North Korea’s Beijing Engagement

What is the issue?

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- After a long and tense phase of political bickering, a detente is being reached between the west and the North Korean leadership.
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- In this backdrop, North Korean Supreme leader Kim Jong-Un recently undertook his maiden foreign diplomatic trip to Beijing.
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How has China – North Korea ties evolved over time?

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- **Historically -** China has historically played a role in inter-Korean relations.
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- In 2000, Mr. Kim’s father and predecessor, Kim Jong-il, had visited China shortly before a summit with South Korea.
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- In 2003, China launched the Six-Party Talks aimed at peacefully resolving the North Korean nuclear crisis, which eventually failed.
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- **The strain -** China had been under pressure from the west for long to exercise its influence to curtail North Korea’s nuclear program.
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- Beijing too wasn’t happy with Mr. Kim’s conduct and had supported the stringent UN sanctions on North Korea, which crippled North Korean trade.
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- Its coal exports of coal, seafood and other goods to China were hit and the friendship with China came under severe strain.
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What are the implications of the current visit?

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- North Korean leader Kim Jong-un recently travelled by train to Beijing, which marks his first foreign trip after assuming power in 2011.
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- The visit has helped repair the strain that had developed lately between Beijing and Pyongyang over erratic nuclear tests by the latter.
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- He held talks with Chinese President Xi and re-emphasised his commitment to de-nuclearise – thereby clearly inviting China into the current negotiations.
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- Notably, a peace summit has been scheduled with South Korean President Moon and the subsequent one is slated with the US president Trump.
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- This visit has send out a clear message that Mr. Kim is serious about his offer for talks.
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What are the areas of convergence?

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- Mr. Kim's visit to Beijing has reinstated China's central role in talks over the Korean crisis, which both countries see as mutually beneficial
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- For the Kim regime, China's experience and guidance could come in handy when it is preparing to engage with two of its biggest rivals.
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- For China, this presents an opportunity to get proactive as a global power house in resolving international disputes.
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- Also, if Mr. Kim's fundamental concern is the survival of its regime, then China too has a major stake in North Korea's view point (South Korea is an US ally).
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What are the challenges for peace?

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- There are still considerable challenges due to the unreliability of the Trump administration in towing its commitments.

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- If the US – North Korea summit fails, there will be a return to a high tension situation, which is undesirable and dangerous for all.
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- As the context is volatile, multilateral intervention would help in sustaining the talks and China could possibly play facilitator to balance demands.
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Source: The Hindu

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