

# Games' door to de-escalation closing

US-ROK military exercises set to reignite tensions after breakthroughs achieved at Pyeongchang Olympics

The Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, which drew to a close on Feb 25, offered the two sides on the Korean Peninsula a chance to de-escalate tensions. The international community is closely watching the developments after the Games.

The Pyeongchang Olympics was an event where "breakthroughs" happened for the two Koreas. Kim Yo-jong, the younger sister of Democratic People's Republic of Korea leader Kim Jong-un, became the first member of the DPRK's ruling Kim family to visit the Republic



Cai Hong

of Korea (ROK). As her brother's special envoy, she delivered his invitation to ROK President Moon Jae-in to visit Pyongyang.

The two Koreas marched under a pro-unification flag and fielded a unified women's ice hockey team at the Games.

The ROK allowed Kim Yong-chol, vice-chairman of the DPRK's ruling Workers' Party Central Committee, to lead a DPRK delegation to attend the closing ceremony of the Games.

The DPRK general is blacklisted by both the United States and the ROK for his role in the torpedoing of an ROK warship in 2010, with the loss of 46 seamen. Pyongyang denies any involvement.

Also, the US agreed with the ROK to delay their annual joint military drill until after the Winter Olympics, whose Paralympics ends on March 18. Militaries of the two countries usually hold exercises, known as Key Resolve and Foal Eagle, in the ROK in March and April.

The drills, which can involve as many as 17,000 US troops and more than 300,000 ROK soldiers, are denounced by the DPRK as preparations for invasion.

Whether the recent cooling of tensions before and during the Winter Olympics will lead to wider contacts is unclear.

On the one hand, the countries concerned were talking about holding dialogue. The ROK asked the US to lower the bar for talks. The DPRK said it was open to dialogue with the US, but US President Donald Trump responded to Pyongyang's offer of negotiations by saying he was willing to talk only under the "right conditions".

Japan, which always dances to Washington's tune, plans to take part in informal meetings with the DPRK. Japanese Prime Minister

Shinzo Abe and Trump agreed in phone talks on Feb 14 that there would be "no meaningful dialogue" unless the DPRK agreed on "complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization".

On the other hand, the US has imposed new sanctions against the DPRK. Japan is mulling following suit and calling for maintaining "maximum" pressure on the DPRK, claiming that "dialogue for the sake of dialogue would be meaningless".

At the meeting with Moon before attending the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympics, Abe asked the ROK to quickly resume its joint military drill with the US after the Pyeongchang Olympics, without scaling it down. Moon dismissed Abe's request, calling it a violation of his country's sovereignty.

But the sounds of guns will be heard again as negotiations between the US and ROK to stage the postponed military drill are moving forward. Marc Knapper, the current charge d'affaires at the US embassy in Seoul — the US has had no ambassador to the ROK for over a year — said in February that the drills would be conducted in April.

Tokyo and Washington have kept a tough stance on Pyongyang, while Seoul wants engagement.

The Trump administration's policies on the ROK and DPRK cause

concern even for US foreign policy experts. Trump has scrapped his nomination of Victor Cha as US ambassador to the ROK allegedly because Cha and Trump are divided on DPRK policy. Cha, a Bush administration official and Georgetown University professor, warned the Trump administration officials against a "bloody nose" military strike against the DPRK.

Joseph Yun, the US State Department's top diplomat in charge of DPRK policy, decided to retire, to many people's surprise.

State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert said in a statement that the US diplomatic efforts regarding the DPRK "will continue based on our maximum pressure campaign to isolate the DPRK until it agrees to begin credible talks toward a denuclearized Korean Peninsula".

Though Yun was said to leave for personal reasons, his abrupt departure raises questions and adds to uncertainty over the Trump administration's DPRK policy. He is believed to be an advocate for dialogue and for diplomacy.

Sports have changed the world in the past. China invited the US ping-pong squad that was in Japan in April 1971 for World Table Tennis Championships to play a few games in Beijing. The US table tennis play-

ers became the first Americans to visit Beijing since 1949.

The ping-pong exchange made a huge impact, transforming American perceptions of "Red China" and setting the scene for then US president Richard Nixon's momentous trip to China in 1972.

