

## The Fifth KIC-EAI International Conference

## South Korea and the Indo-Pacific: After Afghanistan and Ukraine?

Jointly organised by the Korea Centre, East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore and the Institute of International Studies, College of International Studies, Kyung Hee University

Newly elected South Korea President Yoon Suk-yeol has indicated his desire for the Republic of Korea (South Korea or ROK) to play a bigger global role. This implies a more active foreign policy. The Fifth KIC-EAI International Conference on the theme of "South Korea and the Indo-Pacific after Afghanistan and Ukraine" hosted by the East Asian Institute's (EAI) Korea Centre on 13 May 2022 via zoom were timely discussions that could throw light on the external environment and the role that the ROK could play.



EAI Director Professor Bert Hofman noted in his opening remarks that the Korean peninsula plays an increasingly important role in many strategic considerations in the region, particularly after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. As the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)

kicked in on 1 January 2022, it is expected to lead to further economic integration in Asia. The United States' trade and technology measures vis-à-vis China would be disruptive to not only China but also the region. Of saliency is how countries such as Korea, Singapore and ASEAN members anticipate, analyse and adapt to or more proactively react to these changes.



Professor Kim Jun Yeup, Dean of the Institute of International Studies, College of International Studies (KIC) at Kyung Hee University, highlighted the importance of regional stability, prosperity and peace in East Asia. To prevent China from attaining unchecked power and to maintain their influence in the Indo-Pacific, the United States and its major partners, including the United Kingdom,

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France, Australia and Japan, have pivoted on their national security and defence strategies. The fact that Asia accounts for over 60% of the world's population and is an economic engine in the multipolar rules-based order is a factor for this shift. With the current political orders undergoing changes and the Indo-Pacific turning into a geopolitical arena of power contestation, the issues to be discussed are nowhere more pressing than in the Asia-Pacific region.



According to Ambassador Choi Hoon, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary at Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Singapore, the Indo-Pacific is significant for policymakers for three reasons. First, as Korea shares common interests with the United States and partners in various issues in the Indo-Pacific, including the Korean peninsula and South China Sea issues, Seoul naturally cooperates with them in terms of regional strategy. Second, developments in Afghanistan and Ukraine, especially Russia's invasion of a sovereign country and killing of civilians, accentuated the need for cooperation among countries that value norms and principles of a free, open and rules-based regional order advocated by the Indo-Pacific strategy. Countries that have been relatively cautious thus far are taking a positive position on the Indo-Pacific. For Seoul, Pyongyang's expression of strong support for Russian President Vladimir Putin and Moscow's threat of using nuclear weapons have clearly shown that the war in Ukraine is not unrelated to the Korean peninsula. Third, as multilateral alignments were formed in the Indo-Pacific, Korea needed to promote its interest through cooperation with its partners via such platforms. In this context, European countries' increase in engagement with the Indo-Pacific is noteworthy.

These considerations have pushed Korea and its regional partners to coordinate closely on policy on the Indo-Pacific. Ambassador Choi revealed that the new Yoon administration is expected to adopt an active approach to promoting multidimensional and substantial cooperation with countries in the Indo-Pacific based on its strong comprehensive strategic alliance with the United States. Seoul is set to strengthen cooperation with the Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) through its working group and strengthen the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework initiated by the United States to engage key economies in the region.

The high priority of ASEAN in Seoul's diplomacy would be maintained and likely to be further strengthened under the new Yoon administration, given Korea's and ASEAN's geopolitical proximity to each other, rise in trade and investment volumes and shared cultural interests. To promote greater solidarity with ASEAN, the new Yoon government is likely to strengthen mutually beneficial and practical cooperation with ASEAN and expand its contribution to the ASEAN-led regional architecture. Given that ASEAN is at the heart of the Indo-Pacific, South Korea would need to continue its support for ASEAN centrality and the ASEAN outlook on the Indo-Pacific.

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On Russia's armed invasion of Ukraine, Ambassador Choi shared that the ROK government has issued several official statements to support the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, making clear its position that the use of force and the loss of innocent lives cannot be justified. The statements also express serious concerns over the evidence of civilian killings reported by the Ukrainian government, stating that killing civilians in the time of war is a clear violation of international law. Seoul has also supported the United Nations Secretary General's statement issued on 3 April calling for an independent investigation to guarantee effective accountability. South Korea joined the United States, Singapore and a host of other countries in imposing economic and financial sanctions on Russia, while expressing its hope that the current situation could be resolved soon through negotiations. The Korean government had also provided Ukraine with US\$40 million in humanitarian assistance and actively participated in the joint efforts of the international community.

With Singapore, the two countries have been enjoying close diplomatic relations, as evidenced by Singapore President Halimah Yacob's participation at the inauguration of the new Korean president.

#### **SESSION 1: US Withdrawal from Afghanistan and Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: Implications for South Korea and the Indo-Pacific**



Professor Yang Chun Hee from KIC noted the declining number of democracies in the past 15 years on the one hand, and the rise of China and the war in Ukraine on the other; serious doubts have been cast upon liberal democracy and Professor Yang attributed such doubts to the failure of understanding the true meaning and significance of liberal democracy. He held the view that the victory of liberalism has occurred in the realm of ideas and will take time to manifest in the real world. Given impressive economic growth, modernisation and military build-up, China is a force to be reckoned with. However, China and Russia lack universal visions and ideas to replace those of the United States and the West. There was a naïve belief that the values and behaviours of communist states, such as China, Russia and North Korea, could be changed. The ROK's Sunshine Policy and hawkish policy have failed to deal with communist countries, which tend to act according

to their own logic. Professor Yang noted that when dealing with China, Russia and North Korea, the West and the ROK should exercise extreme vigilance while refraining from being aggressive towards them.

To EAI Senior Research Fellow Dr Ryan Clarke, the Ukraine crisis has accelerated land border risks. However, he believed that America's approach to supplying Ukraine specific weaponry to attack an overland invading force that already breached the country's borders would unlikely be applied to Taiwan as such weapon systems would be inadequate to maintain deterrence and prevent invasion attempts. Given America's evident lack of strategic options in the economic sanction domain against China, Washington appeared to be confined to maintaining deterrence and specific advantages in the military domain. Beyond weapons provisions and limited joint training, the United States might need to consider more visible deterrence measures in the Taiwan Strait. India's active efforts to enable Moscow to circumvent international economic sanctions demonstrated that the Quad is still sitting atop an unstable foundation. As such, the United States would likely prioritise the AUKUS alliance, while facilitating a formal or informal formation of "AUKUS Plus Plus", which would mean better strategic synchronisation with Japan and South Korea that would allow them to play more active roles within the AUKUS framework. The net results of these post-Ukraine developments in the Indo-Pacific would likely enhance strategic ties and weapons provisions among the "AUKUS Plus Plus" structure, combined with a reduction in economic interactions between the United States and China. While the current situation could not be classified as a Cold War scenario, Dr Clarke recognised that the associated characteristics had begun to emerge.

Another side effect of Russia's invasion of Ukraine is North Korea. As pointed out by Dr Lam Peng Er, Russia's invasion of Ukraine would reinforce North Korea's perception that it needs nuclear weapons for deterrence and regime survival. Ukraine had voluntarily given up its nuclear weapons and when Russia invades Ukraine, no country has stepped forward to defend Ukraine. Presumably Russia would not be able to invade Ukraine if the latter had not denuclearised. In particular, the Ukraine war has also revived the nuclear question in South Korea.

Dr Clarke believed that the key applicable strategic principle is to treat North Korea's nuclear weapon programme as a fixed feature in the system and to focus less on reducing the nuclear inventory. The decision to scale down nuclear weapons has to come internally.

#### **SESSION 2: East Asian Multilateralism in the Shadow of Ukraine**

EAI Senior Research Fellow Dr Yu Hong, in his presentation on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), highlighted that as of March 2022, China had already inked more than 200 BRI cooperation agreements with 149 countries that cover about 63% of the world's population and 40% of global gross domestic product. The BRI initially focused on infrastructure financing and construction, but its scope had expanded to broader areas, such as digitalisation, health and Arctic. Investment needs in infrastructure for countries in Asia-Pacific region for the 2016–2030 period were an estimated US\$22 trillion, of which Southeast Asian

countries needed US\$2.7 trillion. This explains why BRI is a popular choice for many countries in need of infrastructure development.

Despite this popularity, several recipient countries have raised concerns of environmental and debt issues arising from mega projects of BRI, particularly where excessive borrowing posed threats to financial sustainability. Several big projects had failed to attract private capital or gain the necessary support from local stakeholders. Nevertheless, China has, in recent years, made several adjustments in response to the concerns. For instance, Chinese companies have started to change their business practice and are more willing to share benefits with the local community

## THE CHINA–EUROPE RAILWAY EXPRESS IS ESSENTIAL FOR PROVIDING OVERLAND CONNECTIVITY BETWEEN CHINA, EURASIAN COUNTRIES AND EUROPEAN UNION COUNTRIES...

in BRI countries. China has also shifted from investing in energy-intensive sectors to more environment friendly or renewable energy projects. However, it remains to be seen how far China will readjust its approaches.

Dr Yu stated that China's BRI is also critical for Europe and the future of peace in Ukraine. Russia has China as its most important strategic partner and backing each other at the political level. Russia is also a crucial component of the BRI. The China–Europe railway express is essential for providing overland connectivity between China, Eurasian countries and European Union (EU) countries. Both EU and China have tried their utmost to support the railway express since 2016. China also has huge stakes in Ukraine's agricultural fields. Infrastructure rebuilding would be needed in the post-Ukraine war and Russian economic recovery could bring certain advantageous opportunities for the BRI. China is hence likely to further promote its economic ties with Eurasian countries for a better implementation of BRI.

Professor Park Hahnkyu agreed that China's BRI has both economic and strategic implications, and that it may also become an economic burden for China. Insolvent liabilities of recipient countries could pose risks to the Chinese regime; hence it is imperative to take essential measures to avoid such a crisis. Moreover, there are growing domestic criticisms of the BRI in many BRI recipient countries, such as those in Eastern Europe and Sri Lanka; these are mounting risks of the BRI that China should reflect upon. The difficulty in alleviating political obstacles has become a hurdle for China's BRI to pursue and develop further collaborations.

In answer to the question of the viability of BRI, Dr Yu Hong said that China has improved its image in steering the BRI to the 2.0 version, making readjustments in response to past concerns of most countries involved. For example, more third parties, including corporations from Singapore and Japan, have participated in BRI projects in Southeast Asia and Europe. Besides, China has pushed BRI beyond bilateralism and adopting a multilateral approach. While it is unclear how extensive China's readjustments is and whether the approach would be adequate to improve

China's image, China has made tangible efforts in fostering financial sustainability.



Professor Moon Don from KIC discussed the characteristics of East Asian regional institutional arrangements and their changes and challenges, and offered his insight on why those institutional rearrangements are occurring in the region. There is a growing consensus among East Asian countries that there had been some fundamental challenges to the liberal institutional order in the last 30 years. First is the internal loss of compromise for supporting an open, liberal cooperative international order; and second is the emergence of or an increase in power of illiberal authoritarian regimes that poses a direct challenge to the US model. However, these challenges do not apply to a transforming East Asia.

The prosperity-oriented cooperation has been successful and stable in the East Asian region due to several factors. The region has a stable security environment under US leadership and faces no direct substantial challenges. East Asian countries have largely adopted the economy-first principle and difficult issues, such as historical rivalries, have been put aside. This laid the foundation for very successful economic cooperation and institution-building, such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and ASEAN Plus Three.

East Asian regionalism and institutional arrangements are inclusive and open to external actors, such as the United States and European countries, without discrimination or objection. Such open regionalism implies that there are no exclusive, segregated blocs in East Asia, only some overlaps in various cooperative institutions. Member states can be a member of various institutions, given that the boundaries of each institution are not clear-cut. As such, Professor Moon argued that the Asian way is a less binding, less interventionist and more sovereignty-respectful mode of institutional arrangement that emphasises harmony and consensus.

In recent years, the continually intensifying US–China rivalry may have narrowed the scope of cooperation in the region. Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong wrote in his article in *Foreign Affairs* in 2020 that while there has been some cooperation, competition and confrontation, there are still some hope and room for cooperation. In East Asia, though there are sometimes competition and confrontation,



cooperation in most areas did not substantially deteriorate.

Professor Moon believed that the Ukraine crisis had very negative impacts on the ongoing confrontation in the region. Most countries today feel that security issues are more serious than they previously thought. Concerning the tougher confrontation and competition between China and the United States in the region, the geopolitical tensions in East Asia could lead to military conflicts and the United States' strengthening of its leadership by reinvigorating NATO. The Ukraine crisis also drew China and Russia closer together.

Professor Moon postulated that middle powers could play more constructive roles in facilitating institutional cooperation in East Asia. Multilateral frameworks are needed to promote universal principles or implement international norms.

EAI Senior Research Fellow Dr Sarah Tong agreed that there is a dire need for reorganisation or rearrangement of the current institutional arrangement. Institutional renovation or changes have to deal with the several challenges that the current arrangement is facing. While the growth of world trade showed a downward trend, Asia seemed to have performed better, implying that Asian export-oriented development has taken effect. However, in recent years, East Asia also experienced similar declining trade, a sign that it is also suffering from declining globalisation like the rest of the world.

China plays an increasingly salient role in the remapping of regional trade. It is the major trading partner for most countries, particularly the CPTPP countries. When China joined the World Trade Organisation, its role in world trade was much smaller than today. China has been the major force behind the reshaping or remapping of global trade.

Several issues pertaining to Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) like supply chain resilience, infrastructure and data or digital economy could be discerned. However, a very important missing piece for the IPEF is market access, which has been a key element in other trade programmes or trade arrangements. The IPEF is relatively vague in details, focusing primarily on security issues to counter China's BRI and curtail China's growing influence in the region.

In the Indo-Pacific region, the United States is a major market for India's export while its share of India's import has been growing, though China continues to be the largest source of India's imports. For Indonesia, another large economy in the region, China is a major supplier and an increasingly important export market; US share in Indonesia's export market and its imports had relatively declined by comparison. Therefore, the two larger economies of Indonesia and India have relatively different perspectives in their economic relations with China and with the United States.

Supply chain is China's and the United States' important access to the Indo-Pacific region; China has become an active participant in Asia's supply chain. Dr Tong concurred with Professor Moon that there is a need for a new institutional rearrangement in the region, where most countries expect a multilateral framework that involves active and balanced participation from both the United States and China.

To Professor Park Hahnkyu, from the economic perspective, the ongoing US-China strategic competition

## FROM THE ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE, THE ONGOING US-CHINA STRATEGIC COMPETITION AND THE CRISIS IN UKRAINE WILL **NEGATIVELY IMPACT** COOPERATION FRAMEWORKS IN EAST ASIA

and the crisis in Ukraine will negatively impact cooperation framework in East Asia. The reality that the world may likely be divided into two economic systems is gaining in momentum. To most countries in the region, which economic bloc to join depends on their economic and strategic calculations of their ties with China and the United States.

However, Professor Park also pointed out that there is a low likelihood of two economic systems forming in the East Asian economy, given that most East Asian countries have overlapping memberships in various regional cooperative institutions, and they are unlikely to withdraw their membership. In fact, both China and the United States have indispensable leadership in those cooperative frameworks that are fundamentally different from those between the Soviet Union and the United States during the Cold War.

Thus, for smaller countries, joining as many cooperative frameworks as possible, even the competing ones, is beneficial for maintaining regional peace and prosperity in the long run. This explains why the United States' Indo-Pacific Economic Framework is also welcomed in the region, and the logic extends to China's initiatives such as the BRI and RCEP. Moreover, ASEAN centrality may also be more important in the era of growing competition between China and the United States. As such, the "ASEAN plus" mechanism should expand to more than three parties, incorporating more countries including the United States, to add greater meaning to regional peace and development.

On IPEF, EAI Research Fellow Dr Sarah Chan agreed that open regionalism is one of the distinctive characteristics of East Asian regional order, a growing, albeit inevitable, trend towards the exclusive trade bloc formation. The IPEF appears to be US-centric and this is understandably so because China has been strengthening its linkages with the region and is also seeking to join CPTPP.

The IPEF, which makes limited information disclosure, is nothing more than a political declaration of US economic engagement in the region. It is uncertain to what extent the US government will commit to the framework as it was approved through presidential executive order, rather than a traditional trade agreement with Congressional approval. Hence, it is unclear whether the United States' IPEF could offer increased market access or whether it would be abandoned by the future US administration.

Arriving at a consensus in trade agreement negotiations is challenging since labour issues, agricultural regulatory practices and environmental protection standards are different in various countries, including the United States. By excluding China—a key player in the global and regional supply chain—the economic framework could barely take effect. In particular, the United States' problematic commitment to dealing with climate change has dampened

the credibility of US leadership in global governance. It is unclear how the United States could help in climate financing and in supporting regional infrastructure development. Another issue with the IPEF is in its anti-corruption standards, which require the implementation of global minimum corporate tax agreement, an enormously challenging prerequisite for member countries to comply.

