Singapore Summit – Korean Detente

What is the issue?

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- U.S. president Trump and North Korean leader Kim have stunned the world by pulling off a summit at Singapore despite intense tensions a while ago.
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- Presently, there are clear indications that the looming detente might seal a permanent peace in the Korean peninsula.
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What were the recent flare-ups?

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- Till recently, North Korea kept stepping up its weapons program through nuclear tests and also enhanced its missile capacity.
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- Notably, with Hwasong 14 missile (10,000 km range) in North Korea's arsenal, Kim was said to have the capability to strike even mainland U.S.A.
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- In this backdrop, a missile attack by North Korea on Guam island of U.S.A in the Pacific Ocean was also rumoured.
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- In 2017, the heightened rhetoric on both sides had led to growing concerns about the possibility of a nuclear war between North Korea and U.S.
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- While the UN Security Council met repeatedly, and tightening economic sanctions on North Korea, Trump was also vociferous in his threats.
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How did the thaw begin?

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- Mr. Kim in his New Year's address appealed reconciling with South Korea, while also stating that North Korea had sufficient nuclear deterrence capacity.
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- South Korea also hosted the Winter Olympics, which provided ample opportunities for building bonhomie between the two Koreas.

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- Things moved smoothly thereafter and officials of the two Koreas crossed borders for high-profile meetings, which proved fruitful.
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- Kim also indicated continued restraint on testing and willingness to discuss denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula if regime safety was guaranteed.
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- While the U.S. was kept in the loop throughout, there seemed to be considerable resistance from the Trump administration for any conciliation.
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- A summit was planned but it was then called off unilaterally by the U.S., but persistent efforts from North Korea finally led to restarting of the summit.
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- Notably, previous attempts by the U.S. to negotiate North Korea to give up its nuclear program and arms failed despite consistent negotiations.
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Why is the current peace effort unique?

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- Since the previous negotiations, the capabilities of North Korea has grown multiple times, while has lead to increased anxieties in its neighbourhood.
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- While Kim’s administration seeks regime legitimacy and security, the other stakeholders seek safety and peace.
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- In this context, it is in everybody’s interest to help in the success of the proposed deal, thereby making things clear.
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- While the joint statement after Singapore summit was shy on detail, it carries immense potential for the future of the Korean Peninsula.
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- Notably, North Korea has announced stoppage of any kind of testing and has even promised a complete elimination of its nuclear arsenal permanently.
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- There is hence real promise of ending the Korean conflict between the North and South Korea – which is currently still held by the 1953 truce.
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- U.S. has also called off any joint military exercise in the Korean region and lifting of economic sanctions on North Korea is also under consideration.
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Source: The Hindu

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