

In the Korean Demilitarised Zone

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, left, poses with South Korean President Moon Jae-in for a photo inside the Peace House at the border village of Panmunjom in Demilitarized Zone on April 27. | Photo Credit: [AP](#)

The video of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un crossing over a slab of concrete [to greet South Korean President Moon](#) Jae-in not only went viral, with many calling this single step a creation of history, it also brought back vivid images of my own trip to the Demilitarised Zone some years ago.

Located about 35 km to the north of Seoul, the Korean Demilitarised Zone is considered by some as the one of the most dangerous strips of land in the world. It is a heavily fortified area. Surrounded by mountains, a bunch of us journalists, visiting South Korea as part of a Korea-India journalist exchange programme, stood excitedly at a checkpoint, the tension between the two Koreas palpable there.

It was a cold November morning in 2012. Adding to the chill were the views provided by telescopes placed on a terrace of a forbidden and unknown land. This was no happy, bustling touristy area. It seemed calm, but uneasily so. As we peered into the telescopes, joint military personnel, who were manning the area, stared ahead into vast swathes of uninhabited land.

If this wasn't unnerving enough, we were more edgy at the next site we were escorted to: the Third Tunnel of Aggression, simply called the Third Tunnel. We deposited all our belongings at one spot before clambering down a gently sloping 200 metre underground tunnel, which South Korea claimed was burrowed surreptitiously by the North (in the days of heightened tension) to sneak in their troops into 'enemy' territory. North Korea, however, claimed that this was an underground coal mine. We reached a peep hole that gave us an aperture view of the communist country. A TV journalist clicked photographs stealthily, but not stealthily enough for a patrolling soldier who immediately caught him and forced him to delete all the photos.

We were also taken to Dorasan Station, situated on the Gyeongui Line, on the border. Located about 56 km from Seoul station and 205 km from Pyongyang station, it marked the aspiration for a reunification of the two Koreas.

The artificial divide between the two countries reminded me of such a divide closer home: between West Bengal and Bangladesh. Both, after all, are the outcomes of soured political relationships which have affected thousands of people over generations. Hopefully, the small steps taken by the leaders of the North and South will herald big leaps for the peninsula sometime in the foreseeable future.

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