



**Title:** RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE KOREAN PENINSULA: Reactions to North Korean Nuclear and Missile Activities

**Speaker:** High Commissioner (Retd.) Vishnu Prakash and Dr. Sandip Kumar Mishra

**Chair:** Amb. Ashok K. Kantha

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### **Institute of Chinese Studies**

The current North Korean nuclear and missile activities and the recent South Korean election have shifted attention towards the Korean Peninsula. After the partition of the peninsula into North and South Korea, South Korea has experienced a marvellous economy growth, whereas North Korea has been in limelight due to its aggressive behaviour and totalitarian regime. With regard to this, Ambassador Vishnu Prakash and Dr. Sandip Kumar Mishra threw light upon the recent developments in the Korean peninsula and the reactions of other countries to the North Korean nuclear and missile activities. Ambassador Vishnu Prakash started the discussion by giving insights about South Korean elections. He said that if Moon Jae-in comes to the power, the 9 years of conservative rule will end and this will have important implications for the Korean peninsula and its relation with other powers. He stated South Korea as the young and vibrant democracy. Focussing on the similarities between India and South Korea, he said that there is never a dull moment in both the countries and they both have dangerous neighbourhood but South Korea don't realise it.

Speaking about reunification, the speaker said that people of the age 60 and above are keen for reunification despite their relations with North Korea. There is a strong inclination seen for the dialogue and peaceful negotiations. Though youngsters don't seem to be interested in the idea of reunification but 70% of the population wants the new government to resume dialogue. South Korea has welcomed more than 31,000 defectors and rehabilitated them. There are many initiatives taken by South Korea to engage DPRK to offer humanitarian aid, encourage economic integration and increase people to people engagement, but North Korea never turned up. He stated that North and South Korea are as similar as 'chalk and cheese'. Though they share some similarities but there exists

demographic and economic differences too. Calling North Korea as the ‘last hermit kingdom on the planet’, he said that it is becoming isolated and paranoid due to the growing concerns about annual military exercises between U.S.A and South Korea.

Referring to North Korea as an ‘accomplished poker player’, Mr. Prakash said that North Korean government is well informed about the global strategic affairs. It was significant to note that in spite of engaging into aggressive brinkmanship, North Korea knows when to pull back from the brink. Talking about the threats imposed by Trump to scrap uranium deal, he said that it will only make North Korean conviction stronger about America’s unpredictability and transactional relationship. The increasing nuclear capacity of North Korea is the major concern for America currently.

Looking through the Western perspective, he said it was important to read between lines to know where North Korea stood. Despite continuous negative projections, there was a lot of development in North Korean economy and private sectors. Regarding China, he mentioned that it is the ‘soul saviour’ and ‘economic lifeline’ of North Korea. He thinks China wants to reduce tensions and resume dialogue with North Korea. As 90% of the North Korean trade depends on China, it can play their energy cards and make North Korea feel the pinch of sanctions.

In conclusion, he raised three questions: First, how is the Trump factor playing out? Calling Trump as democrat at heart, he said that South Korea is more concerned about the unpredictability of Trump. Second, will there be any change in the position of Republic of Korea on THAAD after the elections? To which he replied that if Moon Jae-in comes to the power, tensions will ease and a dialogue can begin with North Korea. Third, what is the way forward for Korean peninsula? In regard to this question, the speaker explained that North Korea is a de facto power and they don’t want to give up their cards. He said that the biggest danger is miscalculation and slightest of it can cause dramatic consequences. Contrary to Western belief North Korea is not suicidal but if pushed to the wall, they will retaliate.

Speaker Sandip Mishra largely co-relating to the ideas of Ambassador Vishnu Prakash said that after the commencement of new administration in America under Donald Trump, last 2-3 months have been critical. Unlike Obama’s administration, Trump wants to take a tough stand against North Korea and show zero tolerance towards it. From alluring China to putting THAAD system in South Korea, America has been very active in their rhetoric and military exercises in recent times. America and South Korea are asking North Korea to give up their missile program, where North Korea is consistently demanding for bilateral talks with America. This shows that both the countries are struggling to make any move first.

