

## Another window

Athletes from North and South Korea will march under a unified flag at the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympics when the 2018 edition gets under way in PyeongChang in February. In a breakthrough, both countries are even to field a joint women's hockey team, a goal that has proved elusive in the past. But for all the symbolism and diplomatic show of unity, the games could yet draw closer the two peoples divided by the deadly conflict dating back many decades to the start of the Cold-War.

The PyeongChang events have opened a fresh window for Moon Jae-in, South Korea's President and a reputed human rights lawyer. Mr. Moon has prioritised regional stability no less than the country's long-standing alliance with the U.S. Seoul and Washington have already decided to delay their annual joint military exercises, an act which Pyongyang sees as U.S. muscle-flexing, until after the Winter Olympics. The development falls into an emerging pattern of emphasising dialogue and rapprochement with North Korea's leader, Kim Jong-un, despite the recent escalation in regional tensions following Pyongyang's nuclear adventurism.

Moreover, Mr. Moon has championed the reversal of the U.S.-backed installation of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system in South Korea, a controversial move the previous government embarked upon. The rethink would address China's concerns on the risks to its own security infrastructure from THAAD radars, as much as it would serve to allay Pyongyang's apprehensions of a potential U.S. attack.

The resumption of bilateral negotiations last week after over two years is in itself significant. Yet, the dialogue is unlikely to advance in any spectacular manner the détente between Seoul and Pyongyang, in view of the obligations arising from the international sanctions regime. Nevertheless, the two Koreas could achieve progress, especially in the area of humanitarian support for families in both countries who have long endured the emotional pain of separation ever since the 1953 ceasefire. Nearly three decades elapsed before the respective governments even recognised the need to address the issue. But the formal family reunions that commenced in 1980 have been extremely irregular and helped barely a few hundred people on a given instance among the thousands waiting for their turn. It would not be unreasonable to hope that the current thaw in relations should lead to more regular humanitarian contacts.

For the generations that have grown up after the 1953 ceasefire, sporting ties such as the games in February rekindle hope that the heavily patrolled De-Militarised Zone between the North and the South could one day become history. The prospects of that new dawn are tied to the negotiation of a peace treaty between the North and the South; a demand widely echoed in recent years. Therein perhaps lies a way out of the nuclear stand-off.

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