

Sixth KIC-EAI Conference

The Second Trump Administration: Implications for the
Korean Peninsula and East Asia

Keynote Speech by Mr Bilahari Kausikan

Mr Bilahari Kausikan, Adviser to the Korea Centre, East Asian Institute and Distinguished Fellow, Middle East Institute

I am going to address a simple question: Will the Trump administration restart talks with North Korea?

I would not rule it out. In his seventh February press conference with Prime Minister Ishiba of Japan, President Trump stressed his good personal relationship with Kim Jong-un, saying that, and I quote, "It's a very big asset for everybody that I do get along with him" end quote.

Trump wants to stop the war in Ukraine. He hasn't yet been clear about exactly how he intends to do so. But as North Korea is a significant supplier of munitions to Russia

and has also deployed troops to Ukraine, it makes sense to talk to Pyongyang as part of any effort to stop the Ukraine war. Clearly, however, talking to North Korea cannot be all about Ukraine, but Ukraine would be a good point of entry. During the 7 February press conference, Trump also said that his diplomacy has stopped a war.

Now, I don't know if war with North Korea was a real possibility during the first Trump administration, but it is to my mind an incontrovertible fact that the 45th President, Trump, dealt with North Korea far better than the 44th President, Obama. Obama, particularly in his second administration, made pretty speeches, but came across as weak. He did nothing about North Korea for eight years and called it a policy of strategic patience. This allowed Pyongyang to develop its missile and nuclear weapon programs and eroded deterrence.

In August 2017, Kim Jong-un threatened Guam with his missiles. Trump responded by promising to rain fire and fury on Pyongyang. Since then, to the best of my knowledge, North Korea has never tested a long-range missile on any trajectory that would bring it anywhere near Guam. Deterrence was restored. And having restored deterrence, it was not wrong for the first Trump administration to try diplomacy.

Trump met with Kim Jong-un three times; in Singapore in 2018 and in Hanoi and at the DMZ in 2019. As we all know, these meetings produced no results. They failed because they were hastily prepared and set an unrealistic goal of denuclearization, whatever that ambiguously protean term

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may mean. That particular train has long left the station. It will not go back. To expect CVID; a complete, verifiable, irreversible denuclearization or dismantlement of North Korea's nuclear program is a fool's errand.

The possibility of North Korea giving up its nuclear weapon or missile development programs is zero.

Pyongyang's most vital interest is regime survival. This is an existential issue, and Pyongyang sees these programs as indispensable to this goal. There is thus no incentive that can be offered to, or cost that can be imposed on Pyongyang that can persuade it or compel it to give up these programs, because to do so is tantamount to regime change. CVID is an obstacle to dealing with North Korea's nuclear programme in a practical and realistic manner. Earlier this year, Trump called North Korea a nuclear power, twice if I am not mistaken. Purists and NPT theologians criticised Trump for doing so. But what he said is no more than a simple description of fact. North Korea is rational. I always tell people they are bad, but they are not mad. North Korea is rational and can be dealt with in the same way as we deal with all nuclear weapon states, by strong deterrence and adroit diplomacy.

During the first Trump administration, the strength was present, but the adroitness was lacking. Still, trying diplomacy was not wrong, and reviving diplomacy would not be a mistake. Despite North Korea's habitually inflammatory rhetoric, it is in my judgment highly improbable that Pyongyang will again start a war to reunify the Korean Peninsula, as it did in 1950. Such a war will almost certainly draw in the US and its allies, and would put its most vital interests, regime survival, in jeopardy. So we should not assume that Kim Jong-un's declaration in January last year that he was renouncing peaceful reunification as a policy goal, and it was symbolized by the destruction of the Arch of Reunification in Pyongyang, we should not assume that that was necessarily an indication that he intends to fight a war of reunification.

As likely, perhaps even more likely, it is a recognition of the reality of two Koreas and the beginning of a healthy move out of the deep shadows of his father and grandfather. We tend, quite naturally, to focus on North Korea's military programs, but Kim Jong-un's ascent to power was marked by the announcement of his Byung-jin policy, which placed equal emphasis on both military and economic development, unlike his father's military first policy.

Before I resigned from government, and I should remind you the only official position I hold now is that of pensioner. Okay, so whatever I have to say is from that perspective.

Before I retired from government, I used to visit North Korea, not often, but fairly regularly. When I last visited Pyongyang in 2013, two years after Kim Jong-un came to power, there were tangible signs of development, not only in Pyongyang, but in Nampo and Kaesong. Undoubtedly, these were just more symbolic than anything else, but nonetheless real.

In late February last year, the North Korean media reported that Kim Jong-un had said he was ashamed and sorry for neglecting economic development outside Pyongyang, and called for a rapid rural industrial revolution, acknowledging, however, that achieving this would not be easy, along with military spending on nuclear weapons. The apology is probably mere lip service. Still, any sort of apology from any North Korean leader is such a rare event that we should not lightly dismiss it. Only time will tell whether, having made what he considers sufficient progress in its nuclear weapon and missile programs, Kim Jong-un will return to diplomacy in order to further his economic agenda. But it is at least worth testing the waters. We will not know if the time is right unless we explore the possibilities.

I do not think that either North or South Korea is really interested in reunification. To reduce the risk of miscalculation, it is better that they acknowledge and deal with each other as separate sovereignties, and that the US, Japan and South Korea also recognise North Korea de jure and not just de facto, and conclude a peace treaty with it. It has been argued that a peace treaty will reward and thus encourage bad behaviour. I do not find this argument convincing. Rewarding bad behaviour is hardly unknown in international relations generally, and on North Korea specifically. What else was the KEDO, Korean Peninsular Energy Development Organization, agreement of 1995? To describe KEDO in plain words, it was an attempt to bribe North Korea to stop behaving badly. Of course, KEDO did not work as expected,

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BEIJING WILL NEVER BE COMPLICIT, HOWEVER INDIRECTLY, IN REGIME CHANGE IN NORTH KOREA, BECAUSE THAT MAY GIVE THE CHINESE PEOPLE INCONVENIENT IDEAS ABOUT THEIR OWN SYSTEM.

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but without getting into futile debates about responsibility for its failure, which is more complicated than generally acknowledged, North Korea then had no nuclear weapons capability.

Its development of such a capability, however rudimentary, could change its calculations of interest, particularly when it develops a minimally credible second-strike capability vis-a-vis the US, boosting its confidence in its most vital interest, regime survival.

Regime survival is a relatively modest ambition to accommodate and stabilise by deterrence and diplomacy. In time, this may lead to discussions on arms control and non-proliferation, which are the only realistic goals for nuclear diplomacy with North Korea.

In any case, what are the alternatives? Sanctions clearly have not worked.

So what's left? A war? Too late for that, I think.

The Biden administration lumped China, Russia, Iran and North Korea into one ideological category and contrasted it with the West. But this binary categorization is not a policy, and ignores real differences in how these four countries define their interests, in the degree of their integration into the world economy and the scope of their ambitions. And these differences are at least as important as what they have in common. And diplomacy has to be based on an appreciation of nuance; how North Korean interests differ from those of China, Russia and Iran, as well as their similarities. For example, it is pointless to try to enlist China's help on COVID, completely pointless to my mind. Beijing is not enamoured with North Korea's missile and nuclear programs, but North Korea and China are only two of five surviving Leninist systems in the world, and Beijing's most vital interest is to preserve the rule of the Chinese Communist Party. On this issue, Beijing is completely risk-averse, indeed continually insecure. And Beijing will never be complicit, however indirectly, in regime change in North Korea, because that may give the Chinese people inconvenient ideas about their own system. To Beijing, tolerating North Korea's nuclear and missile programs is the lesser evil.

There is only one country that has any chance, however slim, of shifting the needle in Pyongyang, and that is the US. In all my dealings with North Korean officials, I have found them extremely clear-headed about this. Since the US is the only country that can affect regime change in North Korea, they know they need to deal with the US. Pyongyang is not desperate and will not pay any price to cut a deal with the Trump administration or any administration, but we will not

know the contours of a deal or its price unless the possibility is explored. On 8 February this year, just a few days ago, Kim Jong-un, speaking at the DPRK Ministry of Defence, reaffirmed North Korea's commitment to develop nuclear capabilities and criticised the U.S. for its deployment of nuclear assets, holding joint military exercises, and enhanced cooperation with Japan and South Korea, which he described as creating military imbalance in Northeast Asia. But he also said, and I quote, the DPRK does not seek unnecessary tension in the region, but will take sustained countermeasures to ensure the regional military balance.

Now, I find the emphasis on balance and imbalance intriguing. Is this a hint that is open to discussing what would be an appropriate balance? Again, there is no way to be sure unless the possibilities are explored. Of course, uncertainties remain. What is an appropriate balance? Of long-range capabilities, of short- and medium-range capabilities, some combination, trade-off between long- and medium-range capabilities at what force levels. In the long run, these uncertainties and China's own nuclear modernization program raise fundamental questions about America's extended deterrence, the so-called nuclear umbrella, and the security of Japan and South Korea. Will Los Angeles or San Francisco be sacrificed to save Tokyo or Seoul? Well, to my mind, there is only one credible answer: No.

During the 2016 campaign, Trump suggested that Japan and South Korea acquire nuclear weapons to allow them to defend themselves at less cost. I believe this is no longer a question of whether, only when, Japan and South Korea will develop their own independent nuclear deterrents within the US alliance system, just as the UK and France did in Europe decades ago.

Now, the road to an independent nuclear deterrent will be fraught, will be very difficult, for obvious reasons, more difficult for Japan than South Korea. But we should not forget that at least twice since the 19th century, Japan has shown itself capable of making fundamental changes of direction when national survival is at stake. So never say never, Japan, when it may be on the cusp of another fundamental change of direction.

In any case, the late Abe Shinzo had already laid the groundwork for such a shift by breaking decisively with the last vestiges of the post-war Yoshida doctrine. In the meantime, regardless of decisions on their own nuclear deterrence, Seoul and Tokyo would be well advised to open their own diplomatic channels to Pyongyang, rather than leave that relationship entirely in the hands of a more transactional America. Japanese and South Korean interests on North Korea are not identical with American interests.

Thank you for listening to me.

Congratulatory Remarks by H E Ambassador Hong Jin-Wook

Professor Alfred Schipke, Ambassador Bilahari Kausikan, Dean Park Hahnkyu, Professor Lee Shin-wha, and many other distinguished participants.

I would like to thank and congratulate EAI and KIC on hosting this meaningful and very timely conference on how to work with the second Trump administration.

As you may be aware, EAI hosts the Korea Center, the only think tank in Singapore with “Korea” in its name. It has taken the lead in driving discussions and providing valuable recommendations on Korea-related matters. Despite the political turmoil back in Korea, KIC has dedicated significant resources to both organizing and participating in this conference, reflecting its strong commitment to regional dialogue. It is truly commendable that the EAI and the KIC have sustained this conference for six consecutive editions, ensuring a continued platform for meaningful exchange and collaboration.

It has been just over a year since I assumed my post as the Ambassador of Korea to Singapore, and I can confidently say that Korea-Singapore relations are currently at a more significant juncture than ever before. Last year, the President of Korea paid a successful state visit to Singapore, during which both countries pledged to establish a strategic partnership as we celebrate the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations this year.

Last year, my Embassy, in good collaboration with MediaCorp, conducted the first-ever public perception survey on Korea among Singaporeans, and we were pleased to learn that more than two-thirds of the respondents



H E Ambassador Hong Jin-Wook, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Embassy of the Republic of Korea to the Republic of Singapore

had a positive view of Korea. However, the fact that the majority of this positive perception originated from Hallyu (Korean Wave) suggests that there is still a long way to go in strengthening much sustainable bilateral relations. As I mentioned in my interview with the MediaCorp last October, for our two countries to upgrade their relationship, we have to pursue more substantial interaction between our people going beyond the level of just consuming each other's culture like K-pop and K-drama, or Chili Crab and Chicken Rice. In this sense, with the participation of esteemed academic communities from both countries, I am sure today's conference will contribute to enhancing mutual understanding between our two people on key foreign policy issues.

The outcome of U.S. presidential election last November resonates far beyond its borders, particularly in regions like East Asia where the intricate balance of power is often influenced by American policies.

The second Trump administration has already begun to raise the question about continuity, change and the future of U.S. engagement in the region. During President Trump's first term, we witnessed a series of unprecedented developments, including direct summits between the U.S. and North Korea, shifts in trade policies, and efforts to recalibrate alliances. These actions, being bold, left a mix of accomplishments and unresolved challenges that continue to affect regional security.

