

NUS sets up research centre focusing on Korean peninsula

Korea Centre set to fill a 'lacuna' and enable deeper, broader understanding of East Asia

Ng Wei Kai

Singapore's expertise on both North and South Korea is getting a boost with the establishment of a new research centre.

The Korea Centre, set up by the East Asian Institute (EAI) at the National University of Singapore (NUS), will focus on research into governance, diplomacy and development on the Korean peninsula.

Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan, who launched the centre

last month, said the Korean peninsula is a fascinating and complex issue well worth analysis and academic work.

"We do need a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the intricacies and implications of developments in the peninsula, and its wider impact on us and the rest of the world," he said.

The centre is helmed by Dr Lam Peng Er, principal research fellow at EAI, and is housed in EAI at the

NUS campus in Bukit Timah.

In an interview with *The Straits Times*, Dr Lam said the centre will allow EAI to broaden and deepen its understanding of East Asia.

"You cannot understand East Asia, China or Japan without understanding Korea, as they all have long historical ties to one another, which affect their modern-day relations," he said.

Dr Lam added that while EAI has traditionally had a good grasp

of Chinese and Japanese affairs, the new centre will help fill a "lacuna" in its understanding – Korea.

The move to establish the centre was spurred in part by the 2018 summit between then United States President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in Singapore, Dr Lam said.

He added that the centre hopes to bring in talent to nurture a uniquely South-east Asian per-

spective on the Korean peninsula, and serve both Singapore and Asean by developing reliable, in-depth knowledge.

"Singapore should work to develop its own understanding of both North and South (Korea), leveraging its good relations with both countries, which may be able to give us access and knowledge not available to researchers from other countries that have less cordial relations," he said.

The centre, the first of its kind in South-east Asia, has been welcomed by the embassies of both Koreas in Singapore, said NUS.

The centre plans to host conferences and seminars, and publish a quarterly bulletin. Last Friday, it held an international conference – titled *Assessing Seoul's New Southern Policy Plus: Perspectives From Asean, Korea And India*.

ngweikai@sph.com.sg