Across the region, Korea, Japan, Australia, New Zealand and Singapore can choose to join the IPEF. However, IPEF's opaque objectives of member states' interests do not appeal to a wider range of countries such as other ASEAN states and Pacific-facing countries like Canada and Chile; it may hence be considered a failure. Moreover, politicising the IPEF would probably be counterproductive because not many countries are willing to renounce trade relations with China.

However, on why many countries are hoping to join the IPEF, Dr Sarah Tong believed that joining it could be seen as taking it as a responsibility without reward. Due to the pandemic, e-commerce and digital trade will be important elements of future economic interactions. The IPEF could foster cross-border trade, e-commerce and digital payments and so on. Notably, Singapore has already inked a few agreements, including one with South Korea.

Professor Bert Hofman concluded the session by highlighting that China's conservative rules on data and cross-border data transfer are contrary to CPTPP rules. He noted that in applying such rules, there will be some movements around these alliances delineated by distinctive approaches to digital economy. He is not convinced that the IPEF would be the winner in all of this. However, it would be a game changer should the United States reconsider membership and join the CPTPP. If the EU decides to join the CPTPP, it would form a very large trade bloc that is significantly deeper than the RCEP. That again would be a game changer and Professor Hofman surmised that Korea would also join.

### SESSION 3: Contemporary South Korean Foreign Policy, Political Economy and Democracy



Professor Park Hahnkyu of Kyung Hee University analysed the changes and continuities in Korea's major foreign and security policies that are likely under the new Yoon Suk-yeol administration. A significant shift in the country's foreign and security policy is inevitable with the election of the conservative President Yoon. The main directions of Yoon's foreign and security policies could be

## A SIGNIFICANT SHIFT IN THE COUNTRY'S FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY IS INEVITABLE WITH THE ELECTION OF THE CONSERVATIVE PRESIDENT YOON

taken as (i) a response to North Korean provocations, with North Korea's military as the South's "main enemy"; (ii) a move to upgrade the alliance between South Korea and the United States to a comprehensive strategic alliance that includes not only the economic and values-based dimensions, but also the traditional security-focused dimension; (iii) a way to establish a relationship of mutual respect with China to reduce economic dependence; and (iv) a path to set up a future-oriented relationship with Japan which will likely be challenged by historical issues and nationalist sentiments in both societies. These policy stances are a major departure from former President Moon Jae-in's foreign and security policies that aimed to improve inter-Korean relations. Yoon also pledged to turn South Korea into a "global pivotal state" that contributes to freedom, peace and prosperity in the world, highlighting the importance of liberal democracy and human rights. Seoul will meet South Korea's expectation to take on responsibilities that commensurate with its national capabilities. Yoon's primary foreign policy challenge is his pro-American policy that is likely to antagonise Beijing; he needs to manage his ideological inclinations and pressures from the United States to act against China, while maintaining good trading relations with China to sustain South Korea's economic growth. On relations with ASEAN, Yoon has publicly acknowledged the importance of Southeast Asia as a strategic partner for South Korea, for which he proposed the ABCD Strategy (i.e. advance human capital, build health security, connect cultures and digitise Asian infrastructure). Yoon is also expected to continue the Moon administration's New Southern Policy, albeit with different priority agendas for cooperation with Southeast Asian countries and incorporation of further security agenda in Korea's relations with ASEAN.

## ON RELATIONS WITH ASEAN, YOON HAS PUBLICLY ACKNOWLEDGED THE IMPORTANCE OF SOUTHEAST ASIA AS A STRATEGIC PARTNER FOR SOUTH KOREA, FOR WHICH HE PROPOSED THE ABCD STRATEGY ...

Professor Moon Don concurred with the view that the new administration is pro-United States but he was concerned about the ideological orientations of the foreign policy that focuses more on human rights and democracy, rather than on the more pragmatic foreign policy inclinations of previous administrations. He questioned if the Yoon administration's ideological approach would harm South Korea's foreign policy in the medium to long term. He projected some potential changes to the ASEAN-ROK relations in the future too.



Professor Kim Sunil from Kyung Hee University highlighted Korea's efficiency and effective responses and measures in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic on the one hand and worsening economic inequality on the other. Korea faces the paradox of democracy and inequality. Korea's democracy has enabled the government's effective imposition of counter-COVID-19 measures and restrictions on business activities. Democracy has also reinforced the autonomy of the bureaucracy, particularly that of finance bureaucracy, with the reinforcement of fiscal conservatism after the financial crisis and reliance on credit expansion, rather than direct subsidisation. The deepening of popular, electoral democracy has also enlarged the coverage of benefits facilitated by the establishment of a pattern of and popular preference for quasi-universal delivery of public goods, as well as covering unrealisable claims for loss compensations amid electoral competition. Besides,

### THE DEEPENING OF POPULAR, ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY HAS ALSO ENLARGED THE COVERAGE OF BENEFITS FACILITATED BY THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A PATTERN OF AND POPULAR PREFERENCE FOR QUASI-UNIVERSAL DELIVERY OF PUBLIC GOODS...

the delayed "statutory" loss compensation and de facto universal "petty" grants have resulted in insufficient response to the growing inequality due to the massive size of the self-employed and irregular (gig) sectors where there is a substantial income decline due to the pandemic and a rise in household debt level despite sound economic performance in general.

Associate Professor Baek Buhm-Suk evaluated South Korea's digital technology-led policy on COVID-19 and its



impact on human rights. South Korea's response to the COVID-19 crisis relied extensively on advanced digital technology to maximise efficiency. South Korea actively adopted a top-down approach through its centralised disease control system referred to as K-Quarantine in its implementation of digital measures. However, the extensive use of and reliance on surveillance systems and security technologies had also raised critical concerns about the infringement of South Koreans' privacy and fundamental human rights. There is hence a need to take a rights-based approach to the government's response to the pandemic. The South Korean government's amendments to relevant laws, adoption of a "test-trace-treat" approach using digital technology, implementation of large-scale testing and use of digital technology to track and treat both confirmed and suspected patients have raised controversial human rights and privacy issues. The constant and extensive top-down digital measures implemented during the pandemic can be integrated into everyday life, thus becoming the new normal in the future; what has been justified in the name of public good during an emergency situation can become normalised in everyday life. Associate Professor Baek thus argued that Koreans need to be conscious of the way in which these new technologies pose significant challenges to human rights, and to understand the human rights implications for each stage of key health and quarantine measures.

Mr Shawn Ho, an Associate Research Fellow at the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, examined Seoul's relations with ASEAN in the new Yoon administration. Early signs show that ASEAN has been given lesser emphasis than that in the Moon administration; ASEAN-ROK relations continue, albeit at the bilateral level as the ROK's foreign policy will return its focus on major powers. Since taking office, President Yoon has accepted a telephone call from Vietnamese President Nguyen Xuan Phuc and held a meeting with Singapore President Halimah Yacob. ASEAN-ROK relations should be viewed in the context of US-ROK alliance, and less so in terms of the merits of ASEAN and each member state. Mr Ho saw potential in education innovation, urban development, digitalisation, health care, air connectivity, trade and investments, cybersecurity, smart technologies, green and digital economy, and defence cooperation for future ASEAN-ROK cooperation.

Mr Ho also noted that while the new ROK administration will align closely with the United States in its policies, especially in the Indo-Pacific region, it is unclear if ASEAN, in maintaining its strict policy of neutrality, will support the ROK and the United States if their actions are perceived to be anti-China.

# EAI Distinguished Public Lecture

## ROK-ASEAN Partnership in the Fourth Decade

(a transcript)

**Professor Kang Kyung-wha**

Distinguished Professor Emeritus, Ewha Woman's University and former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea



**T**HANK you very much for the very kind, generous introduction, Professor Hofman and for the invitation to speak to the audience at the Korea Centre. I am truly delighted to do so, and I would, first of all, like to offer a very belated but hearty congratulations to the National University of Singapore and the East Asian Institute for establishing the Korea Centre. Certainly, this is a very important and much needed addition to the network of actors that have built close ties between Korea and Southeast Asia over the decades. I am sure that the Centre will make invaluable contributions to further advancing these relations in the coming years. I readily accepted the invitation to speak out of my fond memories of working closely together with my counterparts of ASEAN and its member states over our New Southern Policy which culminated with the ROK-ASEAN (Republic of Korea-Association of Southeast Asian Nations) special summit in November 2019.

Today, I will talk about the 2019 special summit: before, during and after, and the challenges of the fourth decade of our ROK-ASEAN partnership in the evolving global and regional contexts. What I am able to and should say about the topic is, of course, not a policy statement or update, as I no longer have official status. Rather, they will be my recollections and observations in broad strokes. I have been out of government for a year and a half, and have not plugged into the current developments around the New Southern Policy. Reading your first issue of the Korea Bulletin that the Korea Centre published, as well as the publicly available updates of the Korean foreign ministry, I am very assured to see that the attention and energy given to the New Southern Policy on both sides have been steadfast.

To start on a lighter touch, I should note that my professional ties to the region date back much longer—

to my 10 years of work at the United Nations on human rights and humanitarian assistance when I had numerous occasions to visit and work with government and non-government partners in the region, including the ASEAN Secretariat. Furthermore, the UN Secretariat has an annual week-long consultation with the ASEAN Secretariat during the General Assembly every fall. This means Secretariat-wide preparations and engagement, led by the secretary generals on both sides. I am not aware of any other regional organisation that has established such a well-woven institutional relationship in the United Nations. The consultations could get too mechanic at times, but I was

**I AM NOT AWARE OF ANY OTHER REGIONAL ORGANISATION THAT HAS ESTABLISHED SUCH A WELL-WOVEN INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONSHIP IN THE UNITED NATIONS**

very impressed with the deep commitment of many of my counterparts in the ASEAN Secretariat.

Long before that, as a mid-level officer in the Korean foreign ministry, I had been a part of the Minister's delegation participating in the ASEAN post-ministerial meetings in the late 1990s. What I recall most vividly from those years is the hurried preparations for the talent show after the meetings. I have to say that our boss usually lacked the spirit of fun — and it was very stressful to get him prepared to put up an entertaining performance, so we were all very happy to see that the talent show closed down some years later.

But as formulations become ever more confrontational



and divisive, one has to long for — to a certain extent — those days when the US secretary of state and the Russian foreign minister could dance together, to the amusement of their colleagues in ASEAN and partners. I was also very envious that the long-serving ASEAN foreign ministers mingled like old friends, which indeed they were, having worked together for many years, whereas our minister was typically there for the first time, or the second at best. So, for me, as Foreign Minister of Korea, to be able to take part in the ASEAN post-ministerial meetings and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) for four years straight, was a particular source of much personal, as well as professional, gratification.

On a more serious note, at the ARF in 2000, the first Foreign Ministers' meeting between South and North Korea took place. I was there at the meeting as part of the Minister's delegation. In substance, the meeting did not produce much, but it did feel like being there at a historical moment, and I was very appreciative of the ARF for having provided the opportunity. Ever since then, the ARF has received particular attention from the Korean press. So, in 2017 at my first ARF, when the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) Foreign Minister showed up at the welcoming reception — at a time of continued North Korean missile provocations — I just walked up to him to urge him to stop the provocations and respond to our call for dialogue. He seemed a bit taken aback.

The following year in 2018, I requested a bilateral meeting with him, but the reply was that they do not discuss inter-Korean relations in the international arena. It was clear that he was avoiding me. So, I tried to stage a casual run-in to him on our walk to dinner from the reception. That was not difficult, but catching the moment on camera was. But, we were successful, and the next day, newspapers in Seoul showed the South and North Korean Foreign Ministers walking together seemingly having a serious conversation.

It is not by accident that North Korea is a member of the ARF. ASEAN countries have maintained diplomatic ties with the DPRK, though ties with Malaysia were severed early last year. It is also not a coincidence that the two US–DPRK summits were hosted by two ASEAN countries — Singapore and Vietnam. ASEAN is familiar territory to the DPRK, and the likely choice of venue when it is ready again to engage with the outside world. The likely choice, perhaps most likely, will be an ASEAN country.

## **ASEAN IS FAMILIAR TERRITORY TO THE DPRK, AND THE LIKELY CHOICE OF VENUE WHEN IT IS READY TO ENGAGE WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD**

Now back to the more recent years. In preparing for today's lecture, I dug deeper into the evolution of the ROK–ASEAN partnership over the past three decades. Indeed, in the lead up to the special summit in November 2019, we produced a collection of articles by Korean diplomats and researchers who were there at particular moments in the shaping of the ROK–ASEAN relations, beginning with the exchange of letters to establish a partial dialogue relationship in 1989 up to the exceptional agreement to hold the third special summit in 2019. In fact, I provided the

introduction to the volume and read through the articles at the time. This time, I read them more carefully, and I was really impressed by the deep affection and commitment that the ROK foreign policy professionals have had for ASEAN and its member states.

### **The 30-Year Trajectory of ROK-ASEAN Relations**

I was also struck that the 30-year trajectory is a straight line of upward progress with no major setback due to causes internal to the relationship. I cannot think of another region where South Korea has not had serious setbacks and diplomatic relations. Indeed, the fast growth of close ties between South Korea and the countries of Southeast Asia and ASEAN is unprecedented in recent history. There have been crises for sure, but they were then turned into opportunities to further institutionalise their relationship. A good example is the 1997 Asian financial crisis that started in Southeast Asia and spread to Northeast Asia, and triggered the momentum among ASEAN plus three countries, or the APT, to create institutions to safeguard financial stability in the region, namely the Chiang Mai Initiative (later the Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralisation [CMIM] for currency swaps) and the AMRO (the ASEAN Plus Three Macroeconomic Research Office) for economic surveillance, CMIM support and technical assistance to governments in the region.

Furthermore, the APT served as the platform for the start of the trilateral summit among Korea, China and Japan—first, informally in 1999, then formally in 2002 at the margins of the APT. The first summit away from the APT was held in 2008 in Fukuoka, Japan, and since then, eight rounds of the summit have been held. The ROK has been a keen promoter of the trilateral cooperation and hosts the trilateral secretariat staffed by officials from the three countries. But while the ROK–ASEAN relationship has progressed by leaps and bounds, it has been an uphill struggle to achieve any advances in the ROK–China–Japan framework. The commitment to hold summit-level meetings every two years has been noted more in the breach than in the keeping.

The fact is, the negative legacies of history still cast a long shadow in Northeast Asia. The negotiations on the trilateral summit statements often get bogged down in the language over history. And so, with the immediate neighbours being—if I may put it—too close for comfort, South Korea has had to be even more vigorous in reaching out to the Southeast. Successive governments of South Korea have floated various initiatives for Northeast Asia cooperation, but none really got off the ground. Most recently, given the pandemic experience, we launched an initiative for institutional cooperation among Northeast Asian countries in public health security. While other countries of the region have responded positively, North Korea remains unresponsive even after the recent change of course, from a “we don't have any cases” position, to the acknowledgement, finally, of the spread of the virus within its borders.

In short, the ROK's diplomatic endeavours on regional cooperation began, evolved, and continues to mature with ASEAN at the centre. Since the establishment of the secretarial dialogue partnership in 1989 during the term of President Roh Tae-woo, successive presidents of the ROK

have made signature contributions to the relationship. Let me sum these up. Just two years later, in record time, the secretarial partnership was upgraded to full dialogue partnership. In 1997, the first ASEAN Plus Three, as well as the first ROK-ASEAN summit meetings were held. At the second ASEAN Plus Three summit in 1998, President Kim Dae-jung proposed the establishment of an East Asia vision group to probe ways towards community-building in East Asia. The report of the group was adopted at the APT summit in 2001.

In 2004, during President Roh Moo-hyun's term, the joint declaration on ROK-ASEAN comprehensive partnership was adopted, and the ROK signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia. The following year in 2005, the ROK-ASEAN basic agreement on FTA (Free Trade Agreement) was signed, with the agreement on trading goods reached in 2006, on services in 2007 and on investments in 2009. In 2009, during the term of President Lee Myung-bak, the ROK-ASEAN Centre opened in Seoul, and the special summit was held to mark 20 years of the dialogue partnership. The following year, a joint statement on ROK-ASEAN strategic partnership was adopted, and in 2011, the first ROK-Mekong Foreign Ministers' Meeting was held, and adopted the Mekong-Han River Declaration. The ROK mission to ASEAN opened in Jakarta in 2012, and in 2014, under President Park Geun-hye, the second special summit was held to mark 25 years of the partnership.

President Moon Jae-in took the importance of ASEAN in Korea's foreign policy agenda to a whole new level with the New Southern Policy. His commitment to elevating the relationship on an equal footing with the country's relations

## PRESIDENT MOON JAE-IN TOOK THE IMPORTANCE OF ASEAN IN KOREA'S FOREIGN POLICY AGENDA TO A WHOLE NEW LEVEL WITH THE NEW SOUTHERN POLICY

with the four big neighbours, namely the United States, Japan, China and Russia was real, and not just rhetoric. Upon taking office, he demonstrated his intent by sending a special envoy to the region, a first in the annals of Korea's diplomatic initiatives. On 27 September 2017, the ASEAN Cultural House opened in Busan, and I was very pleased to be leading the cake-cutting at the opening ceremony. While touring Southeast Asia later in the year, President Moon formally announced the New Southern Policy based on the three pillars of "people, prosperity and peace" and proposed a special summit in 2019 to mark 30 years of the dialogue partnership.

