

What North Korea Gets Out of the Ukraine War

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North Korean leader Kim Jong-un's meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Russia in September 2023, the flurry of high-level Russian official visits to North Korea and reports of cargo leaving North Korea for Russia all point to a sea change in North Korea's relationship with Russia.

From the outset of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, North Korea was unusual in issuing a full-throated defence of Russia and support for the invasion, even in comparison to China. China has supported Russia and prevented repercussions for Russia at the United Nations (UN) but been considerably more publicly ambivalent about the war itself. To an extent this is unsurprising. Russia's narrative of the Ukraine War is similar to North Korea's narrative of the Korean War: in the eyes of both countries, a proud nation was unjustly separated from its kin through the perfidy of imperialists in the hostile West (and the United States more specifically), leading to the need to use force, if necessary, to remove the puppet government to the south and reunify the nation.

Since meeting with Russian officials, North Korea has sent thousands of containers of supplies to Russia by both rail and sea. The appearance of old North Korean shells in Ukraine suggests that these containers contained potentially millions of shells. While old North Korean artillery shells reportedly have a high failure rate, this is still enough to prolong Russia's artillery campaign in Ukraine by some margin. There are also reports of North Korean factories being spun up and working long hours to produce more supplies for Russia.

The friendship between Russia and North Korea is not new: while most analysts of strategic dynamics in Northeast

Asia have rightly focused on North Korea's longstanding alliance with China, in actuality North Korea had two allies during the Cold War: the alliance with the Soviet Union was signed just a few weeks apart from the agreement with China in 1961. Throughout the Cold War, North Korea took advantage of the Sino-Soviet split to play the Communist powers off each other, increase its own freedom of action and maximise the aid and protection it received from them. Unusually among Communist countries, North Korea received aid from both the Soviet Union and China up until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Since the end of the Cold War, Russia's economic and political troubles, and focus on its neighbours in Europe and Central Asia have led to a retreat from North Korea, but the possibility of a closer partnership has remained. Now both countries see an opportunity to reactivate it.

Moreover, the Russia-North Korea deal is a logical continuation of North Korean foreign policy. While North Korea and China are famously each other's only treaty allies, North Korea's foreign policy under Kim Jong-un can be thought of as an ABC: Anyone But China. In 2018, North Korea launched a diplomatic offensive that included summits and declarations with South Korea and the United States. This was part of a decade-long search for alternative partners to China that would not have nearly the same economic and political amount of leverage over North Korea, much as the Soviet Union did during the Cold War. North Korea's on-again, off-again talks with Japan under Kim Jong-un and its 2018 diplomatic offensive are examples of this diversification.

As China's share of North Korea's formal trade has

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surged past 90% over the past 10 years, North Korea has become increasingly dependent on China economically. China's selective enforcement of international sanctions to minimise the consequences of North Korea's provocative international actions has also made North Korea more politically dependent on China. From North Korea's perspective, this is an undesirable situation; it increases reliance on China and decreases its strategic room for manoeuvre. The existence of North Korea's nuclear weapons programme in the first place is likely due in part to a North Korean desire to maintain a deterrent independent from Chinