

North-South relations

Summary and key dates

Talks concerning sporting links (April-May 1984). North Korean donation of flood relief aid (September) and subsequent Red Cross talks (October-December). Economic co-operation talks (Nov. 15). Shooting incident in demilitarized zone (Nov. 23). Indefinite postponement of economic and Red Cross talks (January 1985).

The deterioration of relations between North and South Korea (i. e. the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea) following the Rangoon bombing on Oct. 9, 1983 (for which North Korea was widely held responsible—see 32566 A), was reversed towards the end of 1984. The increase in contacts between the two countries was attributed by many observers to a North Korean desire to expand and improve foreign political and economic relations [see also 33337 A], the Rangoon bombing having exacerbated the regime's international isolation. A border clash at Panmunjom in the demilitarized zone (DMZ) in November threatened to bring the improvement in relations to a halt, but by the end of 1984 delegations were involved in economic co-operation talks. A full-scale North-South Korea Red Cross meeting, the first since 1973, was scheduled to be held in Seoul in January 1985, but early that month both the Red Cross meeting and the economic talks were postponed indefinitely [see below].

On March 30 the chairman of the North Korean Olympic committee, Mr Kim Yu Sum, wrote to his South Korea counterpart, Mr Chung Ju Yong, suggesting that a joint Korean team be sent to the XXIII Olympiad at Los Angeles in the United States. The South Koreans agreed to discuss the issue, but the two sides failed to reach agreement in talks between their respective Olympic committees at Panmunjom on April 9, April 30 and May 25. On May 27 the matter became less urgent when North Korea withdrew from the Los Angeles games, on the grounds that the safety of athletes could not be guaranteed [see 33194 A]. However, because South Korea was scheduled to host the 1988 XXIV Olympiad in Seoul, sport continued to influence relations between the two countries. On Dec. 14 the North Korean Prime Minister, Mr Kang Song San, warning that the 1988 games should not be held in South Korea, said that the danger of war in the peninsula “permanently prevails” and that to hold the games in the South would be a “challenge” to the North.

South Korea allegations during the April 9 talks, over the alleged kidnapping in Hong Kong in 1978 of a South Korea film director and his former wife, an actress, were refuted when the two gave a news conference in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, on April 12. Mr Shin Sang Ok and Ms Choi Un Hui, who denied that they had been kidnapped, claimed that their main reason for leaving South Korea was their desire to work freely, and said that they were now living in Hungary and also working in Czechoslovakia. In May Mr Shin visited Pyongyang, the North Korean capital, for the showing of his new film, and told reporters that he had been expelled from South Korea; the South Korean authorities, however, continued to demand that Mr Shin and Ms Choi be returned, claiming that they had been abducted and then brainwashed.

Torrential rain, floods and landslides affected large areas of South Korea in early September. The North Korean Red Cross announced on Sept. 8 that “out of compatriotic love and its humanistic stand” it had decided to send, by ship and lorry, relief supplies to South Korea consisting of 50,000 sacks of rice (1 sack=50 kg), 500,000 metres of cloth, 100,000 tonnes of cement and a quantity of medical supplies. On Sept. 14 the president of the South Korea Red Cross society, Mr Yu Chang Sun, accepted the offer of aid, which was delivered at the end of the month.

This offer of aid from the North followed an offer from South Korea President Chun Doo Hwan to help the North with “technology and aids that could practically elevate the North Korean people's standard of living”. This offer, made at a press conference in Seoul on Aug. 21, was rejected by the North as “despicable and shameless propaganda” and the North demanded, but did not receive, an apology.

Observers noted that South Korea was not in great need of relief supplies, and an offer of aid from the International Committee of the Red Cross had been rejected on Sept. 3 because available supplies were thought to be sufficient. In accepting the North Korean offer Mr Yu said that he hoped it would “pave the way for genuine mutual aid between fellow countrymen, including humanitarian issues, and to improve relations between North and South Korea”.