The ROK-ASEAN special summit in Manila welcomed the new policy initiative and announced the ROK-ASEAN joint future vision. President Moon then went on to fulfil his promise to visit all 10 countries of ASEAN, the first ROK President to do so prior to the third special summit and the first ROK-Mekong summit in November 2019. To promote and oversee progress in the roll-out of the policy, a Presidential Commission was created. In the Foreign Ministry, under my supervision, the work of ASEAN

was elevated with the creation of an ASEAN Bureau at headquarters and the upgrading of the ROK mission to the ASEAN in Jakarta.

### The ROK's New Southern Policy towards ASEAN

**E**VEN though ASEAN leaders appreciated the ROK's stronger commitment to ASEAN with the New Southern Policy (NSP), President Moon's wish to hold a special summit to mark the 30th anniversary of the partnership was not easily granted. Some ASEAN countries were reluctant to give us another special summit, only five years after the second one, marking the 25th anniversary. ASEAN partners wanted firm confirmation that the special summit would not just be a commemorative event, but would deliver concrete outcomes that would upgrade the ROK's engagement in ASEAN. In the end, they were indeed convinced by the rich content of the New Southern Policy, which were shaped through intense consultations among the related ministries at the Presidential Commission, and with the partner countries. They agreed to the holding of the third special summit, which in fact is the only third special summit the ASEAN has had with a dialogue partner.

In the event, the special summit would be the biggest international gathering hosted by the government of President Moon. To ensure that the summit would be a success in form and substance, an all-of-government preparatory committee which I chaired, and a planning group under my guidance, was formed. Consultations continued at the SOM (Senior Officials' Meeting) level with the 10 ASEAN members to finalise the dates, agenda and outcomes of the special summit, as well as the first ROK-Mekong summit. President Moon himself spelled out his ambitions for the summits during his visits to the ASEAN countries. In particular, during his visit to Laos in September, he outlined his vision for the development of the Mekong countries based on Korea's experience of the miracle on the Han.

In the event, the special summit adopted the ROK-ASEAN joint vision statement for a people-centred community of peace and prosperity to guide the strategic partnership between Korea and ASEAN. The co-chairman's statement summarising the discussions outlined concrete cooperation projects and results, along the three sectors of the ASEAN Community: peace and security, economy, and social and cultural. The ROK-Mekong declaration outlined the direction of future cooperation and priority areas, such as cultural tourism, human resources, rural development, infrastructure, ICT (Information and Communications Technology), environment and non-traditional security issues.

The ROK-ASEAN cooperation fund was expanded from US\$700 million a year to US\$1.4 billion annually. The ROK-Mekong cooperation fund would also increase annually to US\$5 million by 2022. Korea's guarantee to the NSP partners would also double from around US\$100 million in 2018 to over US\$300 million in 2022, much of it in the public health sector. At a working lunch, the ASEAN leaders reiterated their support for President Moon's approach to North Korea, and gave very frank and thoughtful advice.

There were some telling moments during the summit event. Let me share a few with you.

At the second session, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong

of Singapore expressed his welcome and support for President Moon's NSP, using the acronym of the policy, as did the Prime Minister of Laos. To hear the ASEAN leaders referring to it by its acronym, we knew that the policy was taking off. At one of the side events, President Moon and

## **A NOTEWORTHY DEVELOPMENT HAS ALSO BEEN THE LINKAGES MADE BETWEEN KOREA'S NSP AND THE REGIONAL STRATEGIES OF THE UNITED STATES, THE INDO-PACIFIC STRATEGY, AUSTRALIA AND SEVERAL EUROPEAN COUNTRIES**

the three Mekong leaders participated in the ground-breaking of the Eco Delta Smart City, a signature project of Busan in green urban development. After the cake-cutting, the four leaders toured the exhibition of the high-tech green infrastructure of the city. As the three Mekong leaders were chatting among themselves in amazement, like little boys on a school outing, I remember envying their informality and conviviality, and I am sure President Moon must also have wished he has such brotherly neighbours.

Post-summit, after all the guests had departed, I made a report to the Cabinet about the outcome of the two summits. President Moon said he was very gratified with all aspects of the summit: the protocol, the logistics, the discussions, the outcomes and the nine bilateral meetings on the side. He could not ask for more. It was the first time I heard him give such an unconditional approval and it made the months of hard work well worth the effort. Of course, I conveyed those exact words to my staff, who were elated and seemed ready to take on another summit.

In early 2020, the outbreak of the pandemic caught us all off guard. As Foreign Minister, my days became filled with phone calls and zooms to protest entry bans against Koreans; to bring our nationals home in the midst of a growing maze of travel restrictions; to secure exceptional access for our business travellers; and increasingly, to reply to requests for help from those who have seen our robust response to the virus. Meanwhile, the NSP team quickly regrouped and upgraded the NSP priorities in light of the global public health crisis with a reprioritisation along seven strategic directions, public health being one. NSP Plus became the nomenclature, and was announced at the virtual ROK-ASEAN Summit in November 2020. At the summit a year later in 2021, a joint statement was adopted, taking stock of the fruits of the four years of cooperation in NSP, and reaffirming the political will of the leaders for future collaboration. Indeed, the fruits have been bountiful in all three anchors of people, prosperity and peace, as listed in the fact sheet as prepared on the occasion of the 2021 summit. For those of you who have not seen it yet, I will certainly refer you to that.

A noteworthy development has also been the linkages made between Korea's NSP and the regional strategies of the United States, the Indo-Pacific strategy, Australia and several European countries. Korea has welcomed the collaboration based on the principle of ASEAN centrality and open regionalism. The plethora of joined-up efforts

can be overlapping and confusing at times, but they can generate synergy and mitigate the fallout of the increasingly divisive and contentious geopolitical dynamics.

### **ASEAN Centrality**

INDEED, the global and regional context for the fourth decade of ROK-ASEAN partnership has changed rather dramatically. The new government of President Yoon Suk-yeol must navigate through the turbulent waters in carrying the ROK-ASEAN partnership to greater strength in the years ahead. In our region and around the world, the US-China strategic rivalry has deepened and become all pervasive. Korea and many small and medium powers, especially those with big economic stakes in China, have painstakingly avoided taking sides in the US-China competition. Our experience of the harsh economic sanctions imposed on Korean businesses over the deployment of the THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defence) missile defence a few years ago, was a rude awakening about China's readiness to use its economic power over political and security issues. The silver lining in this experience was that many Korean businesses in China packed up and left for Southeast Asia, and invested and set up shop there.

I see a similar pattern emerging, although on a much larger scale. As companies have moved, and are moving production facilities to Southeast Asia-Vietnam, I think is particularly noteworthy—away from China in response to the global supply chain disruptions caused by the US-China trade war and the pandemic. Each country tries to find the right positioning on the whole spectrum of issues that divide the big powers. They must amplify the leverage they have, whether it is technological, political, or cultural, and shore up their position in close collaboration with like-minded others. In Southeast Asia, ASEAN centrality is crucial in this regard. Korea's NSP and the regional strategies of others have also placed ASEAN centrality as a core principle.

Equally important is ASEAN unity, without which ASEAN centrality seems to rest on shaky grounds. That unity has been challenged over the years in the clash with China in the South China Sea. Last year it was dealt a serious blow by the crushing of democratic governance in Myanmar. ASEAN intervention in Myanmar has so far not produced meaningful results. The military rulers there have dug in, while peaceful protesters have turned into armed militias. Meanwhile, the world has moved on to other crises—first

## **EQUALLY IMPORTANT IS ASEAN UNITY, WITHOUT WHICH ASEAN CENTRALITY SEEMS TO REST ON SHAKY GROUNDS**

Afghanistan and now, the war in Ukraine.

### **The Impact of the Invasion of Ukraine**

THE Russian invasion of Ukraine has shattered the fundamental norms of peace and security that have kept small powers safe from the might of bigger powers. That is, that disputes must be settled peacefully and that the use of force is prohibited unless in self-defence. In Ukraine, Russia—a permanent member of the Security

Council, charged with a solemn duty to ensure that norms are upheld—massively violated the norms and vetoed the Security Council's actions to punish it for doing so. This absurdity is the epitome of the dysfunction of the Security Council, prompting pessimistic observers to spell the end of the Security Council, taking the whole of the UN system down with it. That is probably not going to happen, and many parts of the UN system continue to do the much-needed work for people around the world. But, for Ukraine, the consequence of Security Council inaction has been a terrible war that has already dragged on for four months with the end nowhere in sight.

Furthermore, Russia's threat to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine has shaken the non-proliferation regime and brazenly broken the promise of security guarantees given to Ukraine at independence for giving up its nuclear arsenal. For those of us whose mission is to get North Korea to give up its nuclear capabilities, the job has gotten much harder.

The war in Ukraine has deepened the US–China strategic rivalry as well. At the beginning of the war, there was some wishful Western thinking that China would rein in Russia. In reality, China has steadfastly refused to denounce the Russian aggression and take part in the Western sanctions. How the war in Ukraine evolves and ends will have far-reaching ramifications for peace and security in Europe and around the world. The ensuing debate should not be dominated by the big powers. Small and medium powers need to pull their wisdom and concerns to secure the policy space to register their interest. In this regard, the informal ROK–ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting in November last year is all the more welcome, and I believe it should probably be made formal and regular.

With big powers at odds, it is easy for small and medium powers to feel insecure and helpless. But, of course, no country can afford to be resigned to such defeatism. Rather they should find strength in their own strength, as well as in closer regional cooperation. Korea's NSP has taken the ROK–ASEAN partnership to a new level which provides an effective framework to deal with growing challenges together. The global trajectory is sobering, but this is all the more the impetus for the ROK–ASEAN partnership to become closer and stronger in the coming years.

To conclude, looking back on the five years of President Moon's term, I can say with confidence that the NSP has been our most successful and fruitful foreign policy initiative. I am deeply grateful to the ASEAN partners for working closely with us at various levels and for taking the ride with us. I have no reason to doubt that the work will not continue by the new administration of President Yoon Suk-yeol. Indeed, an early indication, as far as I can see, is that the NSP will be built upon and expanded, though perhaps with new names and priorities. For, as we noted,

when embarking on the NSP with ASEAN, it is by necessity, not by choice, that ASEAN and its member states are South Korea's close, like-minded neighbours and friends, with no other motive than for our peoples to prosper together in peace.

On a final note, I am not surprised that the Korea Centre, the first dedicated research capacity on the Korean peninsula affairs in Southeast Asia, has been established in Singapore. As I often noted during my time at the UN, seeking commitments of one kind or another from the member states, Singapore tends to under-commit, but over-deliver. I mean that sincerely as a compliment. So, like its host country and university, I have every expectation that the Korea Centre will over-deliver and become Southeast Asia's centre of excellence on knowledge and policy advice about Korean peninsula affairs. Thank you very much.

### **Q & A - ASEAN Centrality, Inter-Korean Relations, the Indo-Pacific Strategy and Korea's Cultural Products**

How will the NSP and the ASEAN–ROK relationship evolve in the coming years?

While the language and messaging of the NSP might differ in the Yoon administration, the substance of the policy will continue. Since its implementation, the ROK–ASEAN relationship has been taken to another level due to the NSP. Internally, between South Korea, ASEAN and its member states, Professor Kang is of the opinion that there is little likelihood of a retraction of the NSP. External circumstances, on the other hand, are much more complicated. Conversely, it is precisely because of the latter that the ROK–ASEAN relationship needs to be stronger. Professor Kang emphasises that she is unclear of the current administration's internal thinking on this—on what can or should be done—but she believes it is in the self-interest of the ROK to stay the course on NSP with ASEAN and its member states.

What role, if at all, should the ROK play in the South China Sea?

The ROK's position on the South China Sea issue has been simple and principled: it believes in the freedom of navigation and flight in the South China Sea, which is crucial to its economic movement and welfare. Reinforcing this position has been complicated in part by differences between Southeast Asian nations on the South China Sea issue. Nonetheless, Professor Kang states that security priorities as determined by natural geopolitical contexts must be respected and she shares an example of Southeast Asian neutrality on inter-Korean relations. On its part, the ROK will continue to speak as a matter of principle.

What do you think the ROK can do to help enhance ASEAN unity and centrality?

Professor Kang highlights that the greatest current challenge to ASEAN unity and centrality is the conflict in Myanmar. However, the ROK is not in a position to play the role of an effective mediator or facilitator of dialogue as the ASEAN culture and working methods are not amenable to the possibility of any country to take such a step. It would likely be seen as presumptuous and not welcomed by ASEAN. However, the ROK continues to encourage greater

**THE GLOBAL TRAJECTORY IS SOBERING, BUT THIS IS  
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IN THE COMING YEARS**



movement towards unity among ASEAN states.

Can ASEAN states do more to promote peace and prosperity in the Korean peninsula? What are concrete steps that ASEAN countries can take?

While the pandemic has made North Korea more insular, at some point North Korea will talk when it is ready to talk. In this regard, even though North Korean embassies in ASEAN countries are important links that may not be doing much now, they will be crucial to facilitating dialogue when the time comes. Professor Kang also highlights the work of Nordic countries, such as Sweden, as being effective examples. Nurturing and maintaining these relationships with the North Korean embassies are thus important, and the role of the Korea Centre is a good example of possible links to meet these ends.

Why was there no significant change towards denuclearisation following the Hanoi summit? Are there positive takeaways that we fail to recognise?

The immediate cause of the failure of the Hanoi summit was its inability to produce a joint agreement that had concrete steps for denuclearisation. Professor Kang stated that she could not share specifically why it did not happen, but offered a brief, general assessment—the North Korean delegation did not have a Plan B, and when Plan A did not work, the delegation was not prepared to offer more. Domestic political concerns of the Trump administration were also probable factors during the negotiations. However, positive outcomes did result from the summits that should still be held on to, particularly the South–North Korean military agreement, a commitment made at the end of the September 2018 inter-Korean summit in Pyongyang. As the agreement refrains both sides from conducting any military training or shooting within a certain distance and parameter in the air, sea and land boundaries, there have since been no incidents, keeping conflict at low levels along the demilitarised zone (DMZ). While there were some questionable events, they were technically still within the limits of the agreement. Such an agreement is positive to retain, as small armed clashes along the DMZ can escalate very quickly.

In your view, what are the future challenges for the ROK–ASEAN relationship?

Developments in the electoral democracies of the ROK and ASEAN member states may significantly affect foreign policy. However, despite future changes, Professor Kang believes that the Yoon administration will realise that the current state of diplomatic and economic evolution is one that was borne out of necessity. Thus, the ROK must thus be wary of how a change of government in ASEAN countries may influence their response to the NSP or its similar policies, and it must ensure that its engagement with ASEAN does not fall off the track. Nonetheless, such is the nature of democratic systems, and the ROK will respect electoral results and adapt their diplomatic engagements accordingly. Professor Kang also shares the view that greater diversification within ASEAN, through establishing more legal frameworks, infrastructure and guarantees to attract Korean businesses and investments, would help to reduce the gaps between developed and less developed

**THE YOON ADMINISTRATION WILL REALISE THAT THE CURRENT STATE OF DIPLOMATIC AND ECONOMIC EVOLUTION IS ONE THAT WAS BORNE OUT OF NECESSITY. THUS, THE ROK MUST BE WARY OF HOW A CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT IN ASEAN COUNTRIES MAY INFLUENCE THEIR RESPONSE TO THE NSP OR ITS SIMILAR POLICIES, AND IT MUST ENSURE THAT ITS ENGAGEMENT WITH ASEAN DOES NOT FALL OFF THE TRACK**

parts of Southeast Asia and strengthen the ROK–ASEAN relationship.

What would be your advice on how the Yoon administration should develop its Indo-Pacific strategy for more beneficial, peaceful relationships in East Asia?

The ROK will need to see how the Indo-Pacific strategy pans out. The Indo-Pacific concept is something that Japan and the United States initiated which the ROK is trying to accommodate and make linkages with in relation to the NSP, particularly on economic and financial terms. Professor Kang believes that the Yoon administration will probably devise a more robust and comprehensive Indo-Pacific strategy that will hopefully integrate the NSP. Importantly, even if the NSP does come under the broader Indo-Pacific strategy, it does not automatically mean the NSP will shrink. Professor Kang reiterates that she hopes that the fullness of the NSP will continue to be reflected in future evolutions.

In your assessment of the ROK's public diplomacy, how does soft power play a role? Or is it just a nice by-product of the ROK's cultural products?

Korea's cultural products are doing great work and should be left alone—the Korean government should not try to intervene and manage it. It has been embraced globally and has already automatically become one of South Korea's best public diplomacy tools. Professor Kang reflects that when K-pop became popular a few decades ago, no one had thought that it would become so deep-rooted and institutionalised within the Korean culture and around the world. What was key to its staying power is its spontaneous, unbound creativity which the ROK's democratic system has enabled. Unless ROK changes its nature as a vibrant democracy, Korea's cultural products will continue to flourish.

