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**SOUTH KOREAN FOREIGN MINISTER SEEKING TO ARRANGE MEETING WITH NORTH KOREAN COUNTERPART IN SINGAPORE**

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South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha is seeking to arrange a separate meeting with her North Korean counterpart Ri Yong Ho when both are in Singapore this week for the Asean Regional Forum (ARF), reported Yonhap news agency on Monday (July 30).

The ARF taking place on Saturday will be the first time North Korea's foreign minister meets his counterparts from Asean and other partners since the warming of ties between the two Koreas as well as between Pyongyang and Washington this year.

The ARF is the only Asia-Pacific consultative group in which North Korea is a member.

It follows four other Asean-related sessions: an Asean-South Korea foreign ministers' meeting, a Mekong-South Korea foreign ministers' meeting Friday, and Asean Plus Three and East Asia Summit (EAS) talks the next day.

North Korea is expected to send Mr Ri to the ARF, according to Yonhap. He represented North Korea at last year's ARF which was held in Manila.

He was part of the North Korean delegation when his leader Kim Jong Un travelled to Singapore in June for his widely-watched summit with US President Donald Trump.

If the foreign ministers of the two Koreas were to meet, it would be the first such meeting in 11 years since 2007, when the then South Korean Foreign Minister Song Min-soon met his North Korean counterpart Park Ui Chun, reported Donga Ilbo.

Yonhap reported on Monday that the South Korean foreign minister is scheduled to hold bilateral talks with the top diplomats of some 15 countries on the sidelines of the regional forums.

She is also likely to sit together with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo who will be in Singapore for the East Asia Summit (EAS), which groups Asean and dialogue partners China, Japan, South Korea, India, Australia, New Zealand, the United States and Russia.

It remains unclear whether Mr Ri and Mr Pompeo will hold bilateral or trilateral talks involving Dr Kang.

The possible meeting between the the top diplomats of the US and North Korea would also be meaningful as it could establish a communication channel between the two countries top diplomats.

Donga Ilbo reported that Mr Pompeos North Korean counterpart in negotiations has thus far been Kim Yong Chol, head of the United Front Work Department.

The newspaper said expectations are rising that the possible talks could inject fresh impetus into the denuclearisation negotiations between Pyongyang and Washington.

If the tripartite meeting is realised, it could provide a chance for discussions on declaring a formal end to the 1950-53 Korean War, according to Yonhap. Donga Ilbo said the creation of a working group for denuclearisation could be on the agenda.

The South Korean Foreign Ministry said in a press statement on Monday that Dr Kang plans to explain at the upcoming forums South Korea's efforts for "the complete denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula and the establishment of peace".

She will also request support for Seoul's relevant policy from the 10 Asean countries and the international community, the ministry added.

Another key task is to publicise the Moon Jae-in administration's campaign to improve South Korea's relations with the 10-member bloc.

Asean is South Korea's No. 2 trade partner, with two-way trade volume totaling US\$149.1 billion last year.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/south-korean-foreign-minister-to-seek-meeting-with-north-korean-counterpart-in>

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