Regarding China, the speaker said that China is dedicated to the survival of North Korean regime but at the same time it is against North Korea's provocative behavior. Due to this reason China has stopped its coal trade which comprises 45% trade export of North Korea to China. Any move of China that appears against North Korea is due to its compliance with the UN Security Council resolution 2321.

Western media has portrayed North Korea as 'mad and bad' nation but the speaker said that North Korea is a rational actor. He believes that North Korea had created situations such a way that South Korea was forced to deploy THAAD system which has created tensions between them and China. North Korea's provocative behavior gives justification to weaponries carried out by different countries in that region. Discussing about the implications of reunification of Korea, he said that if in future the reunification of Korea happens, the American military troops in Seoul will be at the doorstep of China which China wouldn't want. Moreover, there is a third Korea in China where more than 2 million North Koreans live.

The speaker said that since year 2000, there has always been a mismatch in South Korean and American government. If one country has a progressive leader, other has a conservative leader due to which there is no progress in their relations with North Korea. It becomes difficult for both the countries to work in a coordinated manner and have a policy of engagement and containment of North Korea. Assuming Trump as a conservative leader and Moon Jae as a progressive leader, the speaker said that the same problem continued to exist in the present time.

Concluding his speech, he said while looking into the present situation related to Korean issue, among all the countries, China is a biggest loser as they don't know what to do while North Korea is a gainer due their crafty diplomacy. Japan is in favor of America's few decisions towards North Korea whereas Russia is silently trying to take advantage of the dissatisfaction between the two Koreas. America is trying to draw a red line for North Korea and trying to bring new variables by placating China. South Korea is currently feeling annoyed, betrayed and isolated so they may look for new engagements with North Korea. As any miscalculation can lead to dangerous results, China and South Korea should persuade America to have multilateral dialogue in future and deal with North Korea with a different approach.

*Report prepared by Vatsala Mishra, Research Intern, Institute of Chinese Studies.*

## **About the Speakers**

**Speaker 1:** High Commissioner (Retd.) Vishnu Prakash

**High Commissioner (Retired) Vishnu Prakash**, a Law Graduate (Gold Medalist), joined

IFS in 1981. After postings in Moscow, New Delhi, New York and Vladivostok (Consul General) he returned to MEA as Director looking after Nepal and Bhutan (1994 - 1997) when he also did a three-month sabbatical with the 'Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies' in Hawaii (USA). His next served in Tokyo, Islamabad, Cairo and Shanghai (Consul General). In August 08, he was appointed Official Spokesperson of MEA, when interalia he was a member of PM's delegation during all overseas visits. In January 2012, he took over India's Ambassador to Seoul. In August 2013, he was conferred an Honorary Doctoral Degree in Business Administration by Tongmyong University, Busan. In January 2015, he was bestowed the 'Ambassador of the Year, 2014' award by the Asia Society, Korea Center. Mr. Prakash next assumed the office of Indian High Commissioner in Ottawa in March 2015 from where he retired on 31 October 2016.

**Speaker 2:** Dr. Sandip Kumar Mishra

**Dr. Sandip Kumar Mishra** is an Associate Professor at the Centre for East Asian Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University. He is also an Adjunct Fellow at the Institute of Chinese Studies, Delhi and a Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, New Delhi. He writes a monthly column named East Asia Compass at the IPCS website. He completed his Master degree in International Politics from Jawaharlal Nehru University and obtained his M.Phil. and Ph.D. degrees from the same university working in the field of Korean Studies. He studied Korean Language in South Korea and has been Visiting Fellow and Visiting Scholar at many South Korean research institutes and universities. He also had a unique opportunity to visit North Korea on a research trip in 2013. The areas of his research interests are Inter-Korea Relations, North Korean Nuclear Issue, International Relations of East Asia and Korea, East Asian Security, and India-Korea Relations.

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