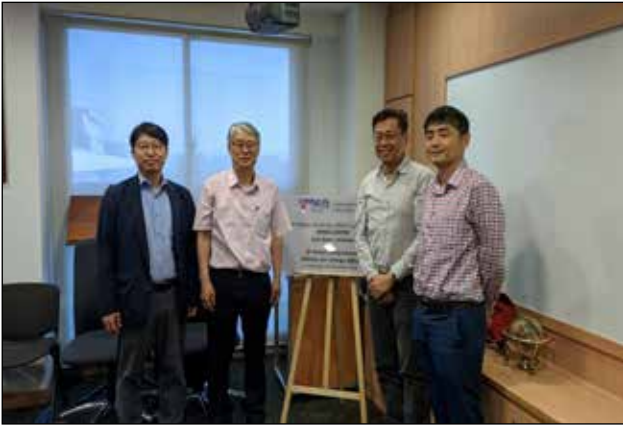
## Highlights at the Korean Centre

### Meeting with Committee Members of 21st National Assembly of the Republic of Korea



9 May 2022. The Korea Centre welcomed committee members of the 21st National Assembly of the Republic of Korea for a cordial and candid exchange of views. The visiting delegation included Kim Kyung Kyup, chairman of the Intelligence Committee and member of the Foreign Affairs and Unification Committee; Kim Byung Kee, executive secretary of the Intelligence Committee and member of the National Defence Committee; and Ha Tae Keung, member of the Intelligence Committee and assistant administrator of the National Defence Committee. At the meeting, the delegation affirmed the intention of the Yoon administration to inherit the New Southern Policy Plus and strengthen the positive and mutually beneficial relations between the Republic of Korea, ASEAN and its individual member states.

## Meeting with Scholars from the Centre for ASEAN-India Studies, Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security of the Republic of Korea



10 June 2022. Scholars of the Centre for ASEAN-India Studies, Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security, Republic of Korea visited the Korea Centre for a constructive and fruitful discussion on contemporary regional developments. The visiting group consisted of Dr Choe Wongi, head of the Centre, Dr Cho Won Deuk, research professor and Mr Lee Sang Hoon (not pictured), researcher. Both sides conveyed their appreciation for the mutually beneficial ties and agreed to continue exploring further opportunities for research collaboration.

## Meeting with the Swedish Foreign Affairs and Defence Delegations of the Kingdom of Sweden

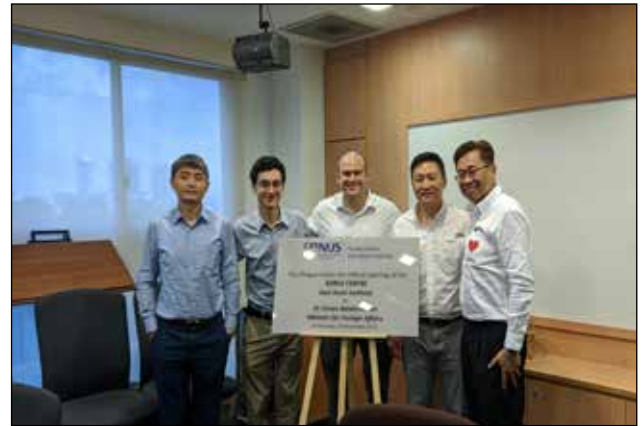


13 June 2022. The Korea Centre had a positive and insightful dialogue on current regional developments in the Indo-Pacific with delegates of the Foreign Affairs and Defence Ministries of Sweden. The delegation included Mr Jan-Olof Lind, state secretary of defence; His Excellency Mr Kent Härstedt, Swedish ambassador to Singapore and Swedish special envoy for the Korean Peninsula; His Excellency Mr Daniel Wolven, ambassador of Sweden to the Republic of Korea; Ms Victoria Sandström, first secretary, Political Affairs, Swedish Embassy of Seoul; Mr Stefan Mattsson, military attaché, Swedish Embassy of Singapore; and Ms Linnea Porathe, desk officer of the Ministry of Defence. Candid views on the Korean Peninsula from the perspectives of Southeast Asia and Europe were exchanged. The two sides agreed to continue exploring potential opportunities for maintaining and promoting stable, positive ties between the Koreans and the region. A commemorative Coin of the Swedish Ministry of Defence was presented to Dr Lam from State Secretary Lind at the end of the discussion.



## Meeting with Officials from the US Forces Korea, INDOPACOM

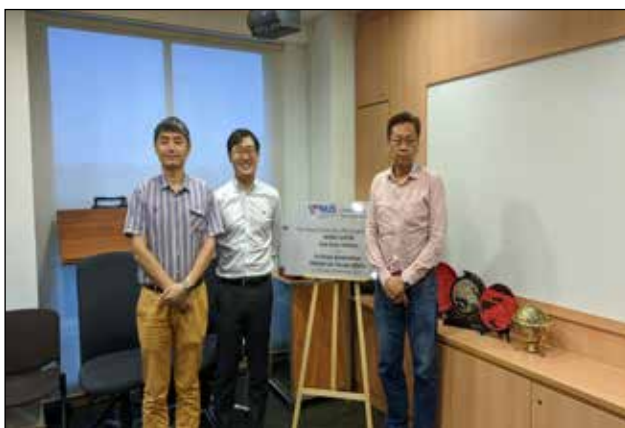
13 June 2022. Members of US Forces Korea, INDOPACOM, visited the Korea Centre for a productive discussion of views on the Korean Peninsula. The meeting was held with Mr Doug Acoba, US Forces Korea J5 strategy director, and Dr Jason M Olson, USFK J5 defence policy officer.



## Meeting with Swedish Diplomats and Officials

15 June 2022. At the kind invitation of His Excellency Kent Härstedt, Swedish ambassador to Singapore and Swedish special envoy for the Korean Peninsula, the staff of the Korea Centre visited the Ambassador's residence for a friendly and wide-ranging dialogue with visiting Swedish diplomats and officials.

## Meeting with Senior Associate of Dentons Global Advisers



16 June 2022. The Korea Centre met Mr Baek Jaemin, senior associate at Denton's Global Advisers, for a dialogue on issues of the Korean Peninsula and the broader Indo-Pacific.

## Meeting with Principal Research Analyst of the United Kingdom's Cabinet Office

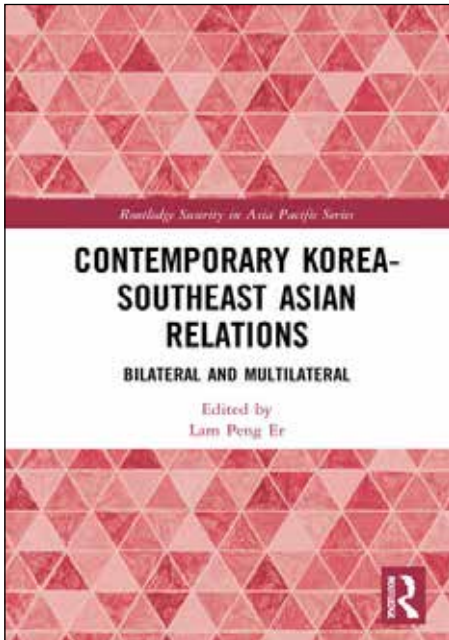


20 June 2022. The Korea Centre welcomed Ms Nisha Begum-Ali, principal research analyst at the United Kingdom's Cabinet Office, for an informative and insightful exchange of views on Southeast Asian perspectives on the Korean Peninsula and China.



## Recent Publications

### 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.

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Part II ASEAN States between Pyongyang and Seoul

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Part III Triangular Relations: Human Security and Economics

13. Human Security: North Korean refugees, Conduit of ASEAN states and South Korean Sanctuary Brendan HOWE; 14. Triangular Economic Ties between ROK, DPRK and ASEAN CHIANG Min-Hua.

## ARTICLE

# Politics of Gender in South Korea

Jay Song

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## 2022 presidential election

The 2022 presidential election in South Korea saw polarisation of votes by political ideology, region, age and gender. As exit polls show, men in their 20s, 30s, 60s and older clearly voted for Yoon Suk Yeol, candidate for People Power Party (PPP) whereas women in their 20s-50s voted more for his opponent, Lee Jae Myung of the Democratic Party. Gender has become the most prominent factor dividing the nation that had already been heavily polarised by ideology, regionalism and generation in previous elections. So why was gender such a divisive factor this time?

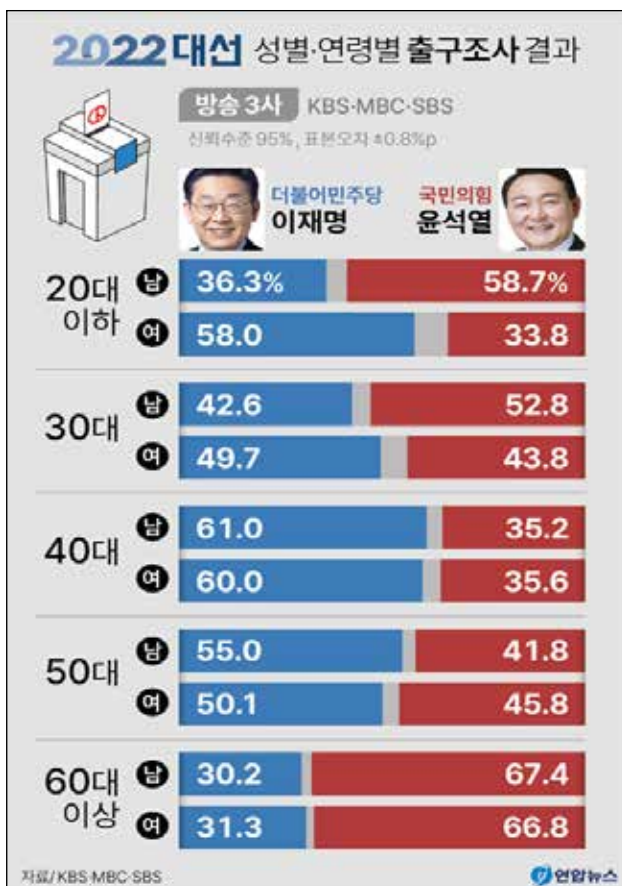
Gender polarisation was most prominent and newly emerging for those in their 20s in this election, with 58.7%

and 22% progressives), the tendency to vote along the political line was apparent. For example, amongst those who identified themselves as progressives, 85.1% voted for candidates they considered as progressive (i.e. Lee Jae Myung) whereas 80.3% of all self-identified conservatives voted for a candidate representing conservative values (i.e. Yoon Suk Yeol), according to a latest analysis in the East Asia Institute's [2022 Presidential Election Panel Survey](#).

However, Lee and Yoon are not necessarily a representative of progressive or conservative parties, respectively. This binary became blurred during the Moon Jae In presidency when his government's [policies on housing](#), electoral reforms and social minorities represented middle-class [neoliberal](#) conservative values. Yoon himself was politically appointed by then President Moon to be the head of prosecutors after Yoon led key investigations of political scandals against Samsung and former President Park Geun Hye. Yoon however defected and ran for presidency for the opposition PPP.

In a survey conducted by the East Asia Institute in South Korea, only [8.1%](#) of voters in 2022 reported that their vote was motivated by the ideology of the presidential candidates. Instead, [80%](#) of respondents perceived that the tension was mainly between men and women and/or the old and young.

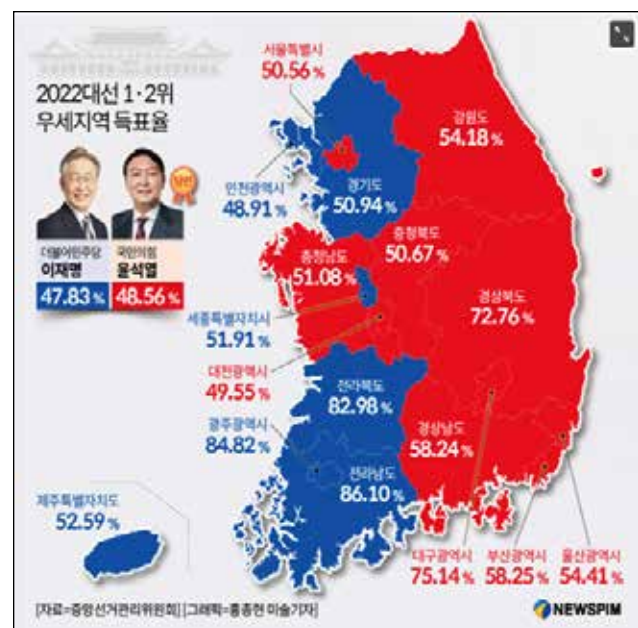
Regionalism still plays a substantial role in voting



Blue: Lee Jae Myung / Red: Yoon Suk Yeol [Source: KBS, MBC, SBS, compiled by Yonhap News]

of men compared to 33.8% of women in their 20s voting for Yoon.

While the [exit polls](#) also show that a large portion of the Korean electorate were centrists at 40% (31% conservatives



Source: 2022 Election Results at <https://m.newspim.com/news/view/20220310000298>, accessed 7 July 2022

behaviour which can be traced back to the 1960s under the military dictatorship of Park Chung-Hee. Park's industrialisation policy favoured the Yeongnam (or Kyongsang) region in the southwestern peninsula, leading to unequal economic development outcomes and anti-conservative sentiment in Honam (or Cholla) in the country's southeast. The 2022 presidential elections showed that 82.3% in North Cholla, 85.4% in South Cholla and 84.2% in Gwangju, the capital of the Cholla province, voted for Lee.

Polarisation by age is another factor in South Korean elections. While Yoon was favoured by the baby boomer (or post-Korean War) generation, receiving 67.1% of the vote from those over the age of 60, Lee was supported by the democracy generation, receiving 60.5% from those in their 40s and 52.4% from those in the 50s.

Gender was the most prominent and emerging factor that polarised voters, especially in their 20s. Why was it so?

#### Male-only Conscription, Gender Discrimination?

THE polarisation for those in their 20s is partly due to South Korea's high youth unemployment and meritocracy where young men increasingly feel disadvantaged by the increased quotas given to their fellow women while they are serving in the military for almost two years during the peak of their most productive years. Youth unemployment rate has been at 8-12%, compared to the national working age average of 3-4%. Male youth unemployment rate is normally 2-3% higher than that of their female counterpart.

There is no longer a traditional sense of lifetime employment. Young men feel even more frustrated because of rising property prices during the Moon administration. They could not afford to buy a house and find lifetime partners. These young men felt threatened by the erosion of male privilege, lifetime employment and affordable housing, resulting in a resentment against the ruling party

and against successful and competitive young women who have benefitted from the government's quota system.

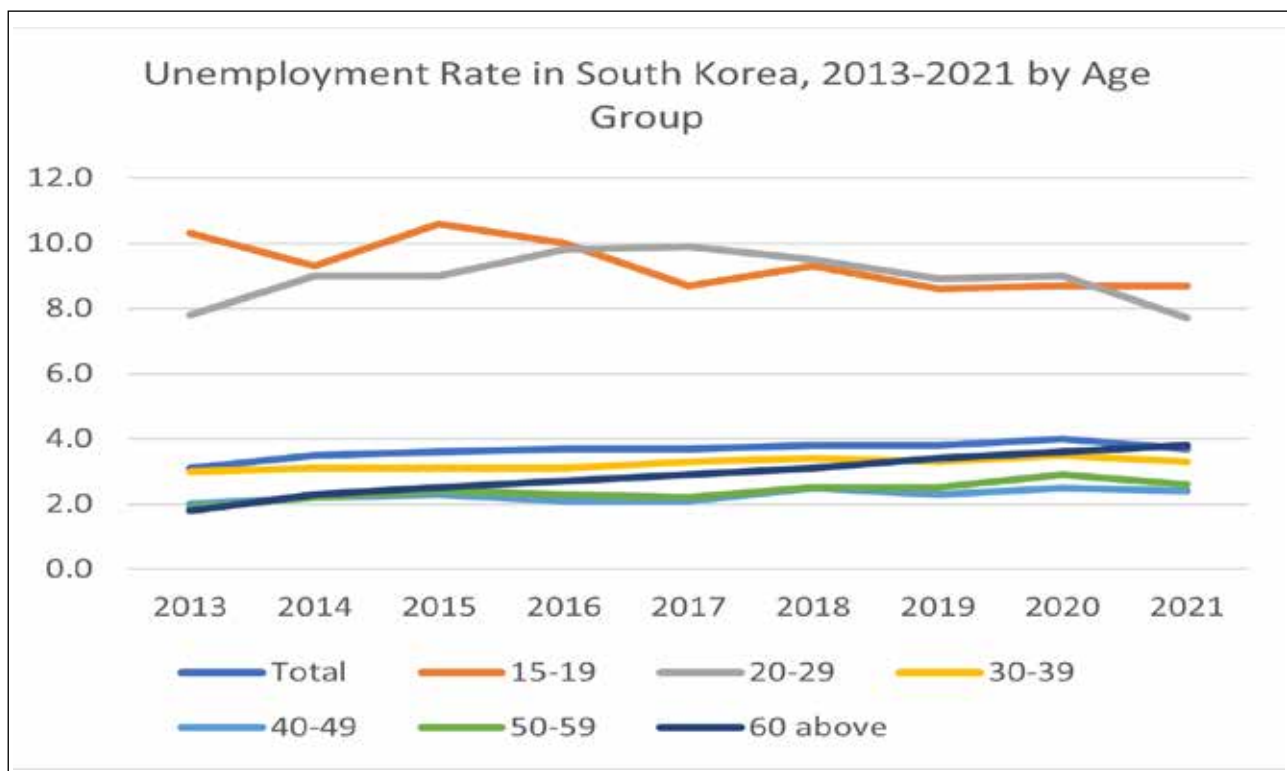
The male-only conscription triggered grievances amongst the young means that conscription is no longer considered valuable experiences for those aged 18-35. Males who have completed military service used to be awarded merit points for entering public office or job markets. However, it was removed in 2001 after the point system was found discriminatory against women and unconstitutional. This loss of male privilege while still having to fulfil this male-only national duty led young men to turn against established progressive institutions, including the ruling party, and feminists. Disgruntled men blamed the progressives for making the changes against men.

