

Koreas to hold high-level talks to set up Kim-Moon summit

24/03/2018 07:32 by admin

The summit aims to improve relations and resolve the standoff over the North's nuclear program.

SEOUL: The rival Koreas have agreed to hold high-level talks this coming week to prepare for an April summit between North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and South Korean President Moon Jae-in, South Korea said Saturday.

The summit aims to improve relations and resolve the standoff over the North's nuclear program.

Unification Minister Cho Myoung-gyon will lead the South's delegation at the meeting Thursday at the border village of Panmunjom, where officials will discuss the date and specific agendas of the summit, according to the Unification Ministry. The North's delegation will be led by Ri Son Gwon, chairman of the agency that deals with inter-Korean affairs.

The rivals agreed to a summit when Moon's envoys visited Kim in Pyongyang earlier this month. South Korean officials also brokered a potential meeting between Kim and President Donald Trump by the end of May.

The leaders of the two Koreas have held talks only twice since the 1950-53 Korean War.

It's unclear whether the leaders' meetings between Seoul, Pyongyang and Washington, if they take place, could lead to any meaningful breakthrough after an unusually provocative year. North Korea in 2017 tested its most powerful nuclear weapon to date and test-launched three intercontinental ballistic missiles theoretically capable of striking the U.S. mainland.

There are also concerns in South Korea over whether the appointment of John Bolton, Trump's hawkish replacement for national security adviser H.R. McMaster, could potentially complicate efforts to set up talks between Trump and Kim, given his past bellicose rhetoric about North Korea.

A South Korean presidential official, who didn't want to be named, citing office rules, downplayed such worries on Friday, saying that Trump remains firmly committed to the summit and is leading the drive to set it up.

The planned summit between Moon and Kim will be preceded by performances of South Korean pop singers in North Korea.

Tak Hyun-min, a South Korean presidential aide who completed a three-day trip to North Korea to arrange the events, told reporters in Beijing on Saturday that it was agreed that the South Korean artists will hold a concert in Pyongyang on April 1 and follow with a joint performance with North Korean artists on April 3.

The South Korean artists will include some of the country's most popular pop singers, including Cho Yong-pil, who performed in Pyongyang during a previous era of detente, and girl band Red Velvet.

- AP