Though high-ranking officials from the US and DPRK attended the opening and closing ceremonies of the Pyeongchang Olympics — sitting just a few feet away from each other — the two sides did not have any interaction.

Moon has emphasized that a resumption of dialogue between the DPRK and the US "is absolutely necessary for developments in inter-Korean relations".

Both US Vice-President Mike Pence and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson spoke of a DPRK policy that is one of "maximum pressure and engagement at the same time".

We have not seen the softer approach. The US should have direct talks with the DPRK, offering confidence-building initiatives aimed at inducing the DPRK's eventual denuclearization.

But the US-ROK military drill is expected to increase tensions again.

*The author is China Daily's bureau chief in Tokyo. caihong@chinadaily.com.cn*

## Millennial bond key to progress

Chinese connections with Jews promise to be vital in achieving the Belt and Road Initiative and the Chinese Dream

By DOMINIC MAN-KIT LAM and MARK O'NEILL

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the foundation of Israel and the 26th year of diplomatic ties between it and China.

Historically, the Chinese and the Jews have enjoyed good relations for more than 1,000 years, when the first Jews, from what is now Iraq, settled in China during the Tang Dynasty (AD 618-907).

After the first Opium War (1839-42), Jewish communities were established in Hong Kong, Shanghai, Tianjin, Harbin and other cities in Northeast China. After World War II, most Jews left the Chinese mainland — but, since the start of the opening-up in the late 1970s, many have returned to live and work in major cities like Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou.

The Jewish community in Hong

Kong, numbering about 5,000, has been the longest lasting in the modern era, with a continued presence since the 1840s. An estimated 10,000 Jews live in the Chinese mainland today.

As early as January 1950, the young state of Israel announced that it had decided to recognize the People's Republic of China. But Chairman Mao Zedong supported the Arab and revolutionary causes, so diplomatic relations could not be implemented during his era.

It was not until January 1992 that Israel and China signed the agreement, in Beijing, to normalize diplomatic relations. Since then, economic and other ties have blossomed, especially in the last five years.

China has become one of the largest foreign investors in Israel, with an estimated \$16 billion invested in 2016, much of it in startups in which the country is a world leader.

One of the earliest Chinese investors in Israel technology companies was Hong Kong billionaire Li Ka-shing. He also donated \$130 million to the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology, the MIT of Israel — the largest donation it has ever received.

In response, it has helped to establish the Guangdong Technion-Israel Institute of Technology, a joint venture between the institute and Shantou University, founded in 1981 with a donation by Li. The new institute was officially inaugurated on Dec 19, 2017.

Last September, healthcare company Sisram Medical, formerly Alma Lasers, completed its initial public offering on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange, raising \$112 million, the first Israeli high-tech company to list on a Chinese stock market. More will follow.

On Jan 6, an article on the economic outlook for 2018 in the *Jerusalem Post* said that, while Ameri-

cans remained the biggest foreign investors in the Jewish state, Chinese investments into Israel might overtake the United States in a few years.

One of the reasons for the special millennial friendship between Jews and Chinese might lie in familial and school education. Especially, both cultures stress the importance of loving relationship within the family, beginning with great respect for one's parents and teachers.

Most remarkably, unlike their experience in Europe, Russia and many other Christian and Muslim countries in the world, the Jews have never experienced discrimination or prejudice in China.

For instance, a Jew can walk the streets of the Chinese mainland or Hong Kong with a *kippah* (skull-cap), a sign of his faith, without fear of being attacked or insulted.

Rabbi Asher Oser of the Ohel Leah Synagogue in Hong Kong

described it poetically: "I believe in God and the hand of providence. Sometimes, if we are lucky, we can see God's guiding hand, and the story of the Jews in China is one of those lucky times. We see God's guiding hand, we have seen providence".

Thus, with the Chinese government and among its citizens, the view has been that Jews are generally gifted, friendly, and hard-working people.

Taken together, the Chinese-Israeli connection promises to be an important vehicle to achieve the Belt and Road Initiative and the Chinese Dream.

*Dominic Man-Kit Lam is chairman of the World Eye Organization and the World Culture Organization. Mark O'Neill is an author who has lived in Asia since 1978. He has written eight books on Chinese history.*