The peace process with North Korea, marked by moments of hope and setbacks, remains at a critical juncture. A second Trump administration might bring renewed engagement or further unpredictability. This presents both risk and opportunities for advancing denuclearization, building trust, and ensuring sustainable peace.

Beyond the peninsula, East Asia as a whole faces a

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THE OUTCOME OF U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION LAST NOVEMBER RESONATES FAR BEYOND ITS BORDERS, PARTICULARLY IN REGIONS LIKE EAST ASIA WHERE THE INTRICATE BALANCE OF POWER IS OFTEN INFLUENCED BY AMERICAN POLICIES. THE SECOND TRUMP ADMINISTRATION HAS ALREADY BEGUN TO RAISE THE QUESTION ABOUT CONTINUITY, CHANGE AND THE FUTURE OF U.S. ENGAGEMENT IN THE REGION.

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complex strategic environment. The rise of China as a global power, the intensification of U.S.-China strategic competition, and regional disputes over sovereignty, trade and technology all create a delicate and dynamic geopolitical landscape. U.S. policies will have profound implications for regional stability, economic integration, and multilateral cooperation.

This is why I believe this is a moment for all nations in East Asia to demonstrate resilience, adaptability, and a commitment to dialogue. The Republic of Korea, with its strategic location, vibrant economy, and strong alliance with the U.S., has a critical role to play in shaping the future of our region.

We must also not lose sight of the importance of multilateralism. Regional institutions like ASEAN and international frameworks must be strengthened to address shared challenges, from security threats to climate change and economic recovery in the post-pandemic era. Singapore, as a hub of diplomacy and a beacon of multilateral cooperation, has an essential role in fostering these efforts.

In this unprecedented period of geopolitical turmoil, agile diplomacy is more important than ever. Given that ASEAN is one of South Korea's most important partners in the world, we will deepen our cooperation with ASEAN countries, to address international challenges, to enhance regional stability, and to promote common economic growth under any circumstance.

While it is true that there have been some concerns regarding South Korea's recent political situation, the international community has recognized the resilience of our democracy and the proper functioning of its constitutional procedures. Regardless of recent changes in domestic political landscape, South Korea has consistently expanded its active diplomacy and economic cooperation with ASEAN based on long-standing bipartisan support, as evidenced by the New Southern Policy of the previous government and KASI initiative of the incumbent government, and intends to continue this approach.

For example, it plans to expand the ASEAN-Korea Cooperation Fund (AKCF) and sustain initiatives like

the Korea-ASEAN Digital Innovation Flagship (KADIF). Additionally, building on last year's elevation of Korea-ASEAN relations to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP), Korea aims to establish the Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN-Korea CSP for 2026-2030, in line with the forthcoming 2045 ASEAN community vision to be adopted in May this year in Kuala Lumpur.

Going back to the 50th anniversary of the establishment of Korea-Singapore diplomatic relations, I'm happy to share that the commemorative logo has already been unveiled earlier this year, and various commemorative events all throughout this year are being organized. I kindly ask for your active participation and support.

Once again, I would like to express my gratitude to everyone present here today. Your wisdom and insights will undoubtedly enrich and add significance to today's discussions.

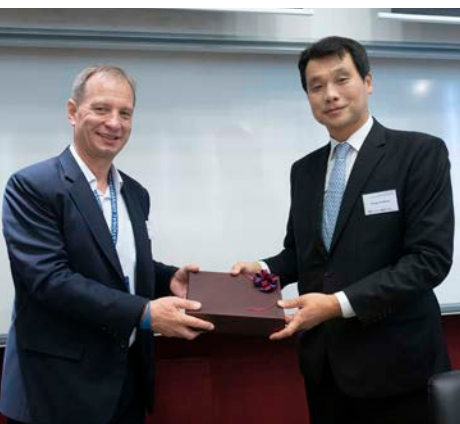
Thank you.

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WHILE IT IS TRUE THAT THERE HAVE BEEN SOME CONCERNS REGARDING SOUTH KOREA'S RECENT POLITICAL SITUATION, THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY HAS RECOGNIZED THE RESILIENCE OF OUR DEMOCRACY AND THE PROPER FUNCTIONING OF ITS CONSTITUTIONAL PROCEDURES. REGARDLESS OF RECENT CHANGES IN DOMESTIC POLITICAL LANDSCAPE, SOUTH KOREA HAS CONSISTENTLY EXPANDED ITS ACTIVE DIPLOMACY AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION WITH ASEAN BASED ON LONG-STANDING BIPARTISAN SUPPORT, AS EVIDENCED BY THE NEW SOUTHERN POLICY OF THE PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT AND KASI INITIATIVE OF THE INCUMBENT GOVERNMENT, AND INTENDS TO CONTINUE THIS APPROACH.

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The Second Trump Administration: Implications for the Korean Peninsula and East Asia



SESSION 1: TRUMP TEAM AND POLICIES TOWARDS THE KOREAN PENINSULA

Session Participants

Second Trump Administration and South Korea: A South Korean Perspective

Professor Park Hahnkyu
Dean and Professor, KIC, Kyung Hee University

The United States, Russia and Ukraine: Implications for the Korean Peninsula

Professor Vitaly Kozyrev
Distinguished Professor of Political Science and
International Studies, Endicott College

Trump Team, Policy Formulation and Implementation Towards the Korean Peninsula

Dr Victor Cha – Online
President of the Geopolitics and Foreign Policy
Department and Korea Chair, CSIS and Distinguished
University Professor, Georgetown University

Session Chair: Professor Alfred Schipke. Director, East Asian Institute, NUS

The following summarises key discussion points from the sessions, which were held under Chatham House rules and are not attributed to any specific speaker.

US' evolving foreign policy under Trump 2.0

Trump's America First approach

Trump prioritises America's national interest over its global commitments, including commitments to its long-time allies. He considers the United States as bearing a high cost in maintaining its alliances, such as NATO, South Korea and Japan, and advocates for these allies to increase their defence spending and share in security responsibilities.

America under Trump prefers unilateral action and a transactional style of diplomacy that maximises US



Prof Park Hahnkyu



Session 1 panelists with EAI Director Prof Alfred Schipke (centre) at the Q&A

economic benefit and minimises US military costs. Apparently, Trump supports tariffs as both a possible revenue source and a tool for leveraging trading partners and protecting US industries.

Trump's views of China

Trump has labelled China as the greatest threat to the United States, citing rampant intellectual property theft and predatory economic practices, and exploitation of free trade norms and causing job losses in the United States. These concerns motivated Trump's initial attempts at decoupling from China in his first term.

The establishment of the Indo-Pacific strategy is seen as a tool to check China's rising influence in the Pacific region, which looks to continue during Trump's second term. As a result, Trump's pressure on China and the resulting pressure on Indo-Pacific nations might introduce additional complexities in the region. US actions are likely to pressure the Republic of Korea (ROK) to align more closely with the United States, which constrains diplomatic manoeuvring space for the ROK in its management of relations between its main security partner (the United States) and its largest trading partner (China).

Implications of a bipolar world

The probability of two isolated geopolitical poles developing while highly improbable, will have dire global implications. Competition between the United States and China takes place in a highly connected, interdependent global system. Attempts by major powers to carve out a bipolar world may lead to conflict, given the asymmetries in power between China and the United States along with its allies.

US policy on Russia

Previous US and European policies on Russia aimed at curtailing Russian influence. Zbigniew Brzezinski, a former national security adviser in the Carter administration, emphasised Ukraine's role as a geopolitical pivot in Eurasia to counter Russian influence in Europe. There was a concern

that this motivated the West to capitalise on Ukraine's "strong nationalistic traditions" to create an alternative in Western Ukraine to "Putin's autocracy", leading Ukraine to gradually develop an adversarial stance towards Moscow and perceiving it as a long-term systemic threat to its national security.

Some signs suggest that the US position towards Russia is beginning to soften. Key members in the Trump 2.0 administration, such as Ukraine-Russia special envoy Keith Kellogg and director of national intelligence Tulsi Gabbard, have criticised Biden's Russia policy. They advocate for reengaging with Russia, post-Russia-Ukraine war, to potentially undermine the solidarity between the CRINKs (China, Russia, Iran and North Korea). They believe that a protracted Russian-Ukraine war strengthens CRINK unity and distracts the United States from its main competitor, China, which poses an existential threat to the United States.

The US-Russian bilateral relationship is thorny and will be so for the foreseeable future. Even if the United States (hypothetically) considers re-engaging Russia to counter China's growing clout, improvement in bilateral ties seems unlikely in the near future.

The Camp David Trilateral

Japan, South Korea and the United States have strengthened economic and security cooperation, with a marked growth in trilateral dialogue on economic cooperation, technical cooperation (CHIPS 4 alliance) and issue of security. This culminated in the Camp David Summit, where the three parties declared their commitment to consult in the event of a common threat. Since that announcement, numerous high-level meetings have taken place on issues like deterrence, maritime security, air drills and anti-submarine warfare. In November 2024, the trilateral secretariat was established.

The United States' attitude towards the Camp David Trilateral between Japan, South Korea and the United States will serve as a barometer of Trump 2.0's view of

Asia. President Trump has expressed intentions to continue this trilateral relationship in talks with Japanese Prime Minister Ishiba. This could be attributed to the arrangement being initiated during Trump 1.0, granting the current administration a sense of ownership of the concept.

The trilateral alliance emerged out of necessity, driven by growing uncertainty in the external security environment, including the Russia-Ukraine war, China's assertiveness in Asia's maritime regions and a nuclear-armed North Korea backed by Russia. In response, Seoul and Tokyo have strengthened their ties with Washington to stabilise their security landscapes. It is increasingly important for South Korea and Japan to emphasise to the United States that any changes to the troop presence on the Korean Peninsula or



Prof Vitaly Kozyrev

engaging in uncertain negotiations or diplomatic dealings with North Korea would not serve the interests of the United States, Japan or South Korea.

However, both Korea and Japan suffer from political uncertainties that undermine the trilateral relationship. Prime Minister Ishiba suffers from a weak domestic political base, facing the threat of possible snap elections. South Korea is also experiencing a domestic political crisis, with the impeachment of President Yoon. In fact, all three original signatories to the trilateral agreement are no longer in power.

Business communities in all three countries can significantly moderate and support improved Japan-Korea relations and stronger trilateral ties. Additionally, military leaders are crucial for urging policymakers—especially in Washington—to commit to the trilateral alliance and address the serious external threats facing all three nations.

At the time, encouraging signs indicated that key accomplishments of the Biden administration in Asia might continue under a potential Trump administration. External threats from Russia, North Korea, China and Iran

could serve to strengthen the bond between the three allies, driving them closer together.

Trump's transactional approach to East Asia

Trump 2.0 has assembled a team with a good understanding of Asia, including key high-level policy positions at the defence department, the state department and in the White House. However, the key variable is President Trump himself and the unpredictability of his views and resulting decisions.

South Korea bilateral relations

South Korea recognises the significant leverage that the United States has over the ROK, with US troops in South Korea helping to anchor the strategic balance in the region. Trump could compel the South Koreans to take on more of the defence burden by threatening to reduce US troops in case of non-compliance. In 2018, President Trump instructed the Pentagon to prepare for a troop reduction in South Korea and stop US-ROK joint military exercises after the joint summit with Kim Jung Un in Singapore, citing their high cost as a concern.

Trump is sceptical of the US-ROK alliance, questioning US obligation to it and considering South Korea as a “free-rider”. Trump seeks to use US leverage over South Korea, referring to it as a “money machine”. In his first term, Trump requested President Moon to increase South Korea's payments from \$1 billion to \$5 billion, which President Moon refused. He has since increased his demands for South Korea to shoulder more of the cost of hosting US troops, proposing an annual figure of \$10 billion.

Trump's policy towards the Korean peninsula remains uncertain, having expressed his dissatisfaction with the alliance on multiple occasions. In spite of this, Korea considers US-ROK's security cooperation as important for maintaining peace and balance in the South and East China Seas. Both Seoul and Tokyo are demonstrating their commitment to the trilateral arrangement with the United States by strengthening trade and security cooperation and taking a more active role.

Domestic politics also significantly affect South Korea's relations with the United States. South Korea's polity is broadly divided into two camps: conservatives who support ROK's alliance with the United States and see North Korea as the enemy, and progressives who support strengthening relations with China to reduce South Korea's reliance on the United States, and view North Korea as a legitimate counterpart for the peaceful reunification of Korea. Given ROK's current political turmoil and polarised electorate, should the progressives come into power, it could lead to friction with a more assertive and transactional Trump administration.