The 2018 survey of 3,000 adult men by the Korea Women's Development Institute demonstrates the changing attitude of men towards national service. The survey found that 72% of men in their 20s think that the male-only draft is a form of gender discrimination and almost 65% believe that women should also be conscripted. Close to 83% believe that military service is better to be dodged, if possible, and 68% believe it is a waste of time.

In another survey, 53.7% of women agree that women should also be conscripted and 52% agree that the male-only national service in South Korea is discrimination based on gender.

#### Feminism Misconceived as Misandry

GENDER inequality is still pervasive in contemporary Korea. The World Economic Forum ranked South Korea 101st out of 156 countries on the Global Gender Gap index in 2021. The ranking is far below that of other advanced economies or democracies such as Singapore (58th) or Australia (53rd). On top of this low ranking, violence against women was revealed during the series of #MeToo



Source: KOSIS Unemployment Rate, compiled by the author.

## East Asia and the Pacific

Country	Rank		Score
	Regional	Global	
New Zealand	1	4	0.840
Philippines	2	17	0.784
Lao PDR	3	37	0.750
Australia	4	53	0.731
Singapore	5	58	0.727
Timor-leste	6	64	0.720
Mongolia	7	69	0.716
Thailand	8	80	0.710
Viet Nam	9	87	0.701
Indonesia	10	99	0.688
Korea, Rep.	11	101	0.687
Cambodia	12	103	0.684
China	13	104	0.682
Myanmar	14	109	0.681
Brunei Darussalam	15	111	0.678
Malaysia	16	112	0.676
Fiji	17	113	0.674
Japan	18	119	0.656
Papua New Guinea	19	139	0.635
Vanuatu	20	141	0.625

Source: World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report 2021.

movements in South Korea after multiple reports of sexual abuses by a senior male [prosecutor](#), [politicians](#) and a [poet](#) against their junior female colleagues at workplaces.

Feminism which has a long history since the early 20th century has seen a [resurgence](#). While women's rights movements are not new in South Korea, young men's hostility towards feminism is. The prolific nature of online anti-feminist discourse is reflected in the [latest findings](#) which found that more than 80% of women had been exposed to misogynistic hate comments online.

South Korea's fast internet and vibrant online communities have been praised as the beacon of economic success and democracy. However, to a certain extent, they provided an online platform for users who were led to believe that [feminism is ubiquitous with misogyny](#). [Megalia](#) and [Womad](#) are some of those online communities of radical feminism who used mirroring tactics to combat deeply rooted misogyny.

This gender conflict was largely caused by a [misperception](#) of feminism as misogyny, further fuelled by escalating political current. Gender conflict is largely constructed and manipulated by political elites who exploited the polemic and anonymous nature of online debates to spread misconstrued ideas that the term feminism is synonymous with misogyny. This has driven many young men, who voted for Moon Jae In in the second last election against political corruption, to turn to the opposition party candidate who campaigned against feminism and increased quotas for women in politics, economy and society.

Young men are not becoming more conservative, it was the gender that political elites used in their campaigns to win the election. Their candidate, now President Yoon Suk Yeol, won by the margin of [0.7%](#).

## Post-authoritarianism, Lingering Militarism and Political Tactics

IN post-authoritarian society like South Korea, even under a full constitutional democracy, the remnants of chauvinistic militarism remain in their abusive and discriminatory practices imposed on citizens of next generations. This is more so in a divided country where the war never ended until July 1953 with the armistice. The male-only conscription, the continuing gender gap, radical feminism and political entrepreneurs who exploit all

### ... POLITICAL ENTREPRENEURS USED CAMPAIGN TACTICS THAT CAPITALISE ON PRE-EXISTING CONFLICTS AND GRIEVANCES IN SOCIETY TO ACHIEVE PERNICIOUS POLARISATION

of these socio-political complexities contribute to today's pernicious polarisation in South Korea.

In order to mobilise voters to win elections, political entrepreneurs used campaign tactics that capitalise on pre-existing conflicts and grievances in society to achieve [pernicious polarisation](#). In contemporary Korea, the cleavages are increasingly based on identities such as region (Cholla versus Kyongsang), generation (MZ versus baby boomers), and most prominently emerging, gender in the last election campaigns.

At the centre of this exploitation of gender politics is the youngest leader of the PPP, Lee Jun Seok. Lee actively mobilised men in their 20s, the *idaenam* vote by triggering the gender cleavage and grievances against women. In his book, titled [Fair Competition](#), Lee reveals his deep-seated scepticism about the quota system that places more women in politics or other elective posts, viewing it as a short-sighted disservice to fair competition in contemporary Korea. Furthermore, Lee used his party to endorse some of the presidential campaign promises to [dismantle](#) affirmative action for underrepresented women and to [abolish](#) the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family.

President Yoon, after winning the election, however, has already [backtracked](#) on his pledge to scrap the ministry by appointing a woman for the ministerial position. At the first press conference, [Kim Hyun Suk](#), the political appointee, indicated that she would focus on population policy and low fertility rates as main agendas for the gender equality ministry. This has already received criticism from women's groups that advocate for equal opportunities and participation.

It is too early to tell if the ministry would survive under the Yoon administration. What is clear, however, is that the politics of gender will remain one of the most prominent political factors in polarising society in South Korea.

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## ARTICLE

# Whither Seoul's New Southern Policy Plus? A Preference by ASEAN for Old Wine in a New Bottle

Shawn Ho

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ONE of the Moon Jae-in administration's signature foreign policy initiatives was its "New Southern Policy Plus" (NSP Plus). This policy, first announced in November 2017 as the "New Southern Policy" and upgraded to the NSP Plus in November 2020, represented the liberal Moon administration's strategic vision to enhance relations between the Republic of Korea (ROK) and ASEAN as well as with India to the same level accorded to the United States, China, Japan and Russia.

Given the election victory of Yoon Suk-yeol from the conservative party in this year's ROK presidential election, there will be major changes to the ROK's foreign policy as it reverts to a focus on the ROK-US alliance and ROK's relations with its neighbouring countries in Northeast Asia. The question is whether the NSP Plus will be continued under the Yoon administration.

This paper examines the early signals from the Yoon administration regarding its ASEAN policy and the likely direction of ASEAN-ROK relations in the coming years.

**GIVEN THE ELECTION VICTORY OF YOON SUK-YEOL FROM THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY IN THIS YEAR'S ROK PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, THERE WILL BE MAJOR CHANGES TO THE ROK'S FOREIGN POLICY...**

## Early Signals from the Yoon Administration on its ASEAN Policy

SINCE the election campaign started and up till the point of writing, ASEAN had been mentioned twice in various policy statements by the Yoon camp. Firstly, in a list of 110 key agenda items prioritised by the Yoon administration, ASEAN was mentioned in item 97 under "Establishing cooperation networks in each region for co-prosperity". This section sought to lay out the Yoon administration's broad foreign policy plans for each of the regions beyond Northeast Asia. It is a good sign of the importance of and emphasis given to ASEAN since it topped that list.

Secondly, the Yoon administration also plans to promote an "ABCD" strategy towards ASEAN through (a) advancing human capital; b) building health security; c) connecting cultures; and d) digitising Asian infrastructure. These areas of focus are certainly welcomed by the ASEAN

side especially since there are areas of continuity (such as health security) from the Moon administration's NSP Plus.

Since Yoon was elected on 9 March 2022, he has had two interactions with ASEAN leaders from Vietnam and Singapore. On 23 March 2022, he spoke to Vietnamese President Nguyen Xuan Phuc who was the sixth foreign leader that Yoon had a conversation with since his election victory. This came after his phone calls with US President Joe Biden, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, the then Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Of significance is the fact that the newly elected ROK president's first teleconversation with an ASEAN leader was with the Vietnamese President – this had even preceded his phone call with Chinese President Xi Jinping. As Vietnam is also the country coordinator for ASEAN-ROK relations from 2021 to 2024, this phone call can be interpreted as the new Yoon administration's emphasis on the ROK's bilateral relations with Vietnam and with ASEAN at the multilateral level.

At Yoon's inauguration ceremony, the highest-ranking foreign official in attendance was Singapore's President Halimah Yacob. President Halimah was also the first official from an ASEAN member state to have had a bilateral meeting with President Yoon at his presidential office after his inauguration. They were also seated next to each other at the inauguration dinner at Shilla hotel which allowed them to have further discussions.

In his opening remarks during their bilateral meeting, President Yoon said he had "studied the Singapore model" during his presidential campaign and found many areas that the ROK can benchmark against, such as education innovation and urban development.

President Halimah asked President Yoon to consider allowing more flights between the two countries given the strong demand for travel from both sides and he agreed to look into this possibility. The two leaders also identified various areas where bilateral cooperation can be further enhanced, such as the green economy and digitisation.

While the Yoon administration was only inaugurated on 10 May 2022, there have been initial signals that ASEAN will continue to be a foreign policy focus of the Yoon administration. The two major interactions with ASEAN leaders from Vietnam and Singapore at such an early stage in his term of office bode well for ASEAN-ROK relations in the coming years.

However, it is still uncertain if the NSP Plus will be dropped in favour of a new policy towards ASEAN by the Yoon administration especially since it would want to distance itself from policy initiatives by the previous Moon administration. From an ASEAN perspective, if the NSP Plus is to be discontinued, the ideal case is that it will be replaced with a new policy name while retaining the major components of the NSP Plus.

### Likely Direction of ASEAN-ROK Relations

**C**LEARLY, the Yoon administration's foreign policy will be centred around the ROK-US alliance and very much closely aligned with almost all the major initiatives of US foreign policy.

In a departure from the Moon administration's policies, the Yoon administration has already come to a joint agreement with the Biden administration to reactivate the high-level Extended Deterrence Strategy and Consultation Group, further strengthen deterrence by reinforcing combined defence posture, and initiate discussions to expand the scope and scale of combined military exercises and training on and around the Korean Peninsula. The Yoon administration has also signalled its intention to adopt the Indo-Pacific terminology and participate in Quad working groups.

The implication of this change in ROK's foreign policy is that ASEAN-ROK relations are likely to be viewed through a different lens by the Yoon administration when compared to those of the Moon administration. It is possible that from Seoul's present viewpoint, ASEAN-ROK relations will be viewed more in the context of how it can help support the ROK-US alliance (or its aims) and less on the merits of ASEAN and its member states.

The ROK is hence inclined to persuade ASEAN and its member states to support policies that will be in line with ROK and US interests (such as the latter's Indo-Pacific Strategy). As some of these policies are viewed by China as targeted at containing its rise and ASEAN member states wish to maintain their good relations with China, such attempts to get ASEAN to choose sides between the United States and China are unlikely to succeed as it would be inconsistent with its key policy of neutrality.

An example of this is ASEAN's reluctance to adopt the Indo-Pacific terminology thus far in its references to the wider region known to ASEAN as the Asia Pacific. While ASEAN has an "ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific", it only

represents ASEAN's collective views of the Indo-Pacific strategies of other states and not ASEAN's own version of an Indo-Pacific strategy.

Regarding ROK's participation in ASEAN-led multilateralism, the ROK is set to continue to play an active role in various mechanisms such as the ASEAN Regional Forum, East Asia Summit, ASEAN Plus Three, ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus, among others. It will also maintain its support for ASEAN Centrality.

If President Yoon and his administration are to have a signature policy towards ASEAN, it would likely announce it at the ASEAN-ROK Summit later this year. If the Summit is to be an in-person meeting hosted by this year's ASEAN Chair Cambodia, it could be President Yoon's first meeting with all 10 ASEAN leaders. They will be keen to know the Yoon administration's plans to engage with ASEAN and how they can jointly work together to maintain or elevate ASEAN-ROK relations.

### Conclusion

**A**T this point in writing, it is uncertain if the Yoon Administration will continue with the NSP Plus since the policy was initiated by the Moon administration. Early indications from the Yoon administration however, show that ASEAN will continue to be a foreign policy focus. This is evidenced by the fact that ASEAN has featured in two foreign policy statements of the Yoon administration and President Yoon has already had interactions with ASEAN leaders from Vietnam and Singapore.

The Yoon administration's foreign policy will centre around the ROK-US alliance, implying that ROK's foreign policy will be closely aligned with that of the United States. It is also likely that the ROK will attempt to persuade ASEAN and its member states to adopt similar policy positions though they are unlikely to follow suit since neutrality is one of their key policies.

If the Yoon administration is to come up with its own policy towards ASEAN, an appropriate occasion to announce it would be at the ASEAN-ROK Summit later this year. From an ASEAN perspective, it would be good for continuity and for reassuring the ASEAN side if the ROK's engagement with ASEAN is to continue at a high level. Should the NSP Plus be replaced by a new policy, ASEAN and its member states would prefer it to be a case of the Yoon administration pouring the "old wine" of ASEAN-ROK relations into a rebranded "new bottle".

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**IN A DEPARTURE FROM THE MOON  
ADMINISTRATION'S POLICIES, THE YOON  
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AGREEMENT WITH THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION  
TO REACTIVATE THE HIGH-LEVEL EXTENDED  
DETERRENCE STRATEGY AND CONSULTATION  
GROUP...**

## ARTICLE

# North Korea's COVID-19 Crisis: Implications for Humanitarian Cooperation through ASEAN and Singapore

Gordon Kang

*Korea Centre, East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore*

TWO days after a sudden midday [lockdown](#) in Pyongyang, North Korea [declared](#) a COVID-19 outbreak of the Omicron variant on 12 May 2022. With the virulency of Omicron, it is not surprising that COVID has managed to enter North Korea. Nonetheless, official state statistics have shown that anti-epidemic and recovery measures appear to be successful in mitigating the outbreak so far. It is thus timely to examine the context of North Korea's COVID crisis, and its implications for humanitarian cooperation through ASEAN and Singapore.

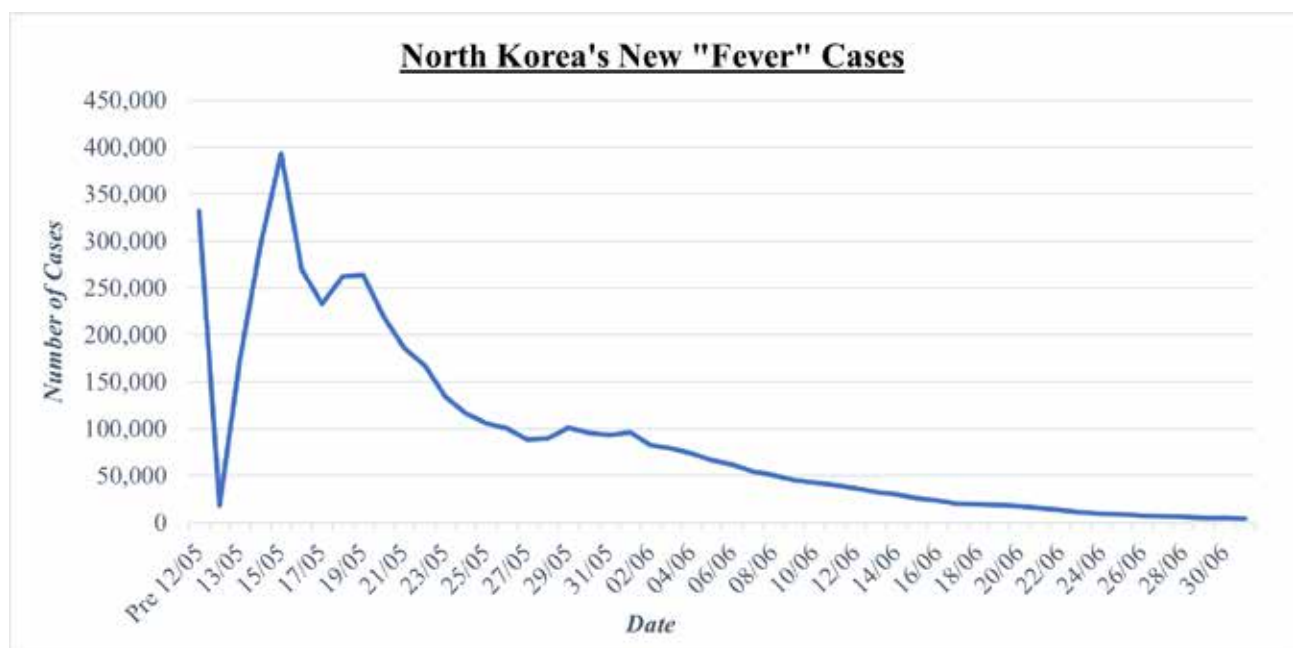
## Progress of the COVID Outbreak in North Korea

NORTH Korea states that its earliest recorded COVID cases [originated](#) from Ipho-ri, Kumgang county, Kangwon province in mid-April 2022. Contact with “alien things” – a reference to balloons flown from South Korea – was specified as the primary cause of the outbreak, a claim that the South Korean Unification Ministry has [rejected](#). Due to the virulency of Omicron, its spread from alternative means is possible. Indeed, North Korea has previously warned of infected [animal](#) border crossings. Transmission through infectious persons or cargo from land or sea trade, by legal or illegal means, has also been a [significant](#) cause of concern.

