

Differing agendas

Chinese President Xi Jinping will meet his US counterpart Donald Trump for the first time today and tomorrow at the latter's Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida. Each has a different set of concerns to discuss with the other. Here are their likely priorities in order of importance.



DONALD TRUMP

TRADE IMBALANCE: Addressing deficit

- Get the Chinese to address the huge trade deficit – US\$347 billion (S\$485 billion) last year – the US has with China that Mr Trump says is costing Americans their jobs. He has threatened to impose huge tariffs on Chinese products and declare China a currency manipulator, and last week commissioned a report on trade practices by countries that contribute to trade deficits.

NORTH KOREA:

Pressure the Chinese to do more

- The White House believes China has a lot of economic influence it can wield to bring North Korea to heel, and it is likely to pressure China to rein in Pyongyang's nuclear and missile programmes. China is likely to agree to more sanctions but also urge resumption of multilateral talks.

DISPUTES:

East and South China Sea

- The US wants China to act with restraint in its territorial disputes with Japan in the East China Sea and with several Asean countries in the South China Sea. Chinese warships and fighter jets have made many incursions into Japanese-controlled waters and airspace. China has also been building artificial islands on reefs it controls in the South China Sea and placing military facilities on them.

XI JINPING

SINO-US TIES: Set the tone for next four years of relations

- The hope would be for both sides to have a good beginning, with the two leaders getting to know each other, exchanging views and reaching some consensus on how to deal with their many problems. Might discuss a mechanism for high-level exchanges to take the place of the Strategic and Economic Dialogue of the previous US administration that had not worked too well.

TRADE FRICTION: Head off a trade war

- China will want to explain that the kind of trade balance the US is looking for is unrealistic, given that many of the products made in China have components coming from other countries. Explore areas of cooperation that could reduce US trade deficit with China and increase job opportunities in the US.

TAIWAN:

Ensure the US will not make trouble in the Taiwan Strait

- Beijing is wary about Mr Trump's intentions over Taiwan after he broke with tradition to speak with Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen and questioned his country's "one China" policy, although he later backpedalled on it.