An emboldened North Korea

South Koreans are concerned that Trump might sideline them in negotiations with the North as he has displayed great interest in unilateral talks. One key worry is that Trump may pare back US demands for the denuclearisation of the North, opting to merely freezing the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK) nuclear and missile programmes instead. While it is not realistic to expect the DPRK to give up its nuclear arsenal, the lowering of previously stated demands

of complete denuclearisation will implicitly acknowledge DPRK as a nuclear power, possibly emboldening Kim Jong Un, especially with Russian support. Trump's North Korean policy will have a significant impact on the strategic balance on the peninsula and on inter-Korea relations.

It was believed that the Russia-DPRK alignment is not a temporary response to the Russian-Ukraine war, but a strategic move to undermine US deterrence efforts in East Asia. This creates incentives for regional actors to reconsider their commitment towards strengthening ties with the United States and rethink their dependency on the US security umbrella.

By becoming the primary security provider for the DPRK, Russia diminishes the United States' ability to use the North Korean nuclear issue as leverage against China.

Russia-China bilateral relations

The China-Russia "quasi-alliance" transcends a personal relationship between President Xi and President Putin. It reflects attempts by both countries to address global systemic and structural changes, and to push back against Western dominance. China's support of Putin is seen as being driven more by the desire to preserve Russia as a counterweight to the United States and hence its motivation to rescue the Putin regime from possible collapse.

Russia and China both advocate for a return to the "spheres of influence" logic, in which large, nuclear-armed powers respect each other's need to maintain spheres of influence around its borders. This includes refraining from expanding military alliances or coalitions or the establishment of military bridgeheads close to the borders of other nuclear powers. Notably, China's assertiveness creates structural impulses globally that the Russians appear to be accommodating.

The competition for influence in Eurasia and the Global South

China and Russia are working to establish an alternative to US economic leadership in Eurasia by fostering a collaborative system of economic, financial and strategic cooperation. This includes developing lending platforms for infrastructure, industry and social services, with fewer conditions. They aim to improve trade connectivity within Eurasia, including the North-South transport corridor and cooperate on Arctic issues, including shipping routes. This gives options for Eurasian and the Global South countries to hedge against US-led systems and alliances. However, the platform needs to be flexible to accommodate varied and often competing interests of Global South countries.

China and Russia might collaborate on developing a security architecture in Eurasia to counter US-led Euro-Atlantic mechanisms. The alignment between Russia's Eurasia Security Initiative and China's 2023 Global Security Initiative could serve as a foundation for their joint efforts in developing a regional security architecture. Russia has initiated this process by formulating a mutual defence treaty and strengthening economic ties with North Korea. Russia has also upgraded its partnership with Iran and deepened military cooperation with Belarus, including the transfer of Russian tactical nuclear missiles. Both Russia and China aim to involve India in developing a security framework. If successful, European nations, along with South Korea and

Japan, could find alternative options to reduce their reliance on the United States by joining this new grouping. However, the success of this shift hinges on China and Russia's ability to effectively collaborate on defence and economic synergies.

The culminative success of China-Russia regional cooperative alternatives like CRINKs, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and BRICS may gradually erode US influence amongst Indo-Pacific nations.

SESSION 2: UNITED STATES, CHINA, JAPAN AND THE KOREAN PENINSULA

Session Participants

Trump 2.0 and US-China Strategic Competition

Professor Choo Jaewoo

Professor, Department of Chinese Studies, Kyung Hee University

The Ishiba Administration's North Korea Policy in the New Trump Era: A Trilemma of Abduction, Atomic Weaponry and Autonomy

Dr Sunil Kim

Associate Professor, KIC, Kyung Hee University

Whither US – Japan – ROK Trilateral Cooperation?

Professor Haruko Satoh

Specially Appointed Professor and Director of International Collaboration, ESG-integration Research and Education Centre (ESG – IREC), Osaka School of International Public Policy (OSIPP), Osaka University.

Session Chair: Professor Park Hahnkyu, Dean and Professor, KIC, Kyung Hee University

Trump 2.0's strategic direction on East Asia

Trump's goal to "restore America's primacy" eventually culminated in the 2017 National Security Strategy during his first term. It outlined the US Indo-Pacific strategy and formalised competition with China. Biden continued where Trump had left off, fleshing out the key aspects of US strategy. Both China and the United States view the following 10 years as a defining decade of US-China competition and by extension, US primacy.

Trump is constrained by the four-year term in office, forcing him to adopt a more transactional diplomatic approach to gain immediate and quick benefits for the United States to fulfil his campaign promises. Trump's actions are arguably not a departure from America's long-term foreign policy strategy, but rather an extension of it, albeit in a different form.

Maintaining US alliances seem to be one of Trump's lesser priorities, a stark contrast with Biden's approach. Trump has demonstrated his readiness to apply tariffs to all, including allies and long-time friends. He prioritises America's economic interests over that of its allies, exemplified by his willingness to walk away from arrangements that do not have clear benefits for the United States.

President Trump arguably embodies certain realities faced by the United States, highlighting the continuous competition in reshaping America's national identity.



Prof Choo Jaewoo

His “America First” policy is not groundbreaking as all countries pursued their own national interests, sometimes at the expense of others. Instead of overreacting to Trump’s transactional dealmaking, countries would do well to evaluate the real impact of his policies and react accordingly.

The United States is still committed to the liberal international order, despite Trump’s vagueness towards it. The existence of such an order is premised on America’s commitment to its alliances and the universal values that America upholds in its foreign policy.

Trump has laid out key strategic interests for the United States. Fentanyl remains the top priority for his administration. His primary focus, however, is on

strengthening America’s resilience against supply and trade shocks. The strength of America’s manufacturing sector was tested during COVID-19 and subsequently, the Russian-Ukraine war. American industries faced significant challenges during the pandemic, struggling to procure the resources and manufacturing capacity for producing adequate medical equipment such as masks. These vulnerabilities revealed a need for strengthening America’s manufacturing base, prompting Trump to focus on bolstering America’s production capabilities and maintaining its lead in high tech sectors.

In the US-China competition for global influence, there are concerns about the emergence of dangerous binaries that pressure countries to “choose a side”. This includes the simplistic framing of US-China competition as a binary choice between autocracies and democracies. In seeking to form new alliances or deepen existing ones – especially in regions like South East Asia – the United States needs to make a realistic assessment of both its hard and soft power projection, including the likeability and appeal of the United States. Countries like Japan and Korea, too, often base their foreign policy decisions on specific issues, rather than fully aligning with the United States or China.

Japan’s evolving foreign policy

The centre of Japanese foreign policymaking has shifted from policymakers to the Prime Minister’s Office, termed as the “Presidentialisation” of the prime minister. This was exemplified by Abe making the shift from the more pacifist Yoshida doctrine to a more pragmatic approach, which saw a more proactive and assertive Japanese diplomacy. The prime minister is now the main driver of Japan’s foreign policy for North Korea and is less dependent on support for policymakers to pursue his agenda.

Ishiba seeks to pursue a more equal US-Japan relationship and supports revising Japan’s constitution to provide for collective self-defence. He seeks to revise



Session 2 panelists (from left): Dr Sunil Kim, Prof Choo Jaewoo and Prof Haruko Satoh

the status of forces agreement which governs the stationing of US troops in Japan and advocates at times for the establishment of an “Asian NATO”. He is however, constrained by an anaemic economic recovery and a weak domestic political base. Achieving these objectives necessitates increased military spending and a larger financial contribution from Japan for hosting US troops. On the positive side, Trump has voiced his commitment to the US-Japan alliance, including the pledge to maintain American deterrence to safeguard Japan.

Ishiba’s foreign policy goals were largely seen as similar to that of Abe, focusing on Japan adopting a more assertive diplomatic stance and expanding its military to enhance Japan’s global role. However, Ishiba differs critically from that of his predecessors in his greater emphasis on “strategic autonomy”. This is a response to an increasingly complicated geopolitical environment surrounding Japan, in particular the hegemonic rivalry between the United States and China, in which Japan seeks to hedge to secure its national interests.

Japan – North Korea bilateral relations

Japan has established the three pillars (goals) in its foreign policy towards North Korea: nuclear disarmament, repatriation of Japanese abductees and eventual diplomatic normalisation of bilateral relations. The Japanese government has been pursuing these three goals concurrently.

The issue of abductions has been the top policy priority of Japan’s policy on North Korea. Since the 1990s, all Japanese prime ministers from both the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and Democratic Party of Japan factions have made it a prime policy consideration. The abduction issue has emerged as a core political concern after the Cold War, coinciding with the growing importance of universal values and human rights.

The political motivations surrounding the abduction issue vary among different factions. Political conservatives, including Abe, have leveraged the issue to justify nationalistic goals, while left-leaning groups have advocated for the normalisation of relations with North Korea. Japanese prioritisation of the resolution of the issue differs between administrations, sometimes even temporarily taking precedence over denuclearisation efforts.

The issue has not been addressed in recent years, even with the support of the United States and South Korea.



Prof Haruko Satoh



Dr Sunil Kim

Japan has sought help from both the GOP and Democratic Party, as well as from South Korea. Japan also requested assistance from President Xi and President Trump on the issue. While these parties have expressed sympathies, none of its allies or dialogue partners have expressed their commitment to the issue, forcing Japan to tackle it largely on its own, without much success. Japan’s insistence on linking normalisation of bilateral relations with North Korea to the resolution of the abduction issue has stalled progress. North Korea also seeks to maintain its leverage over Japan to extract policy concessions, providing little motivation to resolve the abduction situation.

US-ROK cooperation

Korea remains a useful ally to the United States, particularly for its advanced chip-making technologies and capacity. The alliance has grown in significance as the United States curtail imports of Chinese-made chips. The Biden administration recognised this and had deepened technical cooperation between the two countries to improve US manufacturing capabilities in semiconductors. In the semiconductor supply chain among Western allies, there is a clear division of labour: the United States provides raw materials and chip designs, while Japan and the EU supply essential manufacturing equipment. Meanwhile, South Korea and Japan play key roles as major chip manufacturers. As such, US-Korea alliance remains strategically important to the United States’ Indo-Pacific strategy.

As America’s reliance on South Korea grows, it offers the opportunity for South Korea to enhance its global influence and strengthen its role in the American-led global strategy during the Trump administration.

US-DPRK bilateral relationship

The DPRK was seen as harbouring a deep distrust of Trump. The relationship between the two nations’ leaders has been highly erratic, oscillating between threats to two performative meetings in Singapore and Hanoi, neither of which produced substantive resolutions. Trump 1.0’s administration also exacerbated tensions when it forced the extradition of two North Korean individuals from Malaysia who violated US sanctions on the DPRK, further straining the political relationship between the two leaders.

The Obama’s policy of strategic patience towards North Korea was not completely ineffective. It involved US-led global economic sanctions, which further isolated North



Questions from the floor

Korea and restricted its diplomatic space, eventually “forcing” it to side with Russia. However, it is believed that the policy should be reassessed for its effectiveness.

Historical complications in East Asia

Identity plays a crucial role in shaping national identity and in the conceptualisation of the nation-state. Its formation and eventual adoption unfold in stages, drawing extensively on history and historical interpretations for both its relevance and justification.

Citing the examples of Korea, Japan and China, the colonisation of Korea by Japan forms a core foundation of Korean identity and is the basis for continued distrust of Japan. China too, views the Japanese occupation of China in a similar light, which undergirds China-Japan bilateral relations. Consequently, in Japan’s interactions with its East Asian neighbours, it must consider each country’s historical perspective of Japan. The nation’s own national identity may also be undergoing revisions, which means historically significant issues, such as war, may re-emerge in a competition for saliency.

East Asian history, especially on World War II, is unique due to the absence of a comprehensive, collective understanding on the subject, unlike in Europe. The process of transitional justice, which includes reconciling historical perspectives between East Asian countries, has not progressed. Japan has not fully addressed its wartime guilt and much of the region’s historical archives remain closed. The history of WWII is closely linked to the legitimacy of East Asian governments, including the Chinese Communist Party and Japan’s LDP rendering discussions highly politicised. While discussion of history is crucial, it is difficult to proceed.

