

Korean dialogue: a big step forward

by Lydia Cherry

Spokesman for North and South Korea expressed satisfaction following two days of talks between the countries' prime ministers—the highest-level discussions since Korea was divided. A spokesman for the North was quoted in wire reports Sept. 7: "The fact that such broad matters have been discussed is meaningful." A spokesman for the South concurred: "Of course, we reached no agreements that would stir up the nation. But because the eyes of the people were upon us, both sides approached the talks with a sincerity unlike anything seen in the past."

Seoul had presented comprehensive steps to give support to North Korea's decrepit economy through joint ventures and financial assistance. The North Koreans, however, rejected the South's offer, saying that economic deals had to take a back seat to drastic military cutbacks in South Korea and the sending of all U.S. troops home. But the two sides did agree that 1) Seoul would temporarily shelve its plan to join the United Nations separately, and the North Koreans would present a detailed proposal for sharing a U.N. seat; 2) both sides would urge their Red Cross societies to resume talks on the reunification of divided families; and 3) they would meet again in October in the North Korean capital of Pyongyang.

Efforts toward reunification

That the dialogue has proceeded this far is greatly to Seoul's credit, because of President Noh Tae Woo's innovative "Northern policy" to reunify the peninsula. There are also strong clues that one of the reasons the talks took place (many South Koreans doubted they would, even as the North Korean delegation crossed the border) is that both the Soviet Union and Communist China twisted North Korea's arm. Both powers have something to gain from economic hooks to Seoul.

Dmitri Petrov, senior researcher at the Far East Institute of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, told a Seoul seminar Aug. 30, that Moscow hopes South and North Korea solve their disputes through dialogue. "We have done our utmost in that direction," he added.

During late summer, information repeatedly surfaced that Moscow was calling for North Korea to make payment for both oil and military equipment in cash or other hard currencies. "We have received the information that the Soviet Union has asked North Korea to pay for crude oil and other Soviet goods in dollars and other hard currencies from next

Jan. 1," the South Korean daily *Hanguk Ilbo* reported Aug. 29. Another Seoul daily, *Choson Ilbo*, on Aug. 23 quoted claims by Prof. Pang Chan-yong of the Institute for Sino-Soviet Studies at Hanyang University, who had met with Soviet officials in Moscow. Pang said that although previously the supply of conventional weapons was carried out as assistance, he was told that Pyongyang had been informed that Moscow can now only supply those weapons which can be bought. Pang claimed that one high-level Soviet official remarked: "If reunification on the Korean Peninsula is achieved under the initiative of South Korea, as West Germany played the role of initiator in reunifying East and West Germany, that would not interfere with the Soviet Union's national interests."

According to the Sept. 5 *Journal of Commerce*, "The Chinese prodded North Korea that its refusal to talk with the South was a luxury it no longer could afford." China's support for Seoul-Pyongyang talks, sources say, is based on the notion that whatever entity this new Korea turns out to be, can, if necessary, be subverted later on. For now, China is preoccupied with its domestic crisis, for which it is getting strong support from Japan—another major player in the region supporting Korean reunification. And China needs South Korean technology.

Early this summer, high-ranking Chinese officials, including Deng Zhifang, the son of senior leader Deng Xiaoping, were in Seoul as guests of South Korea's Samsung Corp., to discuss joint ventures in computers and communications, industries which in China are in the early stages of development. Though officially denied, there were reports that the younger Deng also had high-level talks with South Korean government officials.

If Seoul's traditional enemies are supporting its reunification efforts, who opposes them? Only its traditional friends, the United States, in alliance with Great Britain. Just as West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and Mikhail Gorbachov dumped International Monetary Fund "free-market" policies, the talks between South Korea and the Soviet Union are focused on economic cooperation projects to gear up both countries, and drag along North Korea. As *Choson Ilbo* reported June 11: "Regarding the 14 major state-sponsored science and technology programs currently being pushed by the U.S.S.R. as national policy tasks, it has been found that except for the Mars exploration program, 13 other programs have many things in common with our government-sponsored research programs, and that therefore, mutually complementary cooperation in science and technology is possible."

Korean reunification would mark the final demise of the U.S. "China card," the policy devised by Henry Kissinger to contain the power of Japan in the region. An enlarged Korea under the hegemony of South Korea would mean an expanded role for Japan, and its "Great Projects" approach in the region.