Number of Provincial Fever Cases up to end-June	
Province	Fever Cases
Pyongyang	744,114
South Pyongan	471,255
North Pyongan	401,172
North Hwanghae	379,583
South Hwanghae	377,751
Kangwon	284,290
South Hamgyong	276,974
Nampo	164,289
Chagang	160,552
Ryganggang	140,972
Kaesong	105,707
North Hamgyong	78,682
Rason	70,674

Source: NK Pro and Korean Central Television (KCTV). Compiled by author.

“Fever” spread [rapidly](#) nationwide in late April, with provincial statistics broadcast by KCTV showing the



Source: Korean Central News Agency (KCNA). Compiled by author.



western provinces of Pyongyang, North and South Pyongan, and North and South Hwanghae as having been adversely affected by such cases. It is likely that the appellation of “fever” was used due to the lack of testing kits to ensure COVID’s diagnosis.

Based on official COVID statistics reported by KCNA (North Korea’s national news agency), North Korea has experienced a generally decreasing trend in daily new fever cases, with numbers increasing substantially twice in the first week of lockdown. As of 30 June, while 4,739,860 individuals had contracted fever, more than 4,730,530 (99.803%) had recovered and at least 9,250 (0.195%) were undergoing medical treatment.

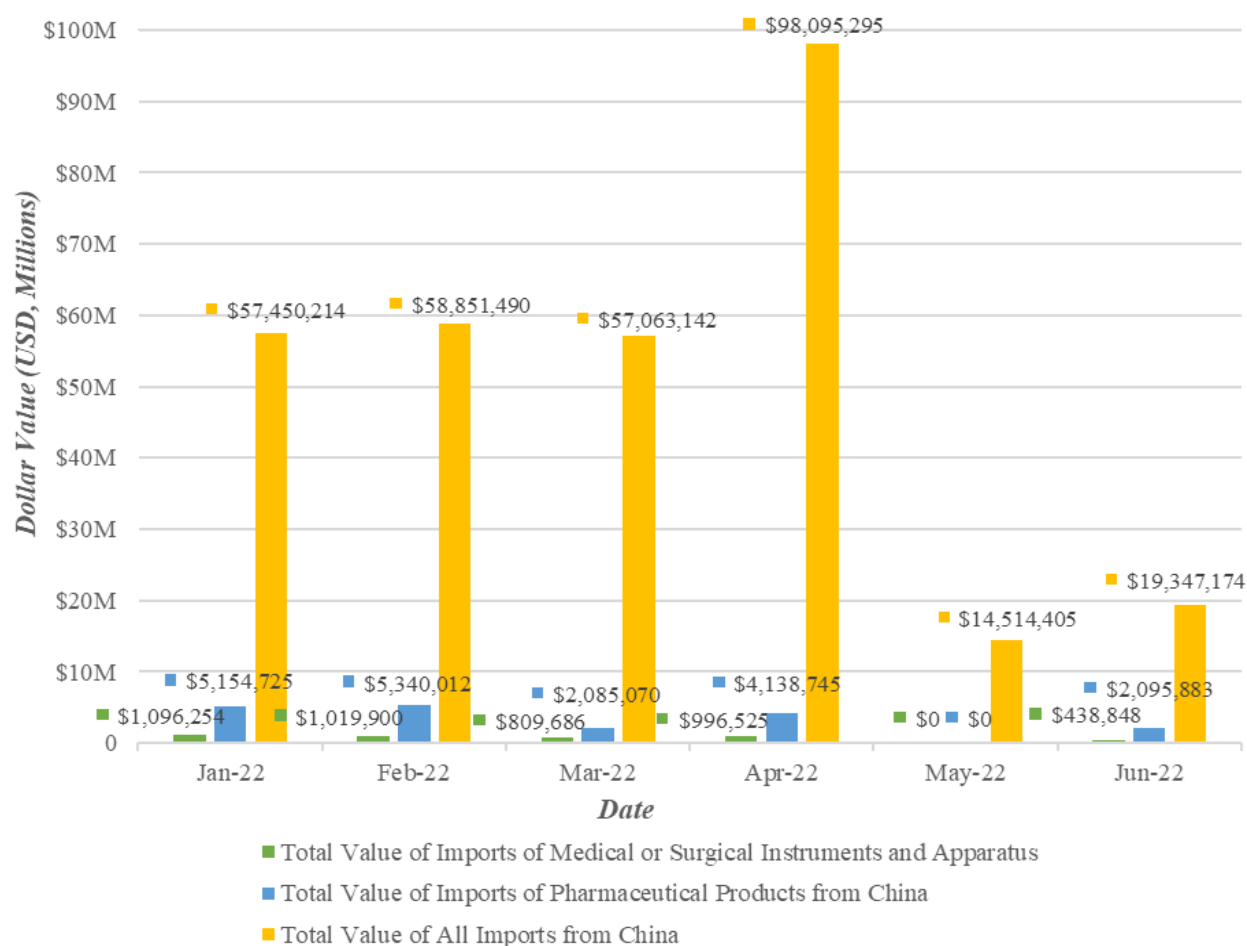
Additionally, with only one official COVID-related death and 73 fever-related deaths, North Korea’s COVID statistics thus far [uniquely contrast](#) with [global COVID trends](#). Without

access to verifiable data, experts from the World Health Organisation (WHO) have cited [difficulties](#) in assessing the severity of the outbreak.

North Korea likely does not administer a nationwide vaccination scheme, but may have a limited programme for a select few. The nation has not officially declared if it has imported vaccines, and has not formally requested for its [COVAX allocation](#) of up to 6.83 million doses of AstraZeneca (AZ) vaccines. It has also previously rejected three million [Sinovac](#) vaccines in September 2021.

However, Gavi, the NGO (Non-Governmental Organisation) that co-coordinates the deployment of COVAX, has [stated](#) that North Korea has previously received and begun administering vaccines from China. Details of their import, or to whom they are being given are unknown – but likely, they will be prioritised for certain key groups.

### Value of North Korean Imports from China - Jan to Jun 2022



Source: General Administration of Customs of the People’s Republic of China. Compiled by author.

In the months before the outbreak, North Korea resumed rail trade with China upon the reopening of the Dandong-Sinuiju border on 17 January 2022. Imports included pharmaceutical and medical commodities, such as general antibiotics and personal protective equipment (PPE). A sea trade route does exist, mostly to the port of Nampo, but Chinese customs data does not differentiate between the two.

April’s total import value of \$98 million was the [highest](#) since the global pandemic began, but imports of

pharmaceutical and medical items [completely stopped](#) in May when borders closed on 29 April due to COVID-19 concerns in Jilin province. Even as the suspension of rail trade continues, both types of imports picked up in June, with pharmaceutical imports surpassing the value in March. This suggests that the sea route has, and will likely continue to facilitate the import of these supplies.

Monthly Highest Dollar-Value Imports of Pharmaceutical Items			
Month	Commodity	Weight of Items (kg)	Value (USD)
January-22	Medicaments of mixed or unmixed products, nes, in measured doses or in retail packings	2,006,839	\$3,137,197
	Medicaments vitamins or other products of heading 29.36, in measured doses or in retail packings	49,187	\$774,080
	Medicaments of ceftriaxone, in measured doses or in retail packings	45,147	\$437,521
	Medicaments of antibiotics, nes, in measured doses or in retail packings	92,177	\$298,408
	Medicaments of ampicillin, in measured doses or in retail packings	19,991	\$111,408
February-22	Medicaments of mixed or unmixed products, nes, in measured doses or in retail packings	1,184,477	\$3,074,908
	Medicaments vitamins or other products of heading 29.36, in measured doses or in retail packings	63,252	\$585,262
	Medicaments of antibiotics, nes, in measured doses or in retail packings	123,788	\$380,697
	Medicaments of amoxycillin, in measured doses or in retail packings	19,764	\$360,043
	Vaccines for human medicine	2,198	\$311,126
March-22	Medicaments of mixed or unmixed products, nes, in measured doses or in retail packings	1,281,001	\$812,991
	Articles with adhesive layer for medical use, retail sale, nes	19,031	\$413,243
	Medicaments of antibiotics, nes, in measured doses or in retail packings	78,881	\$208,787
	Medicaments of ceftriaxone, in measured doses or in retail packings	8,816	\$123,972
	Medicaments of antibiotics, nes, neither in measured doses nor in retail packings	41,000	\$116,569
April-22	Medicaments of mixed or unmixed products, nes, in measured doses or in retail packings	719,449	\$2,039,008
	Medicaments vitamins or other products of heading 29.36, in measured doses or in retail packings	77,969	\$855,144
	Medicaments of antibiotics, nes, in measured doses or in retail packings	96,857	\$459,089
	Medicaments of ceftriaxone, in measured doses or in retail packings	57,995	\$378,544
	Medicaments of recombinant human insulin, in measured doses or in retail packings	1,123	\$152,205
May-22	-	-	-
June-22	Medicaments of mixed or unmixed products, nes, in measured doses or in retail packings	348,558	\$1,459,939
	Other medicaments of cephamycins, in measured doses or in retail packings	10,958	\$156,246
	Medicaments vitamins or other products of heading 29.36, in measured doses or in retail packings	16,563	\$119,803
	Medicaments of ceftriaxone, in measured doses or in retail packings	17,168	\$99,527
	Medicaments of ampicillin, in measured doses or in retail packings	13,733	\$79,788

Source: General Administration of Customs of the People's Republic of China. Compiled by author.

Where [more](#) was spent on pharmaceutical products than in the same period any year of the last decade, several trends are further observable from the period of January to June 2022.

The highest-value pharmaceutical imports largely consisted of general medications, vitamins and antibiotics

that have uses for both COVID and non-COVID infections. Unspecified "vaccines for human medicine" were also imported in February. Nonetheless, such an amount is [unlikely to be enough](#) for a nationwide COVID vaccination programme as only 2,198kg was imported, be it Sinovac or [otherwise](#).

Monthly Highest Dollar-Value Imports of Medical and Surgical Instruments or Apparatus			
Month	Commodity	Number of Items	Value (USD)
January-22	Needles nes, catheters, cannulae and the like	5,587,300	\$347,983
	Thermo/pyrometers, nes	66,000	\$332,967
	Syringes, with or without needles	8,330,600	\$226,001
	Single-phase electronic watt-hour meters (static)	6,000	\$112,680
	Blood transfusion apparatus	3,120	\$44,460
February-22	Needles nes, catheters, cannulae and the like	10,972,256	\$362,139
	Syringes, with or without needles	6,687,568	\$253,651
	Instruments and apparatus using optical radiations (UV, visible, IR), nes	8	\$98,024
	Thermo/pyrometers, nes	13,610	\$76,561
	Stethoscopes	15,580	\$66,142
March-22	X-ray apparatus for medical, surgical or veterinary uses	10	\$175,000
	Needles nes, catheters, cannulae and the like	6,308,319	\$144,637
	Single-phase electronic watt-hour meters (static)	6,000	\$112,680
	Tubular metal needles	(6,250 kg)	\$50,782
	Thermo/pyrometers, nes	10,000	\$47,452
April-22	Non-invasive ventilators	1,000	\$266,891
	Patient monitoring apparatus	1,300	\$205,084
	Other instruments and apparatus for 90.27, other than microtomes	8,010	\$104,130
	Tubular metal needles	(10,789 kg)	\$97,726
	Syringes, with or without needles	2,277,200	\$84,631
May-22	-	-	-
June-22	Invasive ventilators	3,554	\$362,504
	Thermo/pyrometers, nes	600	\$23,400
	Chromoscope ultrasonic diagnostic equipment	2	\$20,625
	Spectacles, goggles and the like, nes	4,880	\$9,261
	Medical/veterinary instruments & appliances, nes	2	\$8,482

Source: General Administration of Customs of the People's Republic of China. Compiled by author.

North Korea's highest-valued medical and surgical commodity imports from January to June 2022 consistently included general items such as needles, syringes and thermo/pyrometers – useful for both non-COVID and COVID purposes. April's data, however, differed with large imports of non-invasive ventilators and patient monitoring apparatuses, not present in previous months.

In addition to the sharp increase in imports of [face masks](#) under a different commodity code up to April, these possibly signify early concerns of a domestic COVID outbreak. Indeed, in June, invasive ventilators – also missing from earlier months – were the highest-value import, and disproportionately so relative to its counterparts.

Several shipments of COVID aid packages from international humanitarian aid agencies and NGOs, such as WHO, UNICEF and the [Singapore Red Cross \(SRC\)](#), have also been delivered to North Korea since 2020 with [sanctions exemptions](#). These packages include similar items, such as PCR testing kits and PPE.

North Korea's strict border restrictions and a complete halt to inbound travel have caused [significant challenges](#) to

many shipments seeking to enter the country. They included for instance, a three-month quarantine and disinfection procedure for imports such as at the recently built [complex](#) at the Uiju airport in Sinuiju, the complex logistics and customs regulations in China, and rising financial costs.

Nonetheless, the state has acted with confidence in the progression of the outbreak by gradually easing lockdown restrictions nationwide.

Pyongyang reportedly began to [do so](#) on 29 May – the same day that a Politburo consultative [meeting](#) affirmed a “positive evaluation of the pandemic situation”. [Access](#) was also expanded for foreign diplomats to various leisure venues in the last week of June. Images from KCTV broadcasts on 23 and 26 June have also [shown](#) the possible partial lifting of restrictions in major regional cities, such as Hamhung and Kaesong, with people walking around and driving.

Additionally, while ordinary citizens continue to wear masks when in groups, this is increasingly the exception for key military and political leaders. Notably, during the [Fifth Plenum](#) of the Central Commission from 8 to 10 June, and





Such practices are, in part, formative to the positive and functional [bilateral relations](#) that North Korea shares with ASEAN member states, such as Singapore, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia and Indonesia.

While Singapore [enforces UN sanctions](#) and [makes clear](#) its stance when UNSC resolutions are breached, Singapore is committed to, and has been able to play an outsized role in facilitating diplomacy and humanitarian aid with regards to North Korea.

For example, in addition to the hosting the 2018 Singapore Summit, Singapore has previously facilitated negotiations between North Korea and the United States, as well as North-South Korea meetings on the sidelines of ARF and ASEAN-related events during the period of the Six-Party Talks.

Singapore also contributes where possible to international humanitarian aid efforts in North Korea. In response to the COVID outbreak, the SRC applied for and

received sanctions [exemptions](#) by the 1718 Sanctions Committee to send PCR testing kits, PPE, and hygiene and sanitation kits to North Korea.

In the past, during the [August 2007 floods](#) and the 2004 train explosion in Ryongchon, North Pyongan, the Singapore [government](#) and the [SRC](#) also contributed relief items to the victims.

It is thus important that Singapore, as well as other relevant actors, continues to strategically navigate and develop its cordial and functional ties with North Korea such that future diplomatic outreach can be effectively facilitated.

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## OFFICIAL DOCUMENT

# 30-Year-Long Growth of Relations with ASEAN

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea

26 January 2022

**T**HIRTY years ago, the 4th Assembly of Heads of Government of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations(ASEAN) was held in Singapore.

On January 26, 1992, the great leader President Kim Il Sung sent a congratulatory message to the 4th Assembly of Heads of Government of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations(ASEAN) for the first time, opening a new chapter of the DPRK-ASEAN relations.

President Kim Il Sung, in his congratulatory message, sent warm congratulations to the leaders and representatives from different countries who participated in the assembly held in the meaningful year marking the 25th anniversary of the foundation of ASEAN, and he highly appreciated that ASEAN had played an important role in the work to effect multi-faceted cooperation between the member states of ASEAN and to maintain peace and stability in the region by making Southeast Asia a peaceful, free and neutral zone.

President Kim Il Sung expressed his conviction that Asian people will ensure the security and common prosperity of Asia as long as they are united and seek close cooperation, and he clarified the position of the government of our Republic to strengthen as ever unity and cooperation with the people of Southeast Asian countries in building a new Asia independent, peaceful and prosperous under the ideals of independence, peace and friendship.

The first congratulatory message sent by President Kim Il Sung to the assembly of ASEAN served as an important milestone in further expanding and developing multi-faceted exchange and cooperation between ASEAN and our country, which have long developed bilateral relations with

Southeast Asian countries after establishing diplomatic relations with them.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), which maintains the external ideals of independence, peace and friendship, joined the ASEAN Regional Forum in July 2000, acceded to the "Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia" in July 2008 and dispatched its ambassador to ASEAN in July 2011. It also took other proactive and meaningful measures to develop the relations with ASEAN.

Today, the friendly and cooperative relations between the DPRK and ASEAN are gathering steam, developing onto a higher stage thanks to the energetic revolutionary external activities of respected Comrade Kim Jong Un.