SESSION 3 - TRUMP ADMINISTRATION, KOREAN PENINSULA AND EAST ASIA

Session Participants:

Vietnam’s Pragmatic Diplomacy: United States, China and the two Koreas

Dr Ha Anh Tuan

Associate Professor and Dean, Faculty of International Politics and Diplomacy, Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam

South Korea and Like-Minded Middle Powers: Sustaining Multilateralism in East Asia Amid Great Power Transition

Prof Shin-wha Lee

Director of Interdisciplinary Institute of Unification Studies;

Professor of Dept of Political Science and International Relations, Korea University

Trump 2.0 Tariffs Policy and Its Implications for South Korea’s Trade

Dr Soyeon Kim – Online

Associate Professor, KIC, Kyung Hee University

Session Chair: Prof Moon Don | Professor, KIC, Kyung Hee University

Pragmatism and Strategic Balancing by Middle Powers

A major theme running through the session was the pragmatic and adaptive approach taken by middle powers such as Vietnam and South Korea in navigating complex international environments. It was emphasised that Vietnam’s increasingly proactive yet pragmatic foreign policy is rooted in the principle of “stick to the objective, be flexible with the means”, a guiding philosophy attributed to Ho Chi Minh. Vietnam has transitioned from a passive rule-taker to a more assertive contributor in multilateral fora, while maintaining a delicate balance among major powers such as the United States, China and Russia. This hedging strategy has been manifested in Vietnam’s recent upgrade of diplomatic relations with the United States, continued engagement with Russia despite international controversies and calibrated management of its fraught but vital relationship with China. Similarly, Vietnam’s balanced diplomacy extends to both Koreas, maintaining robust economic and security ties with South Korea while preserving traditional links with North Korea.

Noted is the particular pressures on Korean foreign policy amid the “fracture of the global order”, with rising authoritarianism, the spectre of a “new cold war” and the weakening of traditional multilateral institutions (G7, G20). South Korea’s “strategic ambiguity”—now shifting towards “strategic clarity”—reflects the existential need to hedge between US and Chinese interests, especially given the North Korean threat. Both Vietnam and South Korea thus exemplify the middle-power imperative: diversifying partnerships, maximising leverage and avoiding overdependence on any single major power.

The Strain on Multilateralism and the Liberal International Order

There was generally deep concern over the erosion of the liberal international order and the challenges facing multilateralism. Notably, the intensifying US-China rivalry



Dr Ha Anh Tuan

and the rise of “bloc-isation” risk marginalising smaller and middle powers, placing a strain on ASEAN centrality and other regional mechanisms. There was also a need for new security architectures and scepticism was voiced about the continued efficacy of existing groupings like the G7 and G20, given internal rifts and the resurgence of transactional nationalism. The argument was that multilateral functional cooperation—especially among like-minded middle powers (Korea, Canada, Australia and Japan)—remains vital, but must adapt to a world where US leadership is increasingly unpredictable or inward-looking.

Economic Uncertainties and the Impact of Trump's Protectionism

Attention was also drawn to the global spillovers of US protectionism, particularly for trade-dependent economies like Korea. Trump's tariff strategy is as much political as economic—leveraged for negotiation and domestic political objectives (reducing trade deficits, revitalising the middle class and combating illegal immigration)—and often wielded as a bargaining tool against allies and adversaries alike. While acknowledging the “contradictions” in aiming simultaneously for inflation reduction, deficit correction and job creation, it was observed that Trump's step-by-step, market-responsive approach makes it difficult to anticipate specific outcomes for Korea. The volatility induced by these policies, especially in sectors like semiconductors and autos, underscores the need for Korea (and, by implication, other middle powers) to diversify supply chains and deepen ties with alternative markets.



Prof Shin-wha Lee

The Challenge of Unpredictability and the Future of Regional Order

There was a pervasive uncertainty regarding the future trajectory of US foreign and economic policies. The advice was to avoid overreacting preemptively, advocating instead for a “wait and see” approach while reinforcing functional cooperation among regional partners. The shared sentiment was that middle powers must be “attentive but cautious”, ever-ready to adapt to new realities but wary of committing prematurely in an unpredictable landscape.

In summary, the session converged on several vital themes: the necessity for pragmatic, balanced diplomacy among middle powers; the dangers posed by intensifying great power rivalry and the decline of multilateral cooperation; the disruptive economic impacts of US protectionism; and the need for adaptability in an increasingly volatile regional environment. As presenters observed in their respective domains, the capacity of middle powers to maintain flexibility, diversify partnerships and sustain functional multilateralism will be key to navigating the challenges of the coming years.

SESSION 4 - TRUMP ADMINISTRATION AND POLITICAL ECONOMY IN EAST ASIA

Session Participants

From Trade War to Tech War: Trump's Policies and Semiconductor Geopolitics in Northeast Asia

Prof Cai Cuihong – Online

Professor of International Relations, Centre for American Studies, Fudan University

The Impacts of Trump's Trade Policy on East Asian Regionalism: Will the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) Survive?

Prof Moon Don

Professor, KIC, Kyung Hee University

Trump 2.0 and the (Continued) Decay of Liberal Institutionalism

Dr Wen Yao – Online

Associate Professor, Institute of International Studies, Fudan University

Trump 2.0 and US-China Technology Competition

Prof Zhao Minghao – Online

Professor and Deputy Director, Centre for American Studies, Fudan University

Session Chair: Dr Chen Gang, Deputy Director and Senior Research Fellow, East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore

From Trade War to Tech War: US-China Rivalry Intensifies

Great interest was shown to the shift in US-China relations from a traditional trade war to an escalating technological competition, or “tech war”. Speakers noted that the Trump administration's first term was characterised by imposing tariffs and blacklisting Chinese technology firms, notably in semiconductors. They expect Trump 2.0 to double down on technology export controls, supply chain decoupling and pressure on allies to align with US policy, especially regarding



Dr Chen Gang

advanced manufacturing and emerging industries. The semiconductor industry—central to economic growth, security and technological dominance—emerged as a focal point, with Northeast Asian regions like China, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan occupying pivotal roles.

Pressure on Regional Allies and Fragmentation of Global Value Chains

The US strategy of leveraging its alliances to contain China was another major point. Panelists discussed how both the Trump and Biden administrations have pressed key semiconductor-producing allies (Japan, South Korea and Taiwan) to restrict technology exports to China, restructure supply chains and support American-led initiatives. This pressure has led to supply chain disruptions and forced countries to reconsider their economic strategies, often at the cost of their own technological or economic interests.

The Erosion of Multilateralism and Liberal Institutionalism

Several speakers addressed the decay of liberal institutionalism and the increasing irrelevance or instrumentalisation of multilateral institutions. Trump's preference for unilateral, transactional policies and disregard for established bodies like the World Trade Organisation and various regional frameworks have accelerated the decline of the rules-based order. Even under Biden, the trend towards exclusive clubs and limited coalitions ("small yard, high fence") persists. This shift has led to not only higher transaction costs, unpredictability and instability but also the weaponisation of institutions for short-term strategic benefit rather than long-term cooperation.



Prof Moon Don

East Asian Regionalism under Threat

The panelists highlighted the unique structure of East Asian regionalism: highly developed economic institutions but weak security frameworks. Traditionally, the region has embraced 'open regionalism'—inclusive, consensus-driven and non-exclusionary. However, US withdrawal from major regional trade initiatives (like the Trans-Pacific Partnership) and the likely collapse of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework under Trump 2.0 threaten the region's institutional fabric. China's attempts to fill the void are viewed with caution by other regional actors, who are wary of both US unpredictability and China's assertiveness.

Technological Innovation, Self-Sufficiency and Multipolarity

In response to US pressure, China and other regional actors are accelerating efforts to boost technological self-sufficiency, innovation and the establishment of multipolar technology networks. Initiatives like the Belt and Road's "Digital Silk Road" aim to broaden China's technological influence across the Global South, while increased R&D investment and alternative partnerships are being pursued by Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. However, trust deficits and concerns over transparency, privacy and standards persist, complicating genuine multipolar cooperation.

The Role of Middle Powers and the Search for Agency

Amid the intensifying rivalry between the United States and China, the predicament of "middle powers" and smaller states (e.g. ASEAN, South Korea, Japan and Singapore) is of interest. These countries face the challenge of safeguarding their own agency, economic interests and regional stability in a context increasingly dominated by unilateralism and great power competition. They are urged to pursue "hedging" strategies, strengthen intra-regional cooperation and assert normative leadership in data privacy, technology standards and inclusive economic frameworks.

Institutional Adaptation, Inefficiency and Uncertainty

There was also a shared acknowledgment of the rapid pace of technological change, which threatens to outstrip the ability of regional institutions and agreements to remain relevant or effective. By the time consensus is reached on frameworks or standards, technological advancements may have already rendered them obsolete. This creates a perpetual lag and a sense of institutional inadequacy in keeping pace with digital and AI-driven transformations.

Together, the presentations portray a region that is facing heightened uncertainty, institutional fragility and strategic dilemma. The US-China rivalry is increasingly fought on technological terrain, with profound implications for allies, supply chains and the global order. East Asian states would have to navigate the decline of multilateralism, challenges of technological decoupling and search for agency amid great power rivalry, all while seeking to keep pace with a rapidly evolving technological landscape. These call for regional cohesion, innovative adaptation and a renewed commitment to open and inclusive cooperation—despite the headwinds from both Washington and Beijing.

Conference compilation by Tan Chia How, research associate, and Liu Bojian, research assistant, at the East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore.

Highlights at the Korea Centre



(Top) Podcast with Prof Lee Shin-wha, Department of Political Science and International Relations, Korea University



(Above left): Congratulatory remarks by H E Ambassador Hong Jin-wook at Prof Lee Shin-wha's EAI seminar (right) on "Navigating South Korea's Multilateral Strategy Amid US-China Rivalry and Trump 2.0". (Below): With EAI Director Prof Alfred Schipke (right)





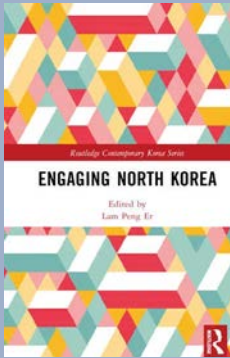
(Top) With Dr Do Thanh Hai and Dr Ha Anh Tuan, Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam



(Above left): With Swedish Special Envoy to the Korean Peninsula Ambassador Kent Harstedt. (Above right): With Minister-Counsellor and Consul General Chang Hoseung (left), Republic of Korea Embassy in Hanoi. (Below): President and CEO Kim Hee-Eun (centre), Centre for Asia Pacific Strategy



Recent Publications



Engaging North Korea

Editor: *Lam Peng Er*

Publisher: *Routledge of London and New York*

Year of Publication: 2025



This book presents a comprehensive overview of international attempts to engage North Korea diplomatically with the aim of avoiding a nuclear war.

It highlights the difficulty of this task, concluding that the containment of North Korea currently depends more on military deterrence than on diplomatic restraint. It considers the various multilateral attempts at diplomatic engagement over recent decades and explores the different approaches of different countries, examining the domestic factors and the strategic interests which drive different countries' different approaches. It includes an account of China's growing estrangement, Russia's increasing closeness and the surprising relationship between North Korea and Sweden which has been effective in providing the North Korean people with humanitarian aid.

Revealing the story of diplomatic frustrations and failures when engaging North Korea this book will appeal to students and scholars of Korean studies, Asian politics and international relations.



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3. A Basic Framework for Understanding China-North Korea Relations by *Jaewoo CHOO*

Regional Great Powers and the DPRK

4. Russia and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the 21st Century by *Vitaly KOZYREV*
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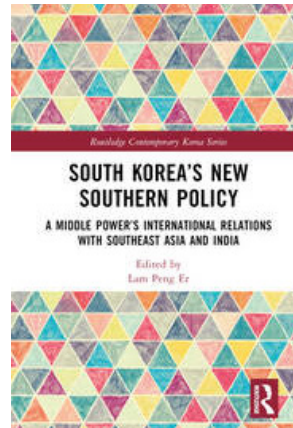
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Discreet Roles of the European Union, Sweden and Ireland

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11. The European Union's Humanitarian Assistance Program in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea by *Saroj DASH*

South Korea's New Southern Policy: A Middle Power's International Relations with Southeast Asia and India



Editor: Lam Peng Er
Publisher: Routledge
Year of Publication: 2023

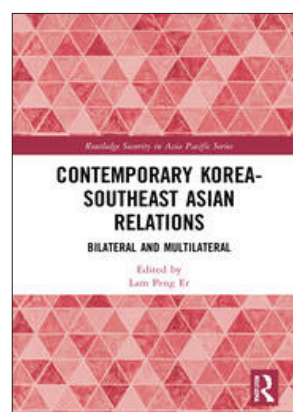
Description:

This book examines the first regional strategy of South Korea towards Southeast Asia and India. At issue is how a middle power (a G20 country with the tenth largest economy in the world) seeks to play a larger and more comprehensive role in regions beyond the Korean peninsula. Hitherto, South Korean foreign policy has focused on nuclearizing North Korea, alliance maintenance with the United States, tricky relations with its most important economic partner China, and difficult ties with Japan marred by historical and territorial disputes. The Moon Administration has sought to diversify South Korean foreign policy by elevating ASEAN and India to the same strategic level as the United States, China, Russia and Japan. To be sure, the latter countries continue to be most significant to the Korean peninsula. However, this book offers different country and regional perspectives on Seoul's first regional grand strategy to play a role commensurate with its status as a middle power.

