

Heading for Re-union?



While both Korean leaders are leaving personal egos aside to keep the peace process on top, it looks that they have a cue of Vietnamese re-union, which suits to Korean Peace process

It may emerge as the major political development of the Korean Peninsula: US President Donald Trump is expected to hold second summit-level meet with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in not “very distant time.” And this has been broadly conveyed by the American President himself during a meeting with South Korean President Moon Jae-in on the sidelines of UN General Assembly in New York recently. The first US-North Korea summit was held in Singapore on June 12. Since then a lot of water have flowed down the bridges of the two countries’ rivers. But a crucial change in their behaviour towards each other came after North Korea’s Kim wrote a letter to President Trump on September 10; information regarding this was passed on to journalists by the White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders recently.

Though details of Kim’s letter were not publicized by the White House, it markedly reflected fast geo-political development of the Korean Peninsula. In fact, denuclearization received a momentum in the region once again after a third meeting between North Korean leader Kim and South Korean President Moon Jae-in in Pyongyang on September 18. Various reports suggest that North Korea retains an estimated 20 to 60 nuclear warheads and there are facilities to produce more.

But the South Korean President, using his personal charm and negotiating skills that he learnt during his previous stint as a chief of staff of former South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun, persuaded the North Korean leader to move the ball forward on the denuclearization front. However, Kim agreed to dismantle a key missile test facility at Tongchang-ri in the presence of international experts and also destroy its Yongbyon-based nuclear unit provided the US takes similar measures. With this, though, Kim shifted the ball in the US’ court; it paved the way for further negotiations between the two countries. Brimming with optimism, while US President Trump acknowledged that he saw “tremendous enthusiasm on behalf of Chairman Kim for making a deal,” he gave no answer as to what

roadmap he would undertake to resolve jigsaw puzzle of the Korean nuclear issue.

As a matter of fact, any North Korean agreement to dismantle nuclear programme involves several gives and takes. Withdrawal of 28,000 US troops from South Korea is one of the key demands of North Korea. Then Pyongyang has been demanding formal declaration of security assurance to the Kim regime. It has also been seeking removal of crippling US and international sanctions imposed on it. While the Trump administration may agree with the second condition, it has already made it clear that demands for withdrawal of troops and relief from sanctions remain too early to be fulfilled. "Now is not the time to ease pressure," US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said recently.

Still, the US President and the North Korean leader — who have developed liking for each other — have voiced support for a second meeting where in all likelihood these issues will be taken up. But then credit goes to South Korean President Moon Jae-in who worked hard to bring the two leaders back to the negotiating table. He knew that peace is pricy and, as such to make things move smoothly, he avoided doing anything that could derail his plan for the two Koreas which ended their bloody wars after armistice was brought in place in 1953. In fact, to nudge mercurial Kim to see brighter side of peace in the region, he met the North Korean leader thrice since April and the last one in September in Pyongyang.

Interestingly, it was 11 years ago the leaders of the two countries had held their meeting in North Korea where Moon Jae during his current visit took along a huge business delegation that included Samsung's vice chairman Lee Jae-yong. Some analysts say the South Korean President's dream of reconciling the rival Koreas is personal; he was born in a refugee camp to parents who fled the North during the war. That was the reason when the South Korean addressed a gathering at a Pyongyang stadium filled with 150,000 cheering North Koreans, he stressed on common prosperity and bringing of a new era of peace in the region. It is rightly said that if Moon Jae-in remains successful in his efforts, not only his popularity graph which is currently down because of his failure to strengthen economy and generate promised number of jobs for South Korean youths, will jump, but also he could be nominated for Nobel peace prize.

In the whole game of peace and reunion efforts surrounding the Korean Peninsula, there is a danger for Japan; it is going to be left behind and for this, incidents of past are cited as the reason. Under Japanese colonial rule in the

decades before the World War II, Koreans suffered hugely. Koreans don't want to forget that chapter of their past sufferings at the hands of Japanese. Tokyo is quite aware of presence of deep rooted hatred among Koreans towards Japanese. And it was the reason, the Japanese media reacted coolly to the jubilant mood that graced the summit between South Korean President Moon Jae-in and North Korean leader Kim recently. Japanese daily Nikkei penned a worse-case scenario in which Pyongyang gives up its intercontinental ballistic missiles, but retains some to target Japan. Therefore, it would not be surprising to find that Japan which last year, stood side by side with the US in insisting on maximum pressure on North Korea until Pyongyang surrenders its nuclear weapon programme, comes with the same set of arguments in the coming days again.

