

# The Koreas Today

## What You Will Learn...

### Main Ideas

1. The people of South Korea today have freedom and economic opportunities.
2. The people of North Korea today have little freedom or economic opportunity.
3. Some people in both South and North Korea support the idea of Korean reunification.

### The Big Idea

Though they share a common history and culture, the two Koreas have very different governments and economies.

### Key Terms and Places

Seoul, p. 609

demilitarized zone, p. 609

Pyongyang, p. 611

### TAKING NOTES

In your notebook, draw two boxes like the ones shown here. As you read, take notes about South Korea in the left box and notes about North Korea in the right. Note similarities between the countries below the boxes.

South Korea	North Korea

## If YOU lived there...

You live in Incheon, one of South Korea's largest cities. Sometimes your grandparents tell you about the other family members who still live in North Korea. You have never met them, of course, and your grandparents have not seen them since they were children, more than 50 years ago. After hearing stories about these family members, you are curious about their lives.

## Would you like to visit North Korea?

**BUILDING BACKGROUND** A peace treaty ended the Korean War in 1953, but it left the Korean Peninsula divided into two very different countries. The conflict separated families from their relatives on the other side of the zone that divides South Korea from North Korea. Since then, the countries have developed in very different ways.

## South Korea Today

Japan's closest neighbor is both a major economic rival and a key trading partner. That neighbor is South Korea. Like Japan, South Korea is a democratic country with a strong economy. Unlike Japan, South Korea shares a border with a potentially hostile neighbor—North Korea.

## Government and Economy

The official name of South Korea is the Republic of Korea. As the name suggests, South Korea's government is a republic. It is headed by a president and an assembly elected by the people, much like the United States is. In fact, the United States helped create South Korea's government after World War II.

The United States also helped make South Korea's economy one of the strongest in East Asia. In addition, Korean business leaders and government officials have worked together to ensure that the economy stays strong. In recent years, South Korea has become a major manufacturing country, exporting goods to places all around the world.

## The Demilitarized Zone



The demilitarized zone separates the countries of South and North Korea. It is about 2.5 miles (4 km) wide and 150 miles (240 km) long. Armed guards patrol both sides of the zone.

### Daily Life

Like Japan, South Korea is very densely populated. The capital city, **Seoul** (SOHL), is one of the most densely populated cities in the world. It has more than 40,000 people per square mile (15,000/sq km).

Although parts of South Korea are densely populated, very few people live in the mountainous interior. Most people live near the coast. A coastal plain in western South Korea is the most crowded part of the country.

In South Korea's cities, most people live in small apartments. Because space is scarce, housing is expensive. Also, cities sometimes suffer from pollution from the many factories, cars, and coal-fired heating systems found there. In some cities, industrial waste has also polluted the water.

Outside the cities, many South Koreans still follow traditional ways of life. Most of them are farmers who grow rice, beans, and cabbage they can use to make kimchi. They usually live on small farms.

### Issues and Challenges

Government policies and international politics have led to some challenges for South Korea. Although South Korea has a successful economy, some people feel that it is corrupt. For many years, four families have controlled much of the country's industry. Some members of these families have used their wealth and power as a tool for making themselves even wealthier. The government hopes to put an end to this corruption through reform programs.

A bigger challenge to South Korea is its relationship with North Korea. Since the end of the Korean War in the 1950s, the two countries have been separated. Between them is a **demilitarized zone**, an empty buffer zone created to keep the two countries from fighting. Although troops are not allowed in the demilitarized zone, guards patrol both sides.

**READING CHECK** Summarizing What issues face South Korea today?



## North Korea Today

The official name of North Korea is the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Its name, however, is misleading. North Korea is neither a democracy nor a republic. It is a totalitarian state, and the Communist Party controls both the government and the economy.

### Government and Economy

The Communist government of North Korea has existed since World War II. It was created by a man named Kim Il Sung. He ruled the country from 1948 until his death in 1994. During this time, he created many policies that are still in effect today.

Kim ruled North Korea as a dictator. According to North Korea's constitution, most power rests in an elected legislature.

In truth, though, the legislature never had much power. Advised by members of the Communist Party, Kim ruled alone.

When Kim Il Sung died in 1994, his son Kim Jong Il took over. Like his father, the younger Kim rules as a dictator. He was elected by the North Korean legislature. The people had no say in his election.

As a Communist country, North Korea has a command economy. This means that the government plans the economy and decides what is produced. It also owns all land and controls access to jobs.