For more details, visit:

<https://www.routledge.com/South-Korea's-New-Southern-Policy-A-Middle-Power's-International-Relations/Er/p/book/9781032404479>

Contemporary Korea-Southeast Asian Relations: Bilateral and Multilateral



Editor: Lam Peng Er
Publisher: Routledge
Year of Publication: 2022

Description:

This book presents a comprehensive overview of the relations between the two Koreas and the different ASEAN states, including their relations with ASEAN as an organisation. It outlines a complex picture with both bilateral and multilateral relations in play at the same time. It charts how the present situation has arisen for each relationship, discusses current difficulties and strains, and assesses how the relationship may develop in future.

For more details, visit:

https://www.routledge.com/Contemporary-Korea-Southeast-Asian-Relations-Bilateral-and-Multilateral/Peng-Er/p/book/9781032111797?gclid=EAlaIqobChMI-duGysbL_gIVxYBLBR019w6SEAAAYASAAEgIMS_D_BwE

CHRONOLOGY

ASEAN - Korea Relations

A Chronology of Key Events:

January 2025 to March 2025

Gordon Kang

S Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University

THE Korea Centre at the East Asian Institute closely monitors Southeast Asian regional developments vis-à-vis the Korean Peninsula. This chronology considers key bilateral and multilateral interstate interactions between both Koreas and individual ASEAN countries, as well as with ASEAN as a regional institution.

January 2025

2nd	The ASEAN Committee in Seoul (ACS) held its Chairmanship Handover Ceremony at the Philippine Embassy in Seoul. The event marked the formal transfer of the ACS chairmanship from H E Maria Theresa B Dizon-De Vega, ambassador of the Philippines, to H E Dato' Mohd Zamruni Khalid, ambassador of Malaysia. The two ambassadors reviewed the committee's recent initiatives and discussed upcoming priorities for ASEAN-South Korea cooperation. The ceremony included the symbolic passing of the ACS gavel, followed by a luncheon attended by ASEAN Heads of Missions. Malaysia assumed the ACS chairmanship for the term spanning 2 January to 30 June 2025.
3rd	The Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) released a statement welcoming the entry into force of the Philippines–Republic of Korea (ROK) Free Trade Agreement (FTA), which took effect on 31 December 2024. The agreement was seen as a major milestone in bilateral relations, following the elevation of ties to a Strategic Partnership in October 2024. The DFA expressed its expectation that the FTA would further strengthen economic cooperation between the two countries.
7-8th	The ASEAN-Korea Centre hosted the 12th ASEAN Connectivity Forum from 7 to 8 January 2025 in Seoul, marking the final year of the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) 2025 and reflecting on 15 years of progress. The event featured thematic sessions on physical, institutional and people-to-people connectivity, covering infrastructure, digital integration and labour mobility. A strategic planning session on Day 2, moderated by former Ambassador Suh Jeong-in, discussed the future of ASEAN Connectivity beyond MPAC 2025 and avenues to deepen ASEAN-Korea cooperation.
10th	ASEAN Secretary-General Dr Kao Kim Hourn attended a luncheon in Jakarta hosted by Korean Ambassador to ASEAN H E Lee Jang-keun. They exchanged views on ASEAN-ROK relations, with particular focus on the implementation of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership established during the 25th ASEAN-ROK Summit held in October 2024 in Vientiane, Laos.
13th	South Korea and Singapore unveiled a commemorative logo to mark the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations, selecting the winning design from a competition between students from Korea National University of Arts and Singapore's Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts. Reviewed by officials and design experts from both countries, the chosen logo featured national flag-inspired colours and symbolic elements, including the number 50 to represent five decades of friendship. South Korean Ambassador Hong Jin-wook praised the design as a reflection of the shared spirit of innovation and cooperation. The embassy also announced celebratory events, including a Korean film screening and a performance of Jongmyo Jeryeak, a UNESCO-recognised royal ritual from Seoul.

13th	Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) launched two new projects worth US\$5.5 million to support Vietnam in addressing gender-based violence (GBV), particularly among marginalised groups such as people with disabilities and LGBTQI+ communities. The projects aimed to expand the One Stop Service Centre (OSSC) model, known as Anh Duong House, to additional provinces and enhance emergency preparedness in the Quang Ninh province. Building on earlier successes, including the first Anh Duong House established in 2020, KOICA also committed to a second “bridge phase” for post-disaster recovery. Implemented in partnership with ministries and local authorities, the initiatives focused on multisectoral responses, public awareness, workplace safety and engaging men and boys to challenge harmful gender norms. By 2025, six OSSCs had been set up across Vietnam, serving over 1,600 survivors and responding to more than 26,000 hotline calls. Both UNFPA and KOICA emphasised the importance of continued collaboration to ensure safety, equality and long-term support for GBV survivors.
16th - 17th	Thailand chaired the fifth ASEAN Digital Ministers' Meeting (ADGMIN) and related sessions with dialogue partners in Bangkok. Held under the theme “Secure, Innovative, Inclusive: Shaping ASEAN's Digital Future”, the meeting addressed cross-border data flows, AI governance, cybersecurity and digital inclusion. Delegates approved key deliverables for 2024 and adopted the 2025 ASEAN Digital Senior Officials' Meeting and ASEAN Telecommunications Regulators' Council Work Plan, including the ASEAN AI Safety Network declaration and a guide on sustainable data centres. Projects with partners such as China, Japan, Korea, the United States, EU and International Telecommunication Union were endorsed, and the World Bank was welcomed as a new development partner. The Terms of Reference for ASEAN's AI governance group were also revised to reflect a broader role, and Vietnam was tasked with leading the development of the ASEAN Digital Masterplan 2030. Separately, South Korea's Ministry of Science and Information and Communication Technology announced a five-year, US\$30 million digital innovation project with ASEAN to build data infrastructure, AI solutions and talent. ROK Vice-Minister Kang Do-hyun also announced plans for a future trilateral meeting with US and Japanese counterparts on AI cooperation.
17th	ROK National Assembly Speaker Woo Won-shik hosted a luncheon at Sarangjae Hall for ambassadors from all 10 ASEAN member states to commemorate 35 years of ASEAN-Korea relations. He highlighted the elevation of their partnership to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2024 as a milestone and expressed hopes for continued growth in 2025, which he described as symbolising renewal and wise transformation. Woo reaffirmed Korea's commitment to ASEAN-led mechanisms and proposed deeper cooperation in emerging sectors such as digital technology, along with expanded parliamentary exchanges. ASEAN envoys welcomed Korea's leadership and called for greater information-sharing.
19th	The 24th Meeting of ASEAN, China, Japan and Republic of Korea Tourism Ministers (24th M-ATM Plus Three) was held in Johor Bahru, Malaysia, as part of the ASEAN Tourism Forum held from 15 to 20 January. The meeting was chaired by Malaysia's Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture H E Dato Sri Tiong King Sing and co-chaired by H E Yu Inchon, South Korea's minister of culture, sports and tourism. Building on discussions from the 45th ASEAN Plus Three National Tourism Organisations Meeting on 17 January, the ministers reviewed progress in regional tourism cooperation. They expressed appreciation for South Korea's continued support through the Korea Partnership Initiative for Sustainable Tourism, including key initiatives such as the High-Level Policy Forum (April 2024), Working-Level Workshop (April–May 2024) and Global Intensive Consulting Programme conducted in Cambodia, with ongoing technical assistance in the Philippines through 2027. The meeting also welcomed a joint research study on ASEAN–ROK tourism cooperation by the Asian Development Bank, ROK Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and ASEAN-Korea Centre, published in conjunction with the 35th anniversary of ASEAN–Korea dialogue relations. In addition, the meeting acknowledged Korea's work with the OECD on the intersection of artificial intelligence and tourism, with upcoming events planned in Gyeongju (6 February 2025) and Incheon (28–31 July 2025). On the sidelines, Cambodia's Minister of Tourism H E Huot Hak and H E Yu Inchon held a bilateral meeting to discuss a proposed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) aimed at enhancing tourism cooperation. The MOU would focus on training Cambodian tour guides for Korean visitors, promoting Cambodian destinations to the Korean market, encouraging Korean investment in Cambodia's tourism sector, and increasing direct flights between the two countries. The two ministers expressed strong interest in formalising this cooperation to advance mutual tourism development.
20th	The Vietnam-Korea Friendship Association (VKFA) and the Korean Association in Hai Phong co-hosted a friendship exchange event, during which the Vietnam-Korea Business Club in Hai Phong was officially launched. Speaking at the event, VKFA Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Hai Phong People's Committee Le Anh Quan highlighted South Korea's leading role in the city's development, noting its top ranking in investment value and second in the number of projects. Korean businesses were recognised for contributing to economic growth, technology transfer, job creation and cultural and educational cooperation. Quan emphasised the strength of the Vietnam–Korea comprehensive strategic partnership and invited continued Korean investment in areas such as innovation, green economy and renewable energy. ROK Consul General Chang Ho-Seung praised Hai Phong's transformation into a global production hub, led by LG Corp. and supported by other Korean enterprises. He also acknowledged the city's reputation as a model destination for Korean investors, bolstered by active cooperation from local authorities.

20-21st	The ASEAN-Korea Centre, in partnership with the Korea Importers Association, conducted a Trade and Investment Facilitation Mission visit to Jakarta, aiming to promote Indonesia-Korea business ties. The programme featured a business forum, matching sessions and industrial visits, drawing participation from 10 Korean companies and over 40 Indonesian firms across sectors such as wood, medical equipment and agriculture. The forum included presentations by Indonesia's Ministry of Trade, Bank Rakyat Indonesia and a successful Indonesian exporter, focusing on trade trends, investment incentives and practical experiences. Business matching and site visits enabled participants to explore new technologies, identify market opportunities and strengthen bilateral networks. The initiative aimed to deepen economic cooperation and was positioned as a key effort by the centre to foster sustained ASEAN-Korea trade and investment collaboration.
21st	South Korea's Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy (MOTIE) announced the launch of the sixth round of FTA negotiations with Malaysia, which took place over four days via teleconference. The talks aimed to advance discussions across 11 key sectors, including goods, services, investment, digital industry and economic cooperation. This round followed the resumption of FTA negotiations in March 2024 after a five-year pause, as part of Korea's strategy to strengthen bilateral economic ties beyond its existing FTA with ASEAN.
22nd	ASEAN Secretary-General Dr Kao Kim Hourn and Korean Minister for Trade, Industry and Energy Cheong In-kyo held a bilateral meeting during the World Economic Forum in Davos. They discussed ways to enhance ASEAN-ROK cooperation in trade, innovation and sustainable growth, emphasising the need to harness shared strengths to promote regional stability, digital transformation and green development. Both reaffirmed their commitment to long-term collaboration for mutual prosperity and resilience.
23rd	South Korea's MOTIE held an Indo-Pacific policy forum in Seoul to examine prospects for Korea-ASEAN cooperation in light of the newly inaugurated US administration. Co-hosted with the Korea University ASEAN Centre, the forum gathered ASEAN experts from the academia and research institutes to assess the progress of Korea-ASEAN economic ties and explore future collaboration. Discussions also addressed global oversupply and strategies to mitigate trade risks. MOTIE announced plans to launch the ASEAN-ROK Think Tank Dialogue on Economic and Trade Policy (AKTD) in the first quarter of 2025 as a new platform to strengthen economic engagement and support Korean businesses operating in ASEAN.
24th	Officials from South Korea and the Philippines met in Manila to review the progress of major infrastructure projects funded by Seoul's Economic Development Cooperation Fund (EDCF), a low-interest loan scheme supporting developing countries. The discussions included updates on the US\$905 million funding for the first section of the Laguna Lakeshore Road Network and South Korea's plan to contribute US\$1 billion for the construction of a bridge linking Panay, Guimaras and Negros islands. Separately, South Korea's finance ministry also met Asian Development Bank representatives to enhance collaboration on new projects through Korean overseas aid initiatives.
30th	South Korea's Navy announced it would dispatch the 4,900-ton landing ship Nojeokbong to participate in an international fleet review in Indonesia from 15 to 22 February. The event at Benoa Harbour was expected to involve around 30 countries, with a maritime parade featuring approximately 30 warships from nations including South Korea, the United States, Japan and Australia. This marked the Navy's first participation in an Indonesian fleet review since 2015.
31st	South Korea's heritage authorities announced the reopening of renovated visitor facilities at Cambodia's Angkor Wat, showcasing advanced Korean technology. The upgrades, part of an ongoing restoration partnership since 2024, included the installation of new viewing stairs to the Bakan Tower and a walkway to the southern pond, a key viewing spot vulnerable to erosion due to visitor traffic. The improvements, carried out by the Korea Heritage Service and Korea Heritage Agency, aimed to enhance safety and accessibility while preserving the site. Plans were also in place to continue restoring the Bakan platform in cooperation with Cambodia's APSARA National Authority through 2026.

