pressure campaign must continue until North Korea denuclearizes," it said.

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