

Diplomacy Heralds Hope for the Korean Peninsula

What is the issue?

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- North Korea seems to have given a tacit call for the U.S. to commence talks to de-escalate mutual tensions.

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- This provides hope for the future, which the stakeholders much capitalise on to build an environment of trust and co-operation.

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How did the “detente” evolve?

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- The situation in the Korean Peninsula heated as U.S. President Trump had been towing a harsh line towards North Korea’s nuclear and missile programs.

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- While Washington kept up economic pressure with biting new sanctions, the South Korean President Moon Jae-in kept diplomatic channels open.

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- The strategy of the latter seems to be paying off as a South Korean delegation that visited Pyongyang recently has brought back the message of peace.

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- It is said that North’s leader, Kim Jong-un was willing to enter talks with the U.S. and even denuclearise if the military threat to the North is eliminated.

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- For now, both Koreas have agreed for a summit between Mr. Kim and Mr. Moon, and the North has promised to suspend its nuclear and ballistic missiles programs when talks commence with the U.S.

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- It is also notable that South Korea’s diplomatic manoeuvres is what secured North Korea participation in the recent “Winter Olympics” in South Korea.

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What is the significance of these developments?

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 - **Hope** - The brewing diplomacy is a marked shift from the aggressive foreign policy that North Korea had pursued since Mr. Kim took over in 2011.
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 - It also signals that - Mr. Kim's aggressive weapons policy is to ensure the survival of his regime, for which he willing to negotiate with his detractors.
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 - Raising hopes further, Mr. Trump has responded prudently, and has called the diplomatic outreach "a serious process for all parties concerned".
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 - **Challenges** - Bitter experiences of previous engagements has entrenched a strong trust deficit between Pyongyang and Washington.
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 - While South Korea has issued a statement about North's willingness to enter into negotiations for denuclearisation, North Korea hasn't confirmed it yet.
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 - Guarded silence of Pyongyang could be in anticipation of a more concrete response from the U.S., as Mr. Trump hasn't explicitly softened his rhetoric.
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 - Hence, it is now for the U.S. to push ahead the negotiations and until then, the scheduled military exercises with South Korea could be suspended.
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Source: The Hindu

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