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2nd	South Korean and Indonesian defence officials reaffirmed their cooperation on the joint development of the KF-21 fighter jet during a meeting between Defence Acquisition Programme Administration Minister Seok Jong-gun and Indonesian Deputy Defence Minister Donny Ermawan Taufanto. The meeting addressed the revised financial contribution by Indonesia, which was reduced from 1.6 trillion won to 600 billion won due to payment delays. This gathering marked the first high-level dialogue following a probe into alleged technology leaks by Indonesian engineers. Both sides pledged to normalise and expand arms cooperation, with Taufanto praising South Korea's defence equipment and commitment to ongoing contracts.
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3rd	South Korea delivered 4,000 tons of rice to the Philippines as humanitarian aid in response to a series of typhoons that struck in late 2024, resulting in over 100 fatalities and widespread agricultural damage. The handover ceremony took place in Batangas, where the rice is to be distributed to affected households. The aid is part of an agreement reached in October 2024 between Presidents Yoon Suk Yeol and Ferdinand Marcos Jr, elevating bilateral ties to a strategic partnership and committing both nations to enhanced cooperation on food security. The assistance was provided under the ASEAN Plus Three Emergency Rice Reserve mechanism.
4th	ROK Acting President Choi Sang-mok hosted a luncheon with ambassadors from 10 countries linked to South Korea's defence and nuclear energy sectors, including Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Poland. He highlighted South Korea's strong competitiveness in these industries and reaffirmed the government's commitment to major ongoing projects. Choi also emphasised the importance of maintaining confidence in the country's democratic stability amid the impeachment trial of President Yoon Suk Yeol. The ambassadors expressed their support for South Korea and pledged to strengthen cooperation through high-level exchanges.
4th	To mark the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and Vietnam, staff from the Vietnamese Embassy in Pyongyang visited the Kangdong Greenhouse Complex. They toured the modern facilities and noted its advanced agricultural features. Ambassador Le Ba Vinh recorded in the guest book his appreciation for Kim Jong Un's efforts to ensure food provision for the people and expressing optimism for the complex's continued development.
6th	The DPRK Embassy in Hanoi hosted a reception to commemorate the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between North Korea and Vietnam. The event was attended by Vietnam's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Bui Thanh Son, along with representatives from various Vietnamese ministries, political parties and friendship organisations. DPRK Ambassador Ri Sung Guk, along with embassy staff, warmly welcomed the guests. Both Ambassador Ri and Bui delivered speeches highlighting the significance of the longstanding bilateral ties. Several Vietnamese ministries and organisations also sent floral tributes to the embassy to commemorate the occasion.
7th	Cambodia's Ministry of Environment, South Korean e-mobility firm VERYWORDS and the Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI) signed an MOU at the ministry to promote electric two-wheelers as part of Cambodia's climate mitigation efforts. The event formalised the donation of 8,000 e-scooters and over 200 charging stations by VERYWORDS, which operates a \$2 million assembly plant in Kandal province. The initiative aimed to reduce emissions by an estimated 5,040 tonnes of CO ₂ equivalent annually while creating 150 new green jobs. The ministry will oversee project implementation and work with GGGI to build institutional capacity in line with Cambodia's Long-Term Strategy for Carbon Neutrality and Article 6 of the Paris Agreement. Both GGGI and VERYWORDS emphasised the project's significance as a model for international carbon finance cooperation and e-mobility development.
7th	The Vietnam-Korea Plus Joint Working Group held its third online meeting, focusing on strengthening cooperation to achieve the bilateral trade target of US\$150 billion by 2030. Co-chaired by Kim Jong Cheol of South Korea's MOTIE and Do Quoc Hung of Vietnam's Ministry of Industry and Trade, the meeting reviewed trade and investment trends and discussed collaboration in areas such as nuclear power and business challenges. Kim emphasised the need for forward-looking economic ties with Vietnam, especially amid global uncertainties, and called for greater efforts to expand trade under the Vietnam-Korea Free Trade Agreement, now in its 10th year. Hung reiterated Vietnam's commitment to supporting Korean businesses and deepening economic ties. The working group, first convened in September 2023, serves as a bilateral mechanism to advance trade and investment goals set by leaders of the two countries.
11th	A workshop was held in Hanoi to examine the role of the semiconductor industry and energy resources in Vietnam's economic reform and global integration. Co-organised by the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences (VASS), Korea Institute for International Economic Policy and Korea University, the event brought together academics, businesses and policymakers to propose strategies for sustainable development. VASS Vice-President Dang Xuan Thanh identified semiconductors as a strategic sector for Vietnam's future and emphasised the importance of learning from countries like South Korea and Japan. He also highlighted the potential of rare earths and the need to balance economic gains with environmental and energy security. Speakers underlined the relevance of international cooperation, technology investment and reform of state-owned enterprises to enhance competitiveness. Participants called for continued restructuring, investment efficiency and global integration to support Vietnam's goal of becoming a high-income nation by 2045.

12th	Cambodian Minister of Labour and Vocational Training Heng Sour met former Speaker of the Korean National Assembly and Board Chairman of Global Together Kim Jin-Pyo, to discuss strengthening technical skills training, particularly in electric vehicles. Both sides supported the development of such programmes to equip Cambodian students with industry-relevant skills and enhance the country's appeal to Korean investors. Heng Sour noted that a skilled workforce would be vital for attracting investment and supporting the creation of a Korean special economic zone in Cambodia. Kim Jin-Pyo expressed enthusiasm for the collaboration between Korean and Cambodian institutions and expressed optimism that continued cooperation, including with KOICA and the Korean Embassy, would foster a workforce that meets investor needs.
12th	Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh hosted a reception in Hanoi for outgoing Samsung Vietnam General Director Choi Joo Ho and his successor Na Ki Hong. Prime Minister Chinh thanked Choi for his contributions to Samsung's success in Vietnam and for strengthening Vietnam–ROK relations. He encouraged Na to continue advancing Samsung's investment strategy, including in new sectors such as artificial intelligence and digital transformation. Choi and Na reaffirmed Samsung's position as Vietnam's largest foreign investor, with US\$23.2 billion in registered capital, and reported revenues of US\$62.5 billion and exports totalling US\$54.4 billion in 2024. They also noted the company's efforts to support local suppliers, smart factory development and human capital training. Prime Minister Chinh welcomed Samsung's performance and urged for further collaboration to enhance Vietnamese firms' role in global supply chains and to support innovation, R&D and digital ecosystem development. He affirmed the government's continued support for Samsung's sustainable growth in Vietnam.
13th	The ASEAN-Korea Centre held its 17th Annual Council Meeting in Seoul, where high-level officials from ASEAN member states and the ROK reviewed FY2024 programmes and approved plans for FY2025. In 2024, the centre marked the 35th anniversary of ASEAN-Korea Dialogue Relations and celebrated the launch of their Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with various events as part of 'ASEAN Week'. These events included an international conference, a trail unveiling, a seminar on Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) guidebook and a youth summit. These initiatives not only deepened public awareness but also affirmed the centre's role in promoting ASEAN-Korea ties. Looking ahead to ASEAN Vision 2045 and Malaysia's 2025 ASEAN chairmanship theme of 'Inclusivity and Sustainability', the centre aimed to expand outreach to wider audiences and boost ESG-related initiatives. A key 2025 project included setting up an ASEAN Promotional Space (Seoul ASEAN Hall) in the Korea Press Centre to raise interest in ASEAN culture and tourism, while planning closer collaboration with other ASEAN centres and Korean local governments.
13th	Vietnamese Permanent Deputy Foreign Minister Nguyen Minh Vu awarded the For the Cause of Vietnam's Foreign Affairs insignia to Choi Joo Ho, general director of Samsung Vietnam, in recognition of his contributions to strengthening economic, trade and investment ties between Vietnam and South Korea. Vu praised Choi's role in expanding Samsung's operations, noting the company's significant impact on Vietnam's socio-economic development and job creation in the electronics sector. He also highlighted Samsung's growing high-tech investment as vital to Vietnam's long-term development goals. Choi reaffirmed Samsung's commitment to deepening cooperation with the Vietnamese government in innovation and human capital development.
14th	Communist Party of Vietnam General Secretary To Lam and Vietnam Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh each hosted separate receptions in Hanoi for Chey Tae-won, chairman of SK Group and the Korea Chamber of Commerce and Industry, to discuss deepening economic ties between Vietnam and the ROK. To Lam acknowledged SK Group's contributions to Vietnam's socio-economic development and encouraged swift implementation of its investment plans, which align with the country's strategic priorities. Chey outlined SK Group's ambitions in energy, AI, hydrogen and logistics. During his meeting with Prime Minister Chinh, the prime minister praised SK's US\$3.5 billion investment footprint and welcomed its proposals for expanding collaboration in high-tech sectors, infrastructure and green innovation. He encouraged SK to support Vietnam's development goals through technology transfer, workforce training and integration into global value chains. Both sides expressed strong interest in fostering innovation partnerships through the National Innovation Centre.
17th	Malaysia and the ROK held their seventh round of negotiations on the bilateral FTA in Kuala Lumpur, aiming to deepen economic cooperation and expand trade. Talks lasted four days, covering 11 key sectors, including goods, services, investment and economic collaboration. Negotiations had resumed in March 2024 after a five-year pause. Kwon Hye-jin, director general for FTA negotiations at Korea's MOTIE, highlighted the urgency of concluding a deal with Malaysia—an important ASEAN partner—in response to rising global protectionism. Although Korea already has an FTA with ASEAN, it pursued bilateral deals to strengthen ties with individual member states.
20th	Cambodian Under Secretary of State H E Ke Sovann met DPRK Ambassador to Cambodia H E Jan Yun Gon at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Phnom Penh. They discussed ways to strengthen bilateral ties and enhance cooperation on multilateral platforms, particularly under the framework of the United Nations.

