

# WHERE SOUTH KOREA MEETS THE NORTH

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - East Asia

"Not the last station from the South, but the first station towards the North", reads a signboard at the Unification Platform of Dorasan station, hardly 650 metres from the southern border of the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). Dorasan is on the Gyeongui Line that connects North Korea with the South. At the bottom of the board, arrows indicate directions to both Seoul (56 km) and Pyongyang (205 km).

There's no rail connectivity between the South and the North. There are daily return trains to Dorasan from Seoul, mainly for tourists visiting the DMZ. "Once the unification of Koreas happens, if it happens at all, this rail line will be the major link between the North and South," said the tour guide accompanying a group of visiting Indian journalists.

The DMZ is a strip of land that divides the North and South. It was established in 1953, as a buffer between the two countries, after the fighting ended in an armistice. Parts of the southern side of the DMZ are now open for tourists. Visitors can either take a train from Seoul to Dorasan or drive up to Imjingak, the last village on the southern side before the DMZ. South Korea has turned the village into a tourist spot with restaurants and small shops selling anything from Bibimbap, a Korean rice dish, to miniaturised war monuments.

The Bridge of Freedom in Imjingak is a chilling reminder of the war. It was through this bridge that thousands of prisoners crossed the Imjin river to the southern side after the war was over. Close to the bridge, an old train bogie, which was fired at and bombed in 1950, sits at the end of the rail link. The plaque describes the steam locomotive, which has 1,020 bullet holes, as "a symbol of the tragic history of the division into North and South Korea". Shuttle buses take visitors from Imjingak to further north.

## Flags, and divisions

One gets a closer view of the military demarcation line that separates the two Koreas from the Dorasan Observatory on top of a hill. The red and blue flag of North Korea waves defiantly from a huge flag post on the northern side of the line. A few meters away, there's a South Korean flag post. Across the DMZ is Kaesong, an industrial region, where southern companies can run businesses and employ North Koreans.

Even as the monuments and signboards speak of unification, the DMZ also reminds the visitor of the deep-running hostility between the two countries. Hardly five minutes from the Observatory is the 'Tunnel of Aggression', one of the four tunnels North Koreans built deep under the DMZ. The incomplete tunnel is 1,635 m long and had progressed 435 m into the southern side of the DMZ when it was detected in 1978.

The South said the tunnel, which can accommodate 30,000 men with light weapons, was built for a surprise attack on Seoul, while North Korea claimed it was part of a coal mine. South Korea has erected three concrete barricades at the actual demarcation line inside the tunnel. Tourists can walk up to the third barricade where a ticking clock marks the days since the 1953 armistice agreement.

But almost seven decades after the war, both Koreas are still chasing peace, let alone the dream of reunification. Like Germany and Vietnam, it's a country divided by the Cold War. But Koreas couldn't make any progress towards peace even after the old Cold War died almost

three decades ago. "We are not like Germany. The situation here is more complex. Though reunification remains on the agenda, I am not sure if the young generation supports the idea," said a Korea Foundation official, back in Seoul.

***The Korean Peninsula, whose divided state is a legacy of the Cold War, has not made any progress towards peace nearly seven decades after the 1950-53 war resulted in an armistice***

Sign up to receive our newsletter in your inbox every day!

Please enter a valid email address.

Our existing notification subscribers need to choose this option to keep getting the alerts.

**END**

Downloaded from [crackIAS.com](http://crackIAS.com)

© Zuccess App by crackIAS.com

crackIAS.com