Economists in South Korea estimated the total value of the North Korean supplies at 10,000 million (South Korea) Won (US \$1.00=815 Won in mid-September 1984). The rice aid, at 2,500 tonnes, represented only a small fraction of North Korea's 2,100,000-tonne annual rice crop. With regard to the supply of cloth, North Korea's synthetic and natural fibre output was thought to be 600,000,000 metres per annum, only about 10 per cent of the South's capacity, while North Korea was estimated to produce 8,500,000 tonnes of cement per annum compared with the South's output of 24,000,000 tonnes per annum. North Korea was thought to manufacture 1,000 different types of medicine while the South manufactured approximately 7,000 different types.

A working-level meeting held in Panmunjom on Sept. 18 between representatives of the North and South Korea Red Cross societies to discuss the details of the delivery and reception of the relief supplies was the first such contact between Red Cross representatives since December 1977 (when talks had broken down on the reunification of families separated during the Korean War—see also page 28227).

The South Korea delegation initially suggested that the relief supplies be transported by ship only. However, at the meeting on Sept. 18 the South Koreans agreed that some of the goods should be transported by lorry. Both sides agreed that the goods transported by ship should be unloaded at Inchon on the west coast and at Pukpyong on the east coast, but the South Korea delegation insisted that goods transported by lorry be unloaded at Panmunjon rather than Seoul. The meeting ended without agreement on this point. Mr Lee Yong Dok, the South Korea delegation leader, then said that his side would not respond to the North Korean delegation's suggestion of a further meeting on Sept. 21 unless the North Korean side “effects a change in its attitude in principle”. Observers thought that the North Koreans were intent on gaining propaganda value from sending a convoy of lorries bearing relief supplies into the South Korea capital city. Despite accusations that the South Koreans were being “impolite” and “stubborn” the North Koreans acquiesced on Sept. 19 to the South Korea stipulation that goods conveyed by lorry be unloaded at Panmunjom.

On Sept. 29, rice, fabric and medicine were unloaded from 725 lorries at six points in South Korea territory two miles south of Panmunjom. Altogether 848 North Koreans crossed into South Korea territory during the operation which was completed on Sept. 30. Eight North Korean ships unloaded cement at Inchon on Sept. 30, while a further four ships unloaded goods at Pukpyong on the same day; a further two ships delivered goods to Inchon on Oct. 2 in place of one which ran aground in North Korean waters on Sept. 30.

Mr Son Song Pil, the chairman of the North Korean Red Cross society, in an announcement on Pyongyang radio on Oct. 3, said that the recent co-operation between the North and South Korea Red Cross societies should not be wasted and that it was “a good opportunity to sweep away all prejudiced views and to link the precious first step that the Red Cross organizations have already made with a great nationwide march towards reunification”. He went on to suggest that the telephone link between North and South Korea, the so-called “hot line”, which had been reconnected to facilitate the delivery of the relief goods after being disconnected for more than four years [see page 31727], should be used to arrange further meetings. On Oct. 4 Mr Yu replied to Mr Son's suggestion saying that he believed that talks “to realize the reunion of separated families” should be held “at the earliest possible date”. Mr Yu also notified Mr Son that the “hot line” was in continuous operation and should be tested twice a day, each side calling the other on alternate days.

In a letter from Mr Son to Mr Yu, broadcast on Pyongyang radio on Oct. 29, Mr Son suggested that a preliminary working-level meeting be held in Panmunjom on Nov. 20 in order to discuss the agenda for the full-scale talks. The last full-scale Red Cross talks had been held between Aug. 30, 1972, and July 13, 1973 [see 26148 A]. The suggestion was accepted by the South Koreans, and at the Nov. 20 meeting the two sides agreed to hold a full-scale meeting and to adopt the five-point agenda used in the earlier 1972–73 talks.

These five points were (i) ascertaining the whereabouts and fate of dispersed people (estimated to be about 10,000,000); (ii) facilitating free mutual meetings and visits; (iii) facilitating free postal exchanges; (iv) facilitating the reunion of dispersed people according to their wishes; and (v) other humanitarian issues.