20th	The ROK formally handed over three air quality monitoring stations (AQMS) to Cambodia under the “Clean Air for Sustainable ASEAN” (CASA) project, funded by the ASEAN-ROK Cooperation Fund. The stations—located in Phnom Penh, Battambang and Banteay Meanchey—aimed to help Cambodia monitor and mitigate air pollution as part of Korea’s broader commitment to environmental cooperation with ASEAN. The handover ceremony held at Cambodia’s Ministry of Environment was attended by senior officials including the Korean ambassador and the Cambodian minister of environment.
20th	Vietnamese technology firms participated in an investment forum and business-matching sessions at SEMICON Korea 2025 in Seoul to boost Korean investment in Vietnam’s semiconductor and high-tech sectors. Co-hosted by the Vietnam National Innovation Centre (NIC), the Ministry of Planning and Investment, the Vietnamese Embassy in the ROK and SEMI, the forum drew over 150 representatives from major Korean and global corporations such as ARM, SK, Samsung and Hana Micron. It marked the first Vietnam-focused semiconductor forum in Korea, held under the two countries’ Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Ambassador Vu Ho and NIC Deputy Director Vo Xuan Hoai highlighted Vietnam’s legal reforms, infrastructure and talent pool as strong foundations for semiconductor investment. Business-matching events provided a platform for Vietnamese companies to present their capabilities, reinforcing Vietnam’s appeal as a growing hub for semiconductor design, workforce development and post-production.
24th Feb - 9th March	The first Senior Officials’ Meeting (SOM1) of the 2025 APEC Summit took place at the Hwabaek International Convention Centre in Gyeongju, Gyeongsangbuk-do province, attended by around 2,000 participants from APEC member economies. Organised by Korea’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Gyeongsangbuk-do government, the two-week event included 24 related meetings, covering key areas such as trade, investment, customs procedures, business mobility and the digital economy. As part of the lead-up to the APEC Summit, SOM1 focused on negotiations shaping the ministerial and leaders’ meetings. The province supported the event with infrastructure, multilingual AI tool, and essential services. SOM1 in Gyeongju was the first in a series of meetings, followed by sessions in Jeju, Incheon and again in Gyeongju ahead of the main summit.
25th	Korean Trade Minister Dukgeun Ahn met his Vietnamese counterpart Nguyen Hong Dien in Seoul to discuss expanding bilateral cooperation in energy and trade. Held during Nguyen’s visit for talks on nuclear energy, the meeting covered Vietnam’s plans to resume nuclear development. Both sides agreed to revive their director general-level dialogue on the nuclear industry, which had been inactive since 2017. They also addressed trade uncertainties, committing to support Korean businesses operating in Vietnam and to expedite the upgrade of the Korea-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement. The two ministers also concurred on the need to strengthen supply chain cooperation through the upcoming launch of a joint critical minerals technology centre. On the sidelines, Nguyen held talks with major Korean energy firms, including KEPCO, Doosan Energy, POSCO E&C and LS Eco Energy. These firms expressed strong interest in rare earth mining and infrastructure development.
25th Feb - 7 Mar	South Korea’s Navy and Marine Corps participated in the annual Cobra Gold multinational military exercise held across 11 regions in Thailand. The Navy deployed the 4,900-ton Nojeokbong landing ship, along with approximately 370 personnel. They were accompanied by six assault amphibious vehicles, two K55 self-propelled howitzers and a K77 fire direction centre vehicle. South Korean troops participated in amphibious landing drills and naval operations with forces from Thailand, the United States and Singapore. The Marine Corps also joined the Cross Dock drills for the first time, deploying vehicles to a Singaporean amphibious transport dock. The exercise included special operations, humanitarian assistance and cyber defence training. South Korea has formally taken part in Cobra Gold since 2010.
27th	Cambodia’s Ministry of Commerce released a statement refuting claims from a recent NK News report, asserting that no North Korean company had been registered in the country. The Ministry clarified that it had not registered any entity by the name of Tongnam Trading Company or Tongnam Transport JV Co. Ltd, and found no evidence of North Korean business activity in Korean product markets in Phnom Penh. It reaffirmed Cambodia’s strict compliance with UN Security Council sanctions, noting that all businesses linked to North Korean individuals or entities were delisted or closed in 2019 and 2022, and that enforcement efforts are ongoing in coordination with relevant ministries.

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1st - 4th	A delegation from Laos, led by Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Phongsavanh Sisoulath, visited the DPRK, marking a significant occasion as the two countries commemorated the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations and the 60th anniversary of the first summit between President Kaysone Phomvihane and President Kim Il Sung. On 2 March, Sisoulath held a bilateral meeting in Pyongyang with DPRK Deputy Foreign Minister Pak Sang Gil. The two sides reviewed the progress of recent bilateral cooperation, agreed to deepen collaboration between their ministries, reaffirmed commitments to implement existing agreements and discussed joint activities to celebrate their shared historical milestones. They also exchanged views on regional and international developments of mutual interest. Sisoulath expressed gratitude for the warm hospitality and arrangements by the DPRK. During the visit, the Lao delegation paid a courtesy call to Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui and held a friendly discussion at the Mansudae Assembly Hall. The programme also included cultural and institutional visits, such as the Tower of the Juche Idea, Kangdong Greenhouse Complex, Pyongyang Children's Foodstuff Factory and modern residential developments in Hwasong and Rimhung. These visits highlighted various aspects of DPRK socio-economic and ideological achievements.
4th	South Korea and Thailand began their fourth round of negotiations in Seoul for a bilateral Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) to deepen cooperation in trade and investment. The four-day talks, led by South Korea's MOTIE, covered 17 sectors including goods, services and broader economic collaboration. Unlike traditional FTAs, the EPA focused on building a mutually beneficial trade framework. Deputy Minister Roh Keon-ki emphasised the goal of concluding an advanced-level agreement with Thailand, a key ASEAN partner, in response to rising global trade uncertainties.
4th	The Insurance Regulator of Cambodia (IRC) and the Korea Insurance Development Institute (KIDI) signed an MOU to enhance bilateral cooperation in insurance development. Signed by IRC Director-General Bou Chanphirou and KIDI Chairman and CEO Chang-Eon Heo, and witnessed by Secretary of State at the Ministry of Economy and Finance Ros Seilava, the MOU aimed to promote mutual exchange of expertise through personnel visits, joint seminars, training programmes and information sharing. Key areas of collaboration included insurance statistics management, IT infrastructure and capacity building. Both parties expressed confidence that the partnership would contribute to more efficient development of the insurance sector in both countries.
4th	Chief Justice Le Minh Tri of Vietnam's Supreme People's Court met South Korean Ambassador Choi Young-sam to discuss enhancing judicial cooperation. Tri proposed greater ROK support in areas such as electronic investigation, evidence handling and combatting high-tech and transnational crimes, while also expressing appreciation for Korean-backed projects aiding Vietnam's judiciary. He emphasised the importance of judicial exchanges and invited the ROK Supreme Court Chief Justice to visit Vietnam in 2025. Ambassador Choi reaffirmed Korea's commitment to supporting Vietnam's digital transformation in the judicial sector through collaboration with KOICA and other agencies. He also advocated for ongoing support and facilitation for Korean businesses operating in Vietnam.
4th	Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh hosted a dialogue in Hanoi with leaders of 35 Korean enterprises operating in Vietnam, aiming to strengthen economic ties under the Vietnam–ROK Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. The event spotlighted Vietnam's commitment to creating a favourable investment climate. Prime Minister Chinh outlined key policy directions on digital transformation, infrastructure development and administrative reform. He also encouraged Korean firms to expand operations in high-tech sectors, green energy and innovation, and proposed deeper cooperation in technology transfer, human resource training and supply chain integration. Korean business leaders, alongside Ambassador Choi Young-sam and the Korean Business Association, welcomed the government's engagement, praised Vietnam's legal improvements and proposed measures to enhance investment efficiency and policy stability, particularly in AI, semiconductors and taxation. The forum underscored Korea's continued role as Vietnam's largest foreign investor and reaffirmed both sides' resolve to deepen strategic economic cooperation.
4th - 7th	South Korea and Thailand held their fourth round of negotiations in Seoul for a bilateral Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) to deepen trade and economic cooperation beyond existing frameworks like the Korea-ASEAN FTA and Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership. The talks were led by Noh Geon-gi, director-general for trade negotiations and Chotima lemsawasdikul, director of Thailand's Trade Negotiation Department, with around 50 Thai officials in attendance. Negotiations covered 17 areas including goods, services, digital trade, government procurement and sustainable development. The South Korean government emphasised the importance of swiftly advancing a high-level, mutually beneficial agreement with Thailand amid growing global trade uncertainty.

5th	Vietnamese Minister of Public Security General Luong Tam Quang met Na Ki Hong, newly appointed general director of Samsung Vietnam, in Hanoi. Quang commended Samsung Vietnam for being a pivotal force in fostering economic and investment cooperation between Vietnam and South Korea, highlighting the company's achievements in advanced technology manufacturing. He urged the company to comply with Vietnamese regulations and proposed greater collaboration in training personnel in IT and AI for the ministry, as well as supporting national security technology, scholarships and social initiatives. Na expressed appreciation for the ministry's support, noting Samsung's 30-year presence in Vietnam, which includes six factories, an R&D centre and a total investment of US\$23.2 billion.
6-7th	Two key Korea-ASEAN policy events were held in Jakarta to deepen regional economic cooperation. One was the inaugural meeting of the ASEAN-ROK Think Tank Dialogue on Economic and Trade Policy (AKTD), held at Hotel Mulia, bringing together think tanks from Korea and ASEAN to launch a collaborative research initiative focused on trade policy and economic development. Proposed by Korea at the 25th ASEAN-ROK Summit in 2024, AKTD is jointly led by the Korea Institute for Industrial Economics and Trade (KIET) and the Korea Chamber of Commerce and Industry and aims to become a central platform for public-private policy dialogue. The other was the opening ceremony of the Korea-Southeast Asia Policy Cooperation Centre held on the same day. Established by KIET, the centre will conduct ASEAN-focused policy research, support Korean businesses in the region and serve as a venue for multistakeholder dialogue. Both events marked significant steps in institutionalising Korea-ASEAN policy coordination and fostering inclusive economic growth across Southeast Asia.
10th	The Korea Institute of Science and Technology Information (KISTI) and Indonesia's National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN) held a commemorative event at BRIN's headquarters to launch the Korea-ASEAN High Performance Computing (HPC) Infrastructure and Capacity Building Project. Supported by a US\$10 million contribution from the Korea-ASEAN Cooperation Fund, the initiative formed part of the Korea-ASEAN Digital Innovation Flagship Project and is scheduled to run from 2024 to 2028. It aimed to strengthen the digital capabilities of ASEAN member states—most of which lacked advanced HPC systems—by establishing shared computing infrastructure, offering technical training to 160 participants over four years and developing a knowledge platform for science and technology cooperation. BRIN provided space, electricity and internet connectivity for the Korea-ASEAN HPC facility in West Java. The facility was expected to become operational by early 2026. ASEAN Secretary-General Dr Kao Kim Hourn welcomed the initiative as crucial to building skilled human capital and advancing the region's digital priorities. Officials from ASEAN, KISTI and BRIN stressed the importance of this partnership in fostering inclusive research collaboration, digital innovation and sustainable science and technology cooperation across Southeast Asia.
10th	A round-table event was held at a museum in Lang Son province, Vietnam, to commemorate the sixth anniversary of DPRK leader Kim Jong Un's official goodwill visit to Vietnam. The event was attended by representatives from the Vietnamese government, friendship associations and the DPRK Embassy. It featured a tribute ceremony at a display showcasing historical mementoes of Kim Jong Un's visit, as well as a floral offering before a photo of Presidents Kim Il Sung and Ho Chi Minh. Vietnamese officials highlighted the historical foundation of Vietnam–DPRK relations and noted that Kim Jong Un's 2019 visit had elevated bilateral ties. They also conveyed their hopes for continued progress in the DPRK under his leadership, especially in a year celebrating key national anniversaries.
11th	ASEAN Secretary-General Dr Kao Kim Hourn met Korean Ambassador to Singapore H E Hong Jin-wook at the ASEAN Secretariat. They exchanged views on ASEAN-ROK relations, including how Korea's bilateral ties with individual ASEAN member states could further support the ASEAN-ROK Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.
14th	Nguyen Xuan Thang, Communist Party of Vietnam Politburo member and director of the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics (HCMA), met Prof Young-Sup Joo, chairman of South Korea's National Research Council of Science and Technology, in Hanoi to discuss leveraging science and technology for Vietnam's economic growth. Thang highlighted Joo's expertise in AI and semiconductors as aligned with Vietnam's policy priorities, including a recent Politburo resolution promoting digital innovation and a streamlined, efficient government structure. He was hopeful that development models integrating sci-tech and private sector leadership could bolster Vietnam's growth targets of 8% in 2025 and over 10% thereafter. Joo, who also chairs the Korea Digital Innovation Association, urged Vietnam to adopt a leadership strategy in AI and tech, stressing the need for global competitiveness. Earlier, he addressed the 2025 Artificial Intelligence and Semiconductor Conference in Hanoi and pledged to collaborate with HCMA on AI, semiconductor and sustainable development policy sharing.
16th	DPRK Ambassador Han Jae Song presented his credentials to King Maha Vajiralongkorn of Thailand. The ambassador conveyed greetings from DPRK leader Kim Jong Un, to which the King reciprocated with his own well wishes and reaffirmed the longstanding friendship and cooperation between the two countries.