Still, it is China which is quite happy with the US and North Korea's readiness to resume talks. Different from Western media's negative reporting about China's views on Trump and Kim's bonding, Beijing is eager to see that Korean Peninsula remains stable and denuclearized. Analysts say that no country howsoever strong it may be, will ever want instability, chaos and disorder to remain entrenched in its neighbourhood. Peace in the region means, withdrawal of US troops from South Korea, a factor which has been a key demand from China, a country of fire spitting dragon which is ambitiously pursuing its economic and military agenda in the Indo-Pacific region.

PEACE IN PENINSULA

However, a question that still needs to be answered, can these two Korean nations look forward to annul the 38th parallel and reunite? Korean reunification refers to the potential reunification of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (commonly known as North Korea), the Republic of Korea (commonly known as South Korea), and the Korean Demilitarized Zone under a single government. The process towards such a merger was started by the June 15th North-South Joint Declaration in June 2000, and it was reaffirmed by the Panmunjom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity and Unification of the Korean Peninsula in April 2018, where the two countries agreed to work towards a peaceful reunification in the future, and the joint statement of President Donald Trump of the United States of America and Chairman Kim Jong-un of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea at the Singapore Summit in May 2018. Prior to World War II, Korea was one country for over one thousand years, known previously as Goryeo and Joseon. Post World War II, Korea was divided into two nations along the 38th parallel

(now the Korean Demilitarized Zone). North Korea was administered by the Soviet Union in the years immediately following the war, with South Korea being managed by the United States. In 1950, North Korea invaded the South, beginning the Korean War, which ended in stalemate in 1953. Since the end of the Korean War, reunification has become more of a challenge as the two countries have become increasingly politically and economically divergent. However, in the late 2010s, relations between North and South Korea have warmed somewhat, beginning with North Korea's participation in the 2018 Winter Olympics in South Korea.

The current division of the Korean Peninsula is the result of decisions taken at the end of World War II. In 1910, the Empire of Japan annexed Korea, and ruled over it until its defeat in World War II. The Korean independence agreement officially occurred on 1 December 1943, when the United States, China, and Great Britain signed the Cairo Declaration, which stated: "The aforesaid three powers, mindful of the enslavement of the people of Korea, are determined that in due course Korea shall become free and independent". In 1945, the United Nations developed plans for trusteeship administration of Korea.

WHERE DIVISION STANDS

The division of the Korean Peninsula into two military occupation zones was agreed — northern zone administered by the USSR and a southern zone administered by the US. At midnight on 10 August 1945, two army lieutenant colonels selected the 38th parallel as a dividing line. Japanese troops to the North of this line were to surrender to the Soviet Union and troops to the South of this line would surrender to the United States. This was not originally intended to result in a long-lasting partition, but Cold War politics resulted in the establishment of two separate governments in the two zones in 1948 and rising tensions prevented cooperation. The desire of many Koreans for a peaceful unification was ended when the Korean War broke out in 1950. In June 1950, troops from North Korea invaded South Korea. Mao Zedong encouraged the confrontation with the US and Joseph Stalin reluctantly supported the invasion. After three years of fighting that involved Koreans, China and United Nations forces led by the US, the war ended with an armistice agreement at approximately the same boundary.

Despite now being politically separate entities, the governments of North and

South Korea have proclaimed the eventual restoration of Korea as a single state as a goal. After the 'Nixon Shock' in 1971 that led to détente between the United States and China, the North and South Korean governments made a South and North Korea Joint Statement (on July 4, 1972) that a representative of each government had secretly visited the capital city of the other side and that both sides had agreed to a North-South Joint Communiqué, outlining the steps to be taken towards achieving a peaceful reunification of the country.

The agreement outlined the steps to be taken towards achieving a peaceful reunification of the country. However, the North-South Coordination Committee was disbanded the following year after no progress had been made towards implementing the agreement. In January 1989, the founder of Hyundai, Jung Ju-young, toured North Korea and promoted tourism in Mount Kumgang. After a twelve-year hiatus, the prime ministers of the two Koreas met in Seoul in September 1990 to engage in the Inter-Korean summits or High-Level Talks. In December, the two countries reached an agreement on issues of reconciliation, nonaggression, cooperation, and exchange between North and South in "The Agreement on Reconciliation, Nonaggression, Cooperation, and Exchange between North and South", but these talks collapsed over inspection of nuclear facilities. In 1994, after former US President Jimmy Carter's visit to Pyongyang, the leaders of the two Koreas agreed to meet with each other, but the meeting was prevented by the death of Kim Il-sung that July.