The DPRK government, which constantly sets great store by the relations with ASEAN, is following with deep interests the turbulent situation in the region of Southeast Asia. We are convinced that ASEAN would smoothly address all problems in line with the principles of respect for national sovereignty, equality and non-interference in internal affairs as enshrined in the Charter.

The DPRK government sincerely wishes the ASEAN members successes in their works to overcome the health crisis caused by the pandemic disease, promote the social stability and to achieve the economic recovery and growth as befits the theme of "Addressing Challenges Together" set by Cambodia, Chair of ASEAN this year. We also hope that meaningful successes be made in the friendly and cooperative relations between our country and ASEAN which have a long history and tradition.

## CHRONOLOGY

# ASEAN - Korean Relations

## A Chronology of Key Events: January 2022 to June 2022

Gordon Kang

*Korea Centre, East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore*

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 2022**

1st	The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement enters into force for six of the 10 countries in Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN): Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.
18-19th	The Ninth ASEAN Connectivity Forum, supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Korea and the ASEAN Secretariat, is held by the ASEAN-Korea Centre (AKC) and International Contractors Association of Korea. Deputy Minister for Economic Affairs Lee Seong Ho delivered the keynote speech. This online forum seeks to promote the participation of Korean companies in ASEAN's various connectivity projects in order to facilitate the continued mutual development of beneficial economic relations between ASEAN and Korea. It focuses on 'sustainable infrastructure' and 'digital innovation', drawn from the five strategic areas in ASEAN's 'Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025', a regional blueprint aimed at achieving a more connected and integrated ASEAN. Areas discussed revolved around the challenges faced by such projects during the pandemic; opportunities going forward in the post-Covid era; bankability of ways to utilise the ASEAN-Korea Cooperation Fund; and progress on projects in the transport, energy and smart cities sectors.
19th	The 21st Meeting of the ASEAN Plus Three (ASEAN, China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea) Tourism Ministers is held in Sihanoukville, Cambodia.
21st	Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Choi Jong Kun meets the ASEAN Committee in Seoul to discuss areas for future cooperation and the continued development of the New Southern Policy as the fundamental framework between ASEAN and the Republic of Korea (ROK). In the meeting, they noted the need to maintain regional supply chain stability and economic security in the face of dynamic international circumstances. Vice Minister Choi also raised Korea's concern and willingness to play necessary roles and provide humanitarian assistance to resolve the situation in Myanmar and restore democracy.
26th	<p>The AKC hosts a roundtable discussion on the mutual perceptions of ASEAN and Korean youths under the theme of 'Enhancing Mutual Perceptions for a Sustainable Partnership'. Key findings from the "Survey on Mutual Perceptions of ASEAN and Korean Youth", conducted by the AKC in 2021, were discussed by experts from the ASEAN Secretariat, ASEAN Foundation, National Institute for International Education, Korea JoongAng Daily and Channel News Asia. The roundtable focused on the role of traditional and social media in shaping youth perceptions, how positive perceptions can be shaped, and the importance of continued exchange, education and cooperation.</p> <p>The South Korean Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy signs an agreement with ambassadors of major ASEAN countries, including Vietnam and the Philippines, on the expansion of joint research and development in green and digital technologies. Six R&amp;D projects are sought to be launched in 2022 in new technology sectors by supporting up to one billion won (US\$835,282) per project, over the next three years. Officials of the participating companies were present for the signing. According to the ministry, the projects include the joint development of a one ton-class electric refrigerated truck by South Korea's Kyeongin Van and Vietnam's Truong Hai Auto Corp. Further are the developments of an electric bus, a smart livestock farming management system, a specialised tractor, an intelligent street lighting system and solar generation for buildings between their firms.</p>



29th	The Cambodia-South Korea Free Trade Agreement (CKFTA) is officially signed into Cambodian law by King Norodom Sihamoni. The agreement was endorsed by the two countries on 26 October 2021 after working group discussions over the past year. The CKFTA falls under South Korea's 'New Southern Policy' framework and presents opportunities to Cambodia for value-added investments in downstream industries, as well as economic diversification from garments, textiles and tourism to electronics and automotive manufacturing and agriculture. Trade is expected to be boosted with the removal of tariffs on 95.6% of products imported from Cambodia into South Korea and 93.8% of imported goods from South Korea into Cambodia.
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### February 2022

1st	The RCEP Agreement officially enters into force for the Republic of Korea (ROK).
4th	ASEAN issues a statement on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK) missile tests in January. ASEAN expressed concern over the tests, called on the DPRK to comply with relevant United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions and reaffirmed its readiness to play constructive roles, such as with the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF).
9th	President Moon holds talks with Foreign Minister Son, and the two leaders exchanged views on areas for positive collaboration, particularly on regional and international issues of common interest, economic investments, trade, international law, education, tourism, culture, citizen protection and people-to-people exchanges. President Moon expressed his hope that the two nations will soon elevate their ties to a "comprehensive strategic partnership" and stated that South Korea considers Vietnam as a key partner in its New Southern Policy.
9-11th	Vietnamese Minister of Foreign Affairs Bui Thanh Son pays an official visit to Seoul, South Korea from 9 to 11 February at the invitation of the Foreign Minister of the ROK Chung Eui Yong, and attended the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)'s Southeast Asia Regional Programme (SEARP) meeting, which took place from 9 to 10 February.
10th	<p>An online photo exhibition is jointly hosted by the Vietnam News Agency and the DPRK embassy in Vietnam under the theme of "Traditional Relations between Vietnam and the DPRK, Leaders' Exploits". It marks the 65th anniversary of the meeting between President Kim Il Sung and President Ho Chi Minh, the 72nd anniversary of the establishment of bilateral diplomatic relations, the 110th birth anniversary of President Kim Il Sung and the 80th birth anniversary of Chairman Kim Jong Il.</p> <p>At the opening ceremony of the exhibition were personages from the Vietnamese government, political parties and organisations and the charge d'affaires ad interim and members of the DPRK embassy in Hanoi. A vice general director of the Vietnam News Agency made a speech. Over 70 black-and-white and colour photographs highlighting the friendly relations of both states were selected from the respective news agencies' websites.</p> <p>Vietnamese Minister of Foreign Affairs Bui Thanh Son meets his ROK counterpart Chung Eui Yong. The ministers held in-depth discussions on measures to advance strategic cooperation; the organisation of major bilateral events; economic trade and investments; cooperation in labour, tourism, education and people-to-people exchange; and coordination on multilateral forums, mechanisms and laws. On 10 February, Minister Bui Thanh Son met the president of the ROK-Vietnam Friendship Association, president of the Korean Cultural Development Association and the Vietnamese Embassy in the ROK.</p>
10-13th	Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen pays an official visit to Seoul, South Korea from 10 to 13 February.
11th	<p>Prime Minister of Cambodia Hun Sen co-chairs the World Summit 2022 (Summit for Peace on the Korean Peninsula) from 11 to 12 February. On 11 February, Prime Minister Hun Sen meets President Moon Jae-in, Speaker of the National Assembly Park Byeong Seug, Co-Founder of United Peace Foundation Dr Hak Ja Han Moon and former Secretary-General of the United Nations Ban Ki Moon. During the meeting, the two parties expressed gratification for positive bilateral ties, and discussed opportunities for broadening mutual collaboration in various economic industries, such as migrant labour dispatch, technology and ICT, and industrial sectors. Agreements were also made to expedite the Cambodia-Korea Free Trade Agreement's (CKFTA) ratification, and support the ASEAN 5-point consensus regarding Myanmar's current situation.</p> <p>Vietnamese Minister of Foreign Affairs Bui Thanh Son meets Speaker of the National Assembly of the ROK Park Byeong Seug and the ROK's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economy and Finance Hong Nam-ki separately in Seoul, South Korea. Discussions in both meetings affirmed positive and productive relations between the two countries, and reiterated a mutual willingness to explore further opportunities for strategic collaboration in legislative, economic and social exchanges. Minister Bui Thanh Son also met various representatives of Vietnamese association in the ROK.</p>

12th	Prime Minister of Cambodia Hun Sen receives the 2022 Sunhak Peace Prize at World Summit 2022 (Summit for Peace on the Korean Peninsula). The Sunhak Peace Prize Committee recognised Prime Minister Hun Sen's "lifetime efforts and achievements to end the decades-long civil war and establish a full peace in Cambodia".
14th	The 14th Annual Meeting of the Council of the AKC is held via video-conference. The Council of the AKC endorsed the budget and proposed work programmes for the financial year 2022, which included increased efforts on digitalisation, trade, protection of intellectual property rights, virtual/hybrid investment tours, post-COVID recovery and empowering women.
16th	The Bank of Indonesia and Bank of Korea signs a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to work closer together on monetary-related issues. Amongst an extensive range of issues, the MoU looks to develop further cooperation in policy dialogues, technical discussions, capacity building, joint research, monetary and macroprudential policy, financial system stability, payment and settlement systems, and cross-border and digital payment infrastructure.
17th	The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Cambodia refute the report published by NK News on 15 February titled, "North Korean spy ran hotels, casinos and travel agency in Cambodia: UN report", alleging the role of Cambodia in "abetting Pyongyang's intelligence operations and illegal economic activities". The ministry described it as an "unfounded report", and stated that "Cambodia has complied with all UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions, shut down all businesses and bank accounts of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in the country and halted granting work authorisation for workers from DPRK". The clarification further states that as of 30 November 2019, the Cambodian government did not issue extensions of visas for DPRK nationals working in Cambodia.
20th-22nd	South Korea's Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Kim Jung Soo visits Indonesia from 20 to 22 February to discuss bilateral defence cooperation at the invitation of Jakarta. During the visit, he held talks with his Indonesian counterpart, Yudo Margono, to discuss their militaries' bilateral exchanges.
22nd	South Korea and Indonesia agree to boost bilateral cooperation in the stabilising of supply chains in key minerals and the electric car sector. The meeting was co-chaired by South Korea's Industry Minister Moon Sung Wook and Indonesia's Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs Airlangga Hartarto. The two parties signed a total of five MoUs during an economic cooperation committee meeting held in Jakarta on 21 February. During Minister Moon Sung Wook's visit from 20 to 22 February, discussions were also held with Indonesia's energy minister and maritime investment chief to discuss areas of cooperation in new renewable energy fields for the achievement of zero-emission goals.
24th	South Korea's Minister for Trade, Industry and Energy Yeo Han Koo meets nine envoys of nations with large resources. Of those amongst ASEAN were the ambassadors and charge d'affaires of Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam and the Philippines. They discussed opportunities for cooperation to ensure stable supplies of key materials amidst global supply chain disruptions and the situation in Ukraine.

### March 2022

1st	An exhibition and roundtable are held at a museum in the Lang Son province of Vietnam to commemorate the third anniversary of Kim Jong Un's official goodwill visit to Vietnam. Photos of Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il and Kim Jong Un in their respective bilateral engagement with Vietnam were displayed. Attending the event were officials of the Vietnamese foreign ministry, Vietnam-DPRK Friendship Association, Lang Son Provincial People's Committee and Charge d'Affaires ad interim, and staff members of the DPRK Embassy in Hanoi.
4th	Vietnamese Ambassador to the DPRK Le Ba Vinh and staff members of the Embassy in the DPRK visit the Korean Revolution Museum in Pyongyang to mark the third anniversary of Kim Jong Un's official goodwill visit to Vietnam. The entourage also visited the DPRK-Vietnam Friendship Kyongsang Kindergarten.
10th	The ASEAN-ROK workshop on "Corporate Innovation, Open Innovation to Support National Innovation Ecosystem: the Roles of Big Corporation, University, Vocational College – to Support Start-ups and SMEs' Innovation" takes place virtually. The workshop is hosted by the National Agency for Technology Entrepreneurship and Commercialisation Development in Viet Nam, along with ASEAN Committee on Science, Technology and Innovation, Science and Technology Policy Institute, and the Ministry of Science and ICT of the ROK. It is a part of the workshop series themed "Technology, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship in the Post-Pandemic Economies" in 2021 – 2022, following two previous workshops hosted by ROK and Cambodia in 2021.

14th	The Singaporean High Court doubles the jail term of a director of three companies that supplied prohibited luxury goods worth almost S\$576,000 to North Korea from three weeks to six weeks, following an appeal by the prosecution. Each of the fines handed to the three companies - SCN Singapore, Sindok Trading and Laurich International - was also either more than doubled or tripled. Items supplied included perfumes, cosmetics, watches and musical instruments at a total profit of more than S\$122,000 between December 2010 and November 2016. The director, Singaporean Chong Hock Yen, 61, held at least 95% of shares in each entity and was the sole decision-maker. Under Singapore Law, anyone in the Republic or Singaporeans outside the country are prohibited from supplying or selling designated items to North Korean entities.
16th	A MoU was signed between the Association of Singapore Marine Industries and Korean Marine Equipment Association at the Asia-Pacific Maritime Trade Show in Singapore. This MoU will help Singapore and South Korea's shipbuilding and offshore sectors to work more closely towards the development of new products and solutions, as the global industry transitions from petroleum-based fuels to renewable biofuels, such as hydrogen and ammonia. Both countries have set carbon reduction targets for their maritime sectors by 2030.
18th	<p>South Korea's Hyundai launches the first electric car assembly plant in Cikarang, Indonesia, which will produce the IONIQ 5 model at an annual capacity of 250,000 vehicles. Indonesia is the world's largest nickel producer, and is also rich in cobalt, bauxite, and copper ores - key materials for manufacturing electric car batteries. Indonesian President Joko Widodo affirmed during the inauguration ceremony that the government aims to establish an integrated EV "ecosystem" ranging from metals mining to battery production and car assembly, targeting production of two million electric vehicles by 2025 in both cars and motorcycles.</p> <p>The RCEP Agreement officially enters into force for the Republic of Malaysia.</p>
21st	<p>Ambassador of the ROK to Thailand Moon Seoung Hyun pays a courtesy call to Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Thailand Thani Thongphakdi on the occasion of the Ambassador's assumption of duty. Both sides expressed satisfaction with the close and comprehensive relations between Thailand and the ROK.</p> <p>Discussions were held on exploring further opportunities for collaboration, such as with economic cooperation, trade and investment, particularly on broadening investment in the Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC) through smart cities. Views were also exchanged on areas of mutual interest, and constructive bilateral engagement in sub-regional and regional frameworks was welcomed.</p> <p>National Assembly Speaker Park Byeong Seug held talks with Indonesian President Joko Widodo on the side-lines of the 144th Inter-Parliamentary Union General Assembly in Bali, Indonesia to discuss ways to bolster cooperation between the two nations. Both sides exchanged views on various issues, including global supply chain stability and defence sector cooperation.</p>
23rd	Vietnamese President Nguyen Xuan Phuc and President-elect of the ROK Yoon Suk Yeol hold a discussion over phone on deepening bilateral relations. They affirmed support for continued high-level delegation exchanges in the 'new normal'; security, defence, and industry cooperation; bilateral diplomatic engagements; strategic cooperation in areas of common interest; and the continued development of a "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership" between both nations. The two leaders discussed closer coordination on existing trade deals such as the Vietnam-Korea Free Trade Agreement (VKFTA) and RCEP to meet the trade goals of US\$100 billion by 2023 and \$150 billion by 2030.
25th	Ambassador Attached to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand Prapan Disyatat co-hosts the First Thailand-Republic of Korea Cybersecurity Dialogue via teleconference with Lee Choong Myon, ambassador for International Security Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea. The meeting was attended by representatives from 13 cyber-related agencies from the two countries. The discussion covered their respective national policies and strategies on cybersecurity, as well as current issues in the cyber-threat landscape. The two sides also explored solutions to greater coordinate on cybersecurity, both bilaterally and multilaterally, through existing channels such as ASEAN-led regional frameworks and UN mechanisms.
26th	Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemns the DPRK's test of an intercontinental ballistic missile on 24 March 2022 in a statement.
29th	To mark the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the meeting between Chairman Kim Jong Il and former President of Indonesia Megawati Soekarnoputri, several individuals of the parliament, government, political parties, organisations and institutions of Indonesia and Indonesian Ambassador to the DPRK pays a congratulatory visit to the DPRK mission.
30th	ROK's Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Choi Jong Kun meets Singapore's Senior Minister of State Sim Ann and Second Permanent Secretary Stanley Loh of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In their discussions, they exchanged views on ways to enhance cooperation between South Korea and Singapore, as well as on regional and international affairs.



