

## Korean want to share their knowledge

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Article

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The occasion was to commemorate the withdrawal 60 years ago of Soviet forces from North Korea, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, which declared Pyongyang as its capital.

The keyword that underlines North Korea for the last six decades is best described as "self-reliance" or *juche*. During its first five-year plan which began in 1957, it was reported that industrial productivity was 3.5 times more than the earlier target.

By 1970, it declared itself an industrialised country based on socialism. In the 1980s, however, the economic situation deteriorated and in the 1990s, there was large-scale starvation,. Many died, forcing reclusive North Korea to seek international aid.

Over the same period, the south of the Korean peninsula had also undergone tremendous progress.

Last year, the north charted a gross national income of 24.8 trillion won (RM73 billion) but this was said to be only 1/36th of that of the south. In fact, South Korea had moved forward by leaps and bounds.

South Korea launched its development plan in the early 1960s. Before that, the economy was in ruins as a result of the Korean War (1950- 1953).

The GDP per capita in the 1950s was less than US\$100 (RM330) but now it is over US\$20,000, Korean Prime Minister Han Seung Soo said in his speech at the end of the forum.

From an agricultural country which perhaps was just as poor as the north, South Korea is now the world's 13th largest economy -- all within 50 years.

Being a small country with few natural resources, Korea had set its eyes on creating economic value. Next to trade was its passion for education and human resource training, emphasised the premier.

Education has always been a priority among Korean families. Therefore, it was not surprising that Korea today is flourishing as an enviable economy full of innovations.

The emergence of a number of competitive industries have contributed to wealth creation. While the search for world economic prosperity is continuing unabated, Korea is in touch with its roots.

Korean cultural values are still very much intact, although increasingly under pressure. The effort to preserve culture and the ability to accommodate modern technology is commendable.

All that has been achieved in science, technology, trade and the pursuit of prosperity would be meaningless if culture and heritage were abandoned.

Korean society is based on basic cultural values. Unlike the Western individualistic bias, there is stress on the value of harmony among the people. There is a general feeling of unease over public discord, especially in issues involving guests.

It is regarded as a "high context" culture whereby a person's behaviour may be just as important as his words, if not more so.

By and large, the Korean way shares a number of similarities with Japan and not surprisingly so. Korea was annexed by Japan at the turn of the last century and it broke free at the end of World War 2.

The Koreans have broken free from colonialism and have recovered from the ravages of a civil war. They now stand confident in engaging the world at large.

Some 100,000 Korean students are said to be studying abroad, mainly in the US. One out of three foreign students in China is Korean.

It is through education that Korea will interconnect with the world, this time by building bridges through research and innovation.

The Seoul forum was organised under the auspices of the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology, the country's premier science and technological research university. It was to identify common issues and

opportunities in strengthening globalisation of higher education and research. The Koreans want to share their expertise and sophisticated facilities with other universities in the world.

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