CURRENT STATUS

However, after too much of brouhaha and attempts by global leadership to bring both countries' leaders at one table remained a distinct vision. Reunification remained a long-term goal for the governments of both North and South Korea. North Korean leader Kim Jong-un made calls in his 2012 New Year's Day speech to 'remove confrontation' between the two countries and implement previous joint agreements for increased economic and political cooperation. The South Korean Ministry of Unification redoubled their efforts in 2011 and 2012 to raise awareness of the issue, launching a variety show (Miracle Audition) and an Internet sitcom with pro-unification themes. The Ministry already promotes curriculum in elementary schooling, such as a government-issued textbook about North Korea titled "We Are One" and reunification-themed arts and crafts projects.

In Kim Jong-Un's 2018 New Year's address, a Korean-led reunification was repeatedly mentioned and an unexpected proposal was made for the North's participation in the 2018 Winter Olympics to be held in Pyeongchang County of South Korea, a significant shift after several years of increasing hostilities. Subsequent meetings between North and South led to the announcement that the two Koreas would march together with a unified flag in the Olympics' Opening Ceremony and form a unified ice hockey team, with a total of 22 North Korean athletes participating in various other competitions including figure skating, short track speed skating, cross-country skiing and alpine skiing.

In April 2018, at a summit in Panmunjom, Kim Jong-un and Moon Jae-in signed a deal committing to finally seal peace between both Koreas by the end of the year. Both leaders also symbolically crossed each other's borders, marking it the first time a South Korean president cross the North border and vice versa. Kim stated that the North will start a process of denuclearization, which is supported by the US President Donald Trump.

COMPARISON WITH GERMANY

While the situation of South and North Korea might seem comparable to East and West Germany, another country divided by Cold War politics, there are some notable differences. Germany did not have a civil war that resulted in millions of casualties, meaning "it is very hard to believe that People's Army commanders who fought the South in such a bloody fratricidal war would allow the ROK to overwhelm the DPRK, by whatever means". Both sides of Germany maintained a working relationship after the war, but the two Koreas' relationship has been more acrimonious.

The East Germans also had 360,000 Soviet troops on their soil in 1989; however, North Korea has not had any foreign troops on its soil since 1955. "East Germany collapsed because Gorbachev chose to do what none of his predecessors would ever have done, namely, keep those troops in their barracks rather than mobilize them to save the Honecker regime." The East Germans looked favorably at the fact that West Germans had good retirement benefits, public order and strong civil society,[citation needed] whereas the North Korean citizens are not aware of any immediate benefits from uniting with South Korea, because all such knowledge is kept from them by the state.

Under Roh Tae-woo, a former South Korean army general and politician, the Seoul government created a “Nordpolitik” policy, based on the West German “Ostpolitik” model, hoping to make trading agreements with Pyongyang.

Korean reunification would differ from the German reunification precedent. In relative terms, North Korea’s economy is currently in a far worse situation than that of East Germany in 1990. The income per capita ratio was about 3:1 in Germany (\$25,000 for the West, about \$8,500 for the East). The ratio is close to 20:1 in Korea. While at the moment of German reunification the East German population (around 17 million) was about a third of the West German (more than 60 million), the North Korean population (around 25 million) is currently around half of South Korea’s (around 51 million).

In fact, the division between North and South Korea can be seen as more comparable to North and South Vietnam, which were also divided after independence following World War II from a colonial power (France). Unlike the Korean War, the Vietnam War spanned a much longer period and spilled over to the neighboring countries of Laos and Cambodia. The end of the war resulted in all three countries coming under control of the Communist-oriented independence movements, with China and the Soviet Union competing for influence. Relations between North and South Vietnam were also acrimonious, with North Vietnam being largely isolated and unrecognized except by other communist states, similarly to North Korea.

It seems that both Moon and Kim have an idea of Vietnamese reunion and hence they have put the global players aside and have started to take decision that suits to the Korean reunion. A glaring example of it is the recent meeting of the two Korean leaders, which took place even after Trump’s aggressive tweets and reprimands to the North Korean leader. Kim used his calm and used his political acumen, which helped him win praise from Japan— a major players, who bats for re-union of the Korean nations and played a pivotal role in this successful meeting of the Korean leaders.

Source: <https://www.dayafterindia.com/2018/09/29/heading-for-re-union/>

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