## April 2022

6th	Secretary-General of ASEAN Dato Lim Jock Hoi receives the Order of Diplomatic Service Merit, Gwanghwa Medal. The award was conferred by the Government of the ROK on Dato Lim in recognition of his contributions to strengthening relations and enhancing substantial cooperation between ASEAN and the ROK in various areas.
7th	Brunei's second Finance Minister Mohd Amin Liew Abdullah and South Korea's Trade Minister Yeo Han Koo hold a virtual meeting where they exchanged views on bilateral relations. The two sides affirmed closer coordination to expand bilateral trade and investment, particularly in digital trade and climate change, and shared views on deepening ties in the energy sector to better mitigate the effects of global supply chain shocks. Minister Amin also expressed support for South Korea's application for membership to the CPTPP.
11th	Ambassador of the ROK to Thailand Moon Seoung Hyun pays a courtesy call to Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand Vijavat Isarabhakdi on the occasion of the ambassador's assumption of duty. During their discussion, various views were exchanged on the political, economic, socio-cultural and diplomatic fronts.
12th	<p>To mark the 57th anniversary of the visit to Indonesia by President Kim Il Sung and Chairman Kim Jong Il, events such as a visit to the monument to Kimilsungia, a photo exhibition and a film show were held at an orchid greenhouse of the Bogor Botanical Garden in Indonesia. Attending the events were Indonesian personages, the president and general manager and employees of the Bogor Botanical Garden and the DPRK ambassador to Indonesia and members of his embassy.</p> <p>Virgil Griffith, a former researcher at Ethereum Foundation, is sentenced to five years and three months in prison by federal prosecutors in Manhattan for conspiring to help North Korea evade US sanctions using cryptocurrency. He was arrested in 2019 and pleaded guilty in September 2021 for conspiring to violate the International Emergency Economic Powers Act by travelling to North Korea to present on blockchain technology. According to court documents, he was a US citizen living in Singapore.</p>
13th	South Korea launches an ASEAN financial cooperation centre in Jakarta to increase the accessibility for South Korean finance firms to enter regional markets and vice versa. The centre will provide advisory services to a range of issues, such as fintech, financial infrastructure and cryptocurrency.
19th	Members of the Lao embassy in the DPRK visit Mangyongdae, the birthplace of Kim Il Sung. Their visit marks the 30th anniversary of the meeting in the DPRK by President Kim Il Sung and Chairman Kim Jong Il with Kaysone Phomvihane, former chairman of the Central Committee of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party and president of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR).
20th	<p>Sisavath Khamsaly, ambassador to the DPRK and members of the Lao embassy meet Han Su Chol, vice department director of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, and several other officials at the Taedonggang Diplomatic Club for a roundtable discussion. Their talks were held to mark the 30th anniversary of the meeting in the DPRK by President Kim Il Sung and Chairman Kim Jong Il with Kaysone Phomvihane, former chairman of the Central Committee of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party and president of the LPDR.</p> <p>Ambassador Khamsaly and members of the Lao embassy also visited DPRK-Laos Friendship Chongryu Junior Middle School in Taedonggang district where they watched an art performance given by schoolchildren, surveyed several classrooms and donated sports apparatuses to the school.</p> <p>The second 'ASEAN-Korea Trade and Investment Roundtable 2022' is hosted under the theme of "Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and the Business Prospects between ASEAN-Korea" by the AKC, Korea Institute for International and Economic Policy (KIEP), ASEAN Secretariat and Korea JoongAng Daily. During the roundtable, the speakers affirmed the potential of the RCEP for catalysing economic growth in the COVID era, particularly through pioneering efforts to include all major Northeast Asian players of China, Japan and South Korea. Secretary General of the ASEAN-Korea Centre affirmed that more than 30 projects are being planned for 2022, such as the upcoming launch of the Jeju ASEAN Hall in September.</p>
26-27th	The AKC hosts the "Seminar on ASEAN-Korea Culture and Tourism 2022", a two-day hybrid symposium from 26 to 27 April that seeks to cultivate discussion on sustainable tourism through digitalisation in a post-pandemic era. A group workshop was also hosted on 27 April that focused on the metaverse and digital marketing.
27th	Defence Minister Suh Wook and his Malaysian counterpart, Dato' Seri Hishammuddin Bin Tun Hussein, held video talks to discuss arms industry cooperation and bilateral relations. The two sides signed a MoU on defence cooperation and marks the success of South Korea's bid to have such arrangements with all 10 ASEAN member countries.

27-29th	Thirteen South Korean companies take part in the "Asian Defence and Security" Exhibition in the city of Manila from 27 to 29 April to showcase locally developed military defence equipment and weaponry to the Philippines. At the expo, Philippine defence secretary stated that plans were being made to secure the purchase of South Korean equipment, such as the FA-50 jets - a light combat aircraft developed by South Korea's Korea Aerospace Industries (KAI) - and the KT-1, a trainer jet.
28th	To mark the 10th anniversary of the organisation of the ASEAN Committee in the DPRK, Pak Myong Ho, vice minister of Foreign Affairs of the DPRK, meets Le Ba Vinh, ambassador of Vietnam to the DPRK; Sisavath Khamsaly, ambassador of Laos to the DPRK; In Sophay, Charge d'Affaires ad interim of Cambodia; and their respective members of their embassies in the DPRK at the National Gifts Exhibition House in Pyongyang. The ASEAN Committee in the DPRK also attended a performance at the Moranbong Theatre.

### May 2022

10th	Singapore President Halimah Yacob meets the newly inaugurated President of the ROK Yoon Suk Yeol. President Halimah conveyed her warm wishes, and the two presidents expressed confidence in the warm and friendly relations, and its further strengthening in the future. In their talks, several areas for enhanced bilateral cooperation were also discussed, such as in digitalisation, air connectivity and people-to-people exchanges.
11th	President Yoon Suk Yeol holds talks with former Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri who handed a congratulatory letter from Indonesian President Joko Widodo and an invitation to visit Indonesia. They discussed the two countries' shared experiences in achieving democratisation and economic development, and former President Megawati affirmed Indonesia's continued support for South Korea as this year's chair of the Group of 20.
15th	The first ASEAN-ROK Health Ministers Meeting is held in Bali, Indonesia. During the talks, views were exchanged on the preparedness and responses to future health challenges, and the appropriate strategic policy directions to enhance ASEAN-ROK cooperation towards the policy of "Strengthening Health System for Sustainable Universal Health Coverage and Health Security for Resilient Health Systems".
22nd	Under the sponsorship of the Laotian foreign ministry, a lecture and a film screening are held in Vientiane, Laos to mark the 30th anniversary of the meeting in the DPRK between Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il and Kaysone Phomvihane, former chairman of the Central Committee of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) and president of Laos. Amongst the attendees present were the vice minister of foreign affairs of Laos, vice-chairperson of the Commission for Propaganda and Training Affairs of the Central Committee of the LPRP, and other officials of the Lao government, political party and friendship organisations, including the Committee for External Affairs of the LPRP, the Ministry of Industry and Commerce and the Laos-Korea Friendship Association, and the ambassador and members of the DPRK embassy in Vientiane.
23rd	US President Joe Biden formally announces the launch of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), which involves a total of 13 nations, including the United States, South Korea, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, India, and seven out of the 10-ASEAN member countries. As of 23 May, the seven ASEAN countries are Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.
24th	The ninth ASEAN-ROK Joint Cooperation Committee (JCC) meeting is held at the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta. The meeting was co-chaired by Permanent Representative of Vietnam to ASEAN Nguyen Hai Bang and Ambassador of the ROK to ASEAN Kwon Hee Seog. ASEAN and the ROK discussed areas for further cooperation, such as in deepening cooperation on post-pandemic recovery efforts, digital economy, science and technology, disaster management, public health, smart cities and innovation, sustainable development, environment and climate change, connectivity, tourism, capacity building and human resource development. The ROK also affirmed its increased contribution to the ASEAN-ROK Cooperation Fund (AKCF) from US\$14 million to US\$16 million annually.

25th	Two Singaporean wholesale suppliers are charged with exporting Pokka drinks and alcohol to North Korea. 123 Holdings faces five charges under the United Nations Act for supplying wines and spirits worth more than S\$720,000 to North Korea via China between November 2016 and July 2017. Additionally, 123 Duty Free faces five charges under the Regulation of Imports and Exports for exporting Pokka drinks, such as Pokka Milk Coffee and Pokka Melon Milk, to North Korea. These exports totalled about S\$341,000 between 10 April and 8 August 2018. Since November 2017, Singapore has suspended all trade ties with North Korea in compliance with United Nations sanctions.
	ASEAN opens the ASEAN-NDTI Disaster Risk Management Capacity Building Project In-Country Training for ASEAN Member States, a project supported by the ASEAN-Korea Cooperation Fund and implemented by the National Civil Defence and Disaster Training Institute of the National Civil Defence, ROK. This training seeks to strengthen disaster governance systems and adaptive capacities in ASEAN countries by exploring the contextual challenges faced by each country, its factors of vulnerability, and local disaster and hazard risks, for adaptation to practical use.
27th	South Korean Foreign Minister Park Jin holds a meeting with the 10 ambassadors of ASEAN in Seoul, South Korea. Minister Park affirmed that the Yoon administration plans to strengthen strategic cooperation with ASEAN members in such sectors as economy, security, health care and technology. Further, South Korea hopes to deepen partnerships with Southeast Asian nations to tackle common challenges in the Indo-Pacific, and cooperate on the IPEF.
31st	A statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines condemns the latest missile test by the DPRK on 25 May 2022.

### June 2022

3rd	<p>Philippine National Defence Secretary Delfin N Lorenzana pays an official visit to Seoul and holds a bilateral meeting with his counterpart, ROK Minister of National Defence Lee Jong-sup at the ROK Ministry of National Defence. In the meeting, they exchanged views on Philippines-ROK bilateral defence relations, particularly on the defence industry and sustaining logistics cooperation. They also discussed the current situation in the South China Sea and on the Korean Peninsula.</p> <p>Philippine National Defence Secretary Delfin N Lorenzana also holds a bilateral meeting with ROK Patriot and Veterans Affairs Minister Park Min Shik. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Veterans Affairs Cooperation was signed. This Philippines-Korea MOU seeks to strengthen support for each country's Korean War veterans and support exchanges among the veterans' descendants.</p>
7th	Singaporean Manfred Low Cheng Jing, 31, ex-director of Singapore-incorporated Yuk Tung Energy (an oil trading and bunkering company), is sentenced to 15 weeks' jail for obstructing investigations into his firm's suspected transfer of gas oil to North Korean vessel Rye Song Gang 1 in the East China Sea on 20 January 2018. Under United Nations regulations, ship-to-ship transfers of all refined petroleum products to or from North Korea-flagged vessels are prohibited. Low had thrown away his iMac and his mobile phone to hide evidence.
7-10th	The Seoul Food Expo 2022 and ASEAN Trade Fair are held at the Korea International Exhibition Center (KINTEX) in Seoul from 7 to 10 June. His Excellency Witchu Vejjajiva, Ambassador of Thailand to the ROK and Philippine Ambassador to the ROK Theresa Dizon-De Vega attended the opening ceremonies and visited exhibitions in both events. Ambassador of Brunei Darussalam to the ROK Pengiran Hajah Noorayah binti Pengiran Lela Wijaya Pengiran Haji Yussof attended the latter event.

8th	<p>The ASEAN Plus Three (APT) Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM) is held virtually on the morning of 8th June. The meeting was chaired by Her Excellency EAT Sophea, Secretary of State and ASEAN SOM Leader of Cambodia.</p> <p>Discussions involved the progress of ASEAN Plus Three Cooperation, the successor of the APT Cooperation Work Plan for 2023-2027 and preparations for the upcoming 23rd ASEAN Plus Three Foreign Ministers' Meeting to be held on 4 August 2022 in Phnom Penh. At the meeting, Deputy Minister for Political Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Yeo Seung-Bae introduced the new Yoon administration's vision of the ROK as a "global pivotal state", discussed cooperation in public health and economy, and shared the ROK's views about regional issues, including the situation on the Korean Peninsula.</p>
	<p>The East Asia Summit (EAS) SOM is held virtually in the evening of 8th June. The meeting was chaired by Her Excellency EAT Sophea, Secretary of State and ASEAN SOM Leader of Cambodia.</p> <p>The discussion involved various issues under the EAS framework, including the progress in implementing the Manila Plan of Action (2018-2022), ongoing drafting of the new EAS Plan of Action (2023-2027) and preparation for the upcoming 12th East Asia Summit Foreign Ministers' Meeting to be held on 5 August 2022 in Phnom Penh.</p> <p>Views were also exchanged on regional and international developments. Deputy Minister for Political Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Yeo Seung Bae explained the new Yoon administration's vision to actively contribute to freedom, peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific, and discussed regional and global issues, such as on the Korean Peninsula, Myanmar, the South China Sea and Ukraine.</p>
	<p>Vietnam's Communist Party General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong and President of the ROK Yoon Suk Yeol hold virtual talks. The two leaders exchanged positive views on current bilateral relations and discussed further areas of cooperation, noting that this year marks the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between the two countries.</p>
	<p>The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) SOM is held. Her Excellency EAT Sophea, Secretary of State and ASEAN SOM Leader of Cambodia, chaired the meeting. The discussion involved ARF-related issues, including activities and initiatives for 2022-2023, Future Direction for the ASEAN Regional Forum and the Preparations for the 29th ASEAN Regional Forum Foreign Ministers' Meeting (ARF FMM) in Phnom Penh on 5 August 2022. Deputy Minister for Political Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Yeo Seung-bae discussed regional and global issues, including the situation on the Korean Peninsula, and ways to bolster cooperation for freedom, peace and prosperity in the region.</p>
9th	
10th	<p>South Korea's Minister of National Defence Lee Jong Sup called on Singapore's Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen on the sidelines of the 19th Shangri-La Dialogue. The two ministers signed an enhanced MoU on defence cooperation that furthers bilateral cooperation to institutionalise defence dialogues and cooperation in maritime security, CBRNE, cybersecurity, military museum development and multilateral frameworks such as the ADMM-Plus. In addition to the defence memorandum, Singapore's So Drama! Entertainment and South Korea's Defence Media Agency signed an MoU on exchanges and cooperation in media production and technology.</p>
10th	<p>The Foreign Ministers of ASEAN release a joint statement on the recent surge in the DPRK's ICBM and ballistic missile launches, expressing grave concern on the latter's threat to regional and global stability. The statement also called on the DPRK to fully comply with all relevant UNSC Resolutions and reaffirmed ASEAN's readiness to contribute through mechanisms, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum.</p>
10-12th	<p>The 19th Shangri-La Dialogue, organised by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), takes place from 10 to 12 June. A total of 42 countries, including the ROK and ASEAN member states, attended the event.</p>
12th	<p>Speaking at the plenary session, "Common Challenges for Asia-Pacific and European Defence" during the IISS-Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, South Korean Defence Minister Lee Jong Sup states that the ROK would "dramatically" enhance its defence capabilities and strengthen defence cooperation with the United States and Japan, in response to the threats posed by North Korea's nuclear weapons and ballistic missile developments.</p>
13th	<p>The fifth Vietnam-ROK Forum for the Future takes place in Hanoi. Three sessions, which discussed the 30-years of cooperation, strategic cooperation in the current politico-economic context, and the prospect, opportunities and measures for partnership elevation, were held.</p>
16th	<p>Cambodia and the ROK hold a fourth policy consultation meeting at the Ministry of Economy and Finance in Phnom Penh. The meeting was co-chaired by Kim Kyung Hee, representative of the Korean government, and Hem Vandy, secretary of state of the Ministry of Economy and Finance. Several development projects in priority sectors were discussed. The two sides also signed a concessional loan agreement for the \$60 million Sustainable Rural Connectivity Improvement Project.</p>



17th	<p>The second ROK-BIMP-EAGA (Brunei Darussalam-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area) Senior Officials' Meeting is held virtually. The meeting was co-chaired by Cecilia Chung Eui Hae, director-general for ASEAN and Southeast Asian Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the ROK, and Datuk Dr. Zunika Binti Mohamed, deputy director-general of the Economic Planning Unit of the Prime Minister's Department of Malaysia.</p> <p>Director-General Chung reaffirmed the ROK government's commitment to enhancing its relations with ASEAN and BIMP-EAGA, highlighting the greater investment in the BIMP-EAGA-ROK Cooperation Fund from US\$1 million in 2021 to US\$3 million in 2022.</p> <p>Both sides also approved the first batch of ROK-BIMP-EAGA cooperation projects for implementation in the areas of climate change and renewable energy. Environment, connectivity and tourism were highlighted as priority cooperation areas for future projects.</p>
22nd	<p>The 16th ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) is held in-person at the Ministry of National Defence of Cambodia. Amongst other declarations, the 16th ADMM adopted a declaration that reaffirmed the countries' commitment to "enhance strategic dialogue and practical defence cooperation" through the ADMM and the ADMM-Plus.</p>
27th	<p>The Korea Shipbuilding and Offshore Engineering Co. signs a US\$573 million patrol vessel order with the Philippines. Korea Shipbuilding is to build six 2,400-ton offshore patrol ships for the Philippine Navy by 2028.</p>
28th	<p>The AKC hosts a seminar to promote sustainable market expansion in the food and beverage (F&amp;B) sector in Korea and ASEAN. The seminar was co-organised with the Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency. Discussions revolved around current trends in the F&amp;B sector and maximising the benefits of FTAs, such as the RCEP and ASEAN-Korea FTA.</p>
30th	<p>An ROK delegation, headed by floor leader Representative Kweon Seong-dong of the ruling People Power Party, attends the inauguration ceremony of Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr, delivering ROK President Yoon Suk Yeol's congratulations.</p>

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 Republic of Cambodia; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Laos; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar; The Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Philippines; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Singapore; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea; Channel News Asia; The Borneo Bulletin; Khmer Times; Phnom Penh Post; The Jakarta Post; The Laotian Times; The Star; The Myanmar Times; The Philippine Star; The Straits Times; Bangkok Post; Nhan Dan; Vietnam News Agency; The Korean Central News Agency; NK News; NK Pro; Yonhap News Agency; Arirang; and the Korea JoongAng Daily.*