18th	Vietnamese Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Bui Thanh Son spoke to South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul on bilateral cooperation over telephone. Both sides expressed satisfaction with the progress of Vietnam–ROK relations since their elevation to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in December 2022. Son reaffirmed Vietnam's commitment to deepening ties, proposing enhanced political trust through high-level exchanges, a push to reach US\$100 billion in bilateral trade and increased Korean investment in key sectors. Cho welcomed the proposals, emphasising Vietnam's importance in Korea's regional foreign policy and calling for stronger coordination in international forums and cooperation mechanisms, including the annual Foreign Ministers' Dialogue. They agreed to promote high-level exchanges, particularly in connection with Vietnam's hosting of the fourth P4G Summit. Cho has also graciously accepted an invite by Son to visit Vietnam.
18th	Seok Jong-gun, head of South Korea's Defence Acquisition Programme Administration, held meetings in Manila with Philippine Defence Secretary Gilbert Teodoro and senior military officials to discuss expanding defence industry cooperation. The talks focused on the Philippines' ongoing interest in South Korean-made weapons systems, such as FA-50 aircraft, frigates and corvettes. Seok also met with Major General Aristotle Gonzalez of the Philippine Air Force, who confirmed that the service was considering the acquisition of additional FA-50s. Seok also met Major General Aristotle Gonzalez of the Philippine Air Force, who confirmed that the service was considering the acquisition of more FA-50s. Additionally, Seok met Navy Chief Vice Admiral Jose Ma Ambrosio Quiatchon Ezpeleta, where both sides expressed interest in broadening cooperation to include naval ship maintenance and overhaul projects.
19th	South Korean and Malaysian defence officials convened in Seoul for bilateral talks, reaffirming their commitment to the complete denuclearisation of North Korea. Lee Seung-beom, director general for international policy at South Korea's Ministry of National Defence, and Mohd Yani bin Daud, Malaysia's deputy secretary general for policy, voiced concern over North Korea's involvement in the Ukraine war and its implications for regional security. Malaysia expressed support for South Korea's condemnation of Pyongyang's nuclear and missile activities. Both sides agreed to uphold the Non-Proliferation Treaty and UN Security Council resolutions, while also committing to closer cooperation in areas such as maritime security, advanced technologies including artificial intelligence and the defence industry. The meeting formed part of South Korea's broader effort to enhance defence ties with ASEAN, including a proposal for joint maritime drills in 2026.
20th	South Korea's Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries announced plans to construct an integrated logistics centre in the Nhon Trach 6 Industrial Park in Dong Nai province, southern Vietnam. Developed in partnership with Lotte Global Logistics and backed by a global logistics supply chain fund, the facility is set to span over 55,000 sq metres, with 26,168 sq metres of floor space. It would include zones for both ambient and cold storage and was scheduled to be operational by May 2026. The centre aimed to serve as a strategic hub for Korean import-export activities in Vietnam, leveraging Nhon Trach's proximity to Ho Chi Minh City, Nha Trang, Long Thanh International Airport and Cat Lai Port.
20th	South Korean Ambassador Park Jung-Wook visited Preah Ang Duong Hospital (PADH) in Phnom Penh, reaffirming Korea's commitment to health cooperation with Cambodia. He toured the KOICA-funded ENT and eye departments and praised the hospital as a key success story in bilateral development ties. PADH Director Prof Lou Lykheang highlighted major progress, including a doubling of eye surgeries and expanded ENT services for children, thanks to Korean support. The visit followed a high-level meeting on 18 March at the ambassador's residence, where officials from the South Korean Embassy, KOICA Cambodia Office and PADH discussed further opportunities to strengthen bilateral health cooperation. Ambassador Park emphasised Korea's alignment with Cambodia's Pentagonal Strategy and the growing strategic partnership, reinforced by Prime Minister Hun Manet's 2024 visit to Seoul. Korea's investment in PADH includes \$5.5 million allocated to the eye hospital, \$7.7 million for the ENT hospital and continued support for medical training and personnel exchanges.
21st	The Royal Academy of Cambodia (RAC) hosted a seminar titled "Bridging Tradition and Innovation: Climate Crisis Solutions Through Water Management", reaffirming Cambodia–Korea cooperation on climate resilience and water resource management. Attended by officials from the RAC, South Korean embassy in Cambodia, the Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology and Seoul National University, the event highlighted rainwater harvesting and sustainable practices. RAC Secretary General Yang Peou called for collective efforts to manage Cambodia's rainfall effectively, while South Korean Deputy Chief of Mission Hyunsoo Kim introduced the RAIN School Initiative, funded by the Mekong-Korea Cooperation Fund, to integrate water conservation into Cambodia's education system. A roundtable discussion featured experts from both countries.

21st	South Korea and Thailand signed the “Korea–Thailand Nuclear Cooperation Agreement” in Bangkok to establish a formal framework for collaborating on the peaceful use of nuclear energy. The agreement, signed by Korean Ambassador Park Yong-min and Thai Minister Supamas Isarabhakdi, established Thailand as the 30th country to enter into such a partnership with Korea. As members of the International Atomic Energy Agency and signatories to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, both countries committed to upholding nuclear safety and environmental protection while promoting social and economic development. The agreement covered cooperation in nuclear research, reactor construction and operation, the application of nuclear technology in various sectors, waste management, safety and capacity building. A joint committee would be set up to implement the agreement through technology exchange, joint research and training. The pact aimed to support Thailand's nuclear infrastructure development and deepen bilateral ties through mutually beneficial cooperation.
21st	On the occasion of the 2025 International Day of Forests held at the Korea National Arboretum in Pocheon, Gyeonggi province, ambassadors from Asian Forest Cooperation Organisation (AFoCO) member countries, including Myanmar's Ambassador U Thant Sin, joined Korean officials in marking the event. The ceremony featured congratulatory remarks from senior Korean leaders, including the minister of the Korea Forest Service and the deputy foreign minister, who underscored the importance of regional and global collaboration in forest conservation. Ambassador U Thant Sin reaffirmed Myanmar's commitment to sustainable forestry and highlighted ongoing cooperation with Korea, particularly through the AFoCO Regional Education and Training Centre in Yangon. The event concluded with a symbolic tree-planting ceremony involving all attending ambassadors to demonstrate shared dedication to sustainable development and forest protection.
21st	Singaporean oil trader Justin Low Eng Yeow was sentenced to 12 months and three weeks' jail for violating United Nations sanctions by supplying gas oil to North Korea. He pleaded guilty to three charges under the UN (Sanctions - DPRK) Regulations 2010, and admitted that his company, ISA Energy, had also transferred over US\$2.7 million in financial assets for the purchase of petroleum products subsequently delivered to Pyongyang. The company was fined \$280,000. Low had collaborated with ship agent Kwek Kee Seng—whom he met in 2016 and began supplying from 2019—on a scheme involving ship-to-ship transfers of gas oil via the South China Sea and Dalian, China. Despite knowing the fuel was destined for North Korea, Low proceeded to profit from the deal, supplying an estimated 14.3% of North Korea's annual permitted gas oil quota. Kwek, who faces 17 charges, is due for a pretrial conference on 8 April.
24-25th	The third Mekong-Korea International Water Forum was held in Daejeon, ROK, under the theme “Enhancing Climate Resilience and Sustainable Water Management”. Organised by Korea's Ministry of Environment and the Mekong-Korea Water Centre, the forum brought together officials and experts from Korea and five Mekong countries, namely Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam, to address pressing water-related challenges in the region. The two-day event served as a platform for dialogue on transboundary water governance, climate resilience and sustainable development, while promoting stronger partnerships and technical cooperation. Since its launch in 2022, the forum has played a growing role in advancing regional collaboration on water security, with previous meetings held in Seoul and Incheon.
24th	The “2025 Korea-Cambodia Bilateral Meeting on Development Cooperation” was held in Phnom Penh to review and advance development collaboration between the two countries. Co-organised by the Council for the Development of Cambodia, KOICA and the South Korean Embassy, the meeting highlighted Cambodia's status as the largest recipient of South Korean Official Development Assistance (ODA) in 2025, totalling an estimated US\$315 million. Key initiatives discussed included 27 concessional loan projects, most notably the Korea-Cambodia Friendship Bridge and 62 grant aid projects, such as support for the National Children's Hospital.
24th	Chairman of South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Kim Myung-soo and Philippine Armed Forces Chief General Romeo Brawner Jr held talks in Seoul to explore ways to expand military cooperation. They discussed regional security in the Indo-Pacific and reaffirmed shared values and historical ties, with Kim noting the Philippines' support during the Korean War. Brawner expressed support for deepening collaboration in defence and the arms industry. The meeting was the first between the nations' top generals in six years, coinciding with Brawner's visit for a ceremony marking the delivery of a Philippine Navy corvette.
25th	South Korean Navy Chief Admiral Yang Yong-mo met Philippine Navy Chief Vice Admiral Jose Ma Ambrosio Quiatchon Ezpeleta at the Submarine Force Command in Jinhae to discuss strengthening bilateral naval cooperation. Their talks focused on enhancing military diplomacy and defence collaboration through high-level exchanges and training. Ezpeleta also visited the Naval Logistics Command and South Korea's naval maintenance facilities to explore deeper logistics cooperation. His visit coincided with upcoming ceremonies for the delivery and launch of two Philippine Navy corvettes built by HD Hyundai Heavy Industries.

25th	ASEAN and the ROK reaffirmed their commitment to deepening the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) at the 12th ASEAN-ROK Joint Cooperation Committee Meeting, held at the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta. The meeting recognised the positive progress since the CSP's launch in 2024, which coincided with the 35th anniversary of ASEAN-ROK Dialogue Relations. It emphasised Korea's continued support for ASEAN's community-building and centrality through active engagement in ASEAN-led mechanisms. Both sides acknowledged significant progress under the ASEAN-ROK Plan of Action (2021–2025), covering cooperation in areas such as political-security affairs, trade, investment, digital transformation, energy, environment, tourism, education, health, culture and disaster management. They also discussed the development of a successor Plan of Action for 2026–2030, which was expected to be adopted by Foreign Ministers in July 2025. Further discussions focused on strengthening practical cooperation under the CSP in priority sectors, including the ASEAN-ROK Free Trade Agreement, smart city development, clean energy, digital connectivity, climate action and people-to-people ties. The contributions of the ASEAN-Korea Centre, based in Seoul, were noted for promoting sectoral collaboration.
25th	Cambodian Minister of Water Resources and Meteorology H E Thor Chetha met South Korean Minister of Environment H E Wan-sup Kim in Seoul to discuss four key strategies for strengthening bilateral cooperation in water resource management, climate resilience and infrastructure development. Both sides explored collaboration on flood and drought mitigation, digital water technologies, irrigation expansion and technical assistance in areas such as hydrological modelling and disaster management. They also discussed funding opportunities, including grants, concessional loans and private investment, and considered expanding the Mekong-Korea Cooperation Fund to support major Cambodian water projects. The delegations emphasised regional water governance and enhancing Cambodia's engagement in Mekong cooperation, drawing on Korean best practices. Korea's Ministry of Environment also provided official development assistance to support capacity-building for Cambodian hydrological observation.
27th	United Overseas Bank (UOB) announced the opening of a Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) advisory centre in Seoul to support South Korean and ASEAN firms expanding into regional markets. This marked the bank's 11th FDI centre in Asia and an extension of its Korean desk in Singapore. UOB stated that the new office would facilitate Korean firms' global expansion, improve investor access to Korea and strengthen the bank's regional presence. The bank cited global supply chain shifts, regional cooperation and net-zero policies as key factors influencing investment. Since 2011, UOB has supported over 5,000 companies in expanding their operations internationally.
31st	The South Korean government pledged US\$2 million in humanitarian aid to support emergency rescue and relief efforts for the 28 March earthquake in Myanmar. The assistance was to be delivered through international organisations, with Korea expressing hope that the support would help save lives and ease suffering. The government also pledge to monitor the situation closely and consider providing further aid if necessary.

This chronology of events is cross-referenced from the following ministries, institutions and news sources:

The ASEAN Secretariat; The ASEAN-Korea Centre; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brunei Darussalam; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Kingdom of Cambodia; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lao People's Democratic Republic; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia; The Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Philippines; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Singapore; The Government of Timor-Leste; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea; The Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy of the Republic of Korea; The Ministry of Economy of Finance of the Republic of Korea; Channel News Asia; The Borneo Bulletin; Khmer Times; Phnom Penh Post; The Jakarta Post; Laos News Agency; The Star; The Philippine News Agency; The Straits Times; Bangkok Post; Vietnam News Agency; Vietnam Plus; The Korean Central News Agency; NK News; Yonhap News Agency; and The Korea Times.