Unlike Japan and South Korea, North Korea is rich in mineral resources. With these resources, factories in North Korea make machinery and military supplies. However, most factories use out-of-date technology. As a result, North Korea is much poorer than Japan and South Korea.

#### ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

policy rule,  
course of action



Life in Korea



Because it is so rocky, very little of North Korea's land can be farmed. The farmland that does exist is owned by the government. It is farmed by cooperatives—large groups of farmers who work the land together. These cooperatives are not able to grow enough food for the country. As a result, the government has to import food. This can be a difficult task because North Korea's relations with most other countries are strained.

### Daily Life

Like Japan and South Korea, North Korea is largely an urban society. Most people live in cities. The largest city is the capital, **Pyongyang** (PYUHNG-YAHNG), in the west. Like Tokyo and Seoul, Pyongyang is very crowded. More than 3 million people live in the city.



The differences between life in South Korea and North Korea can be seen in their capitals. Seoul, South Korea (shown to the left), is a busy, modern city and a major commercial center. In comparison, North Korea's capital, Pyongyang, (shown above), has little traffic or commercial development.

**ANALYZING VISUALS** What do these photos suggest about life in Seoul and Pyongyang?

Life in Pyongyang is very different from life in Tokyo or Seoul. For example, few people in Pyongyang own private cars. The North Korean government allows only top Communist officials to own cars. Most residents have to use buses or the subway to get around. At night, many streets are dark because of electricity shortages.

The people of North Korea have fewer rights than the people of Japan or South Korea. For example, the government controls individual speech as well as the press. Because the government feels that religion conflicts with many Communist ideas, it also discourages people from practicing any religions.

### Issues and Challenges

Why does North Korea, which is rich in resources, have shortages of electricity and food? These problems are due in part to choices the government has made. For years, North Korea had ties mostly with other Communist countries. Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, North Korea has been largely isolated from the rest of the world. It has closed its markets to foreign goods, which means that other countries cannot sell their goods there. At the same time, North Korea lacks the technology to take advantage of its resources. As a result, many people suffer and resources go unused.

In addition, many countries worry about North Korea's ability to make and use nuclear weapons. In 2002 North Korea's government announced that it had enough materials to build six nuclear bombs. This announcement troubled world leaders, who feared what North Korea might do with atomic weapons. Negotiations are underway to resolve the issue.

**READING CHECK** Generalizing What is North Korea's relationship with the world?



Young people at a political rally express support for reunification. The flag in the background shows a united Korea.

## Korean Reunification

### FOCUS ON READING

What opinion do many Koreans hold toward reunification?

For years, people from both South and North Korea have called for their countries to be reunited. Because the two Koreas share a common history and culture, these people believe they should be one country. As time has passed, more and more people have voiced support for reunification.

The governments of both South Korea and North Korea have also expressed their support for reunification. Leaders from the two countries met in 2000 for the first time since the Korean War. As part of their meeting, they discussed ways to improve relations and communication between the two countries. For example, they agreed to build a road through the demilitarized zone to connect the two Koreas.

The chief obstacle to the reunification of Korea is the question of government. South Koreans want a unified Korea to be a democracy. North Korean leaders, on the other hand, have insisted that Korea should be Communist. Until this issue is resolved, the countries will remain separate.

**READING CHECK** Summarizing What issues stand in the way of Korean reunification?

**SUMMARY AND PREVIEW** In this chapter you learned about the history, cultures, and people of Japan and the Koreans. In the next chapter, you will examine a region that lies farther south, a region called Southeast Asia.

## Section 4 Assessment

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Online Quiz

KEYWORD: SK7 HP23

### Reviewing Ideas, Terms, and Places

- Define** What is the demilitarized zone? Why does it exist?
  - Summarize** What factors have helped South Korea develop a strong economy?
- Identify** What is the capital of North Korea? What is life like there?
  - Contrast** How is North Korea's government different from South Korea's?
- Recall** Why do many Koreans support the idea of reunification?
  - Evaluate** If you lived in North or South Korea, do you think you would support the reunification of the countries? Why or why not?

### Critical Thinking

- Analyze** Draw a diagram like the one below. In the left box, write three statements about South Korea. In the right box, write three statements about North Korea. In the oval, list one factor that supports reunification and one that hinders it.

South Korea

Reunification

North Korea

### FOCUS ON WRITING

- Considering Korea** As you read about the Koreans, did you think of an image, or picture, that would work in a poem? List your ideas.