A date was not fixed for this full-scale meeting and there was concern that, following the shooting incident on the border on Nov. 23 [see below], it might be abandoned. However, on Dec. 14 the North Koreans agreed to resume full-scale Red Cross talks in Seoul on Jan. 23, 1985. On Jan. 9, following the controversy over the South Korea-US military exercise [see below], Mr Son postponed the talks indefinitely.

The South Korea Deputy Premier and Minister of the Economic Planning Board, Mr Shin Byong Hyun, proposed on Oct. 12 that North and South Korea should hold talks with a view to creating a permanent body to promote trade and economic co-operation. On Oct. 16 Mr Kim Hwan, Deputy Prime Minister of North Korea, accepted the invitation, calling it a “forward step”. The subsequent meeting, in Panmunjom on Nov. 15, was the first between officials of the two governments since 1980 [see 31726 A].

The talks, lasting two and a half hours, were described by the South Korea chief delegate Mr Kim Ki Hwan as a “good initial start”; his North Korean counterpart, Mr Lee Song Rok, said that “we must make this meeting successful for the benefit of both sides”.

It was agreed that a joint economic committee be formed, to meet regularly and alternately in South and North Korea. The North Korean delegation proposed establishing joint ventures to mine coal and iron ore resources in North Korea and tungsten and molybdenum resources in South Korea. The North Koreans also proposed establishing joint fishing grounds and suggested that a joint fishing company be formed. The South Korea delegation expressed an interest in purchasing coal, iron ore, pig iron and agricultural products from the North and in supplying manufactured goods including steel and aluminium products. Both sides agreed that any exchange of goods between the two countries should be conducted by ship, although a rail link might be reopened.

A second meeting scheduled for Dec. 5 was postponed after the shooting incident at Panmunjom on Nov. 23 [see below] but on Dec. 14 the North Koreans accepted South Korea's invitation to hold the second round of economic talks at Panmunjom on Jan. 17, 1985. As with the Red Cross talks, however, these talks were postponed indefinitely in early January at North Korea's insistence, following a South Korea announcement on Jan. 4 that the annual "Team Spirit" military exercises involving South Korea and United States forces would begin on Feb. 1.

In its Jan. 4 announcement the South Korea government had for the first time itself invited a North Korean delegation to observe the Team Spirit exercises; such invitations had in the past been issued by the United Nations Command (UNC). However, in a statement broadcast on Jan. 9 by the (North) Korean Central News Agency (KCNA). Mr Kim Hwan described the Team Spirit exercise as "a provocative step" and "an artificial obstacle to economic talks"; he went on to propose a meeting between himself and Mr Shin (his South Korea counterpart) before the scheduled economic talks, "to discuss measures to overcome the difficulties that have been created".

Despite a plea from Mr Shin issued on Jan. 10 to Mr Kim and Mr Son Song Pil (of the North Korean Red Cross), for both the economic and the Red Cross talks to go ahead as scheduled, both sets of talks were postponed indefinitely.

On Nov. 23 four people (three North Korean soldiers and one from South Korea) were killed when shooting broke out as a citizen of the Soviet Union crossed the border from North Korea to the South at Panmunjom.

The North Koreans said that the shooting started when North Korean soldiers went to the aid of Mr Vasily Yakovlevich Matuzok (22) after he "inadvertently" stepped over the military demarcation line and was immediately abducted by soldiers of the United Nations Command. The North Koreans demanded an apology for the incident and insisted that Mr Matuzok be returned. The South Koreans said that Mr Matuzok was a defector and that the shooting was started by North Korean soldiers as they pursued Mr Matuzok into the southern sector of the Joint security Area, after he had broken away from a group of tourists and had run towards the South.

At the 426th meeting of the Korean Military Armistice Commission in Panmunjom on Nov. 26 a video tape was shown in which Mr Matuzok stressed that he was a defector and that his action had been voluntary. Mr Matuzok was subsequently placed in the custody of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; he was sent to a refugee camp in Rome and then on to the United States where he had been seeking asylum.—(Times - Guardian- Financial Times - Le Monde - International Herald Tribune - New York Times - Korea Newsreview, Seoul - Far Eastern Economic

Review - Neue Zürcher Zeitung - BBC Summary of World Broadcasts) (*Prev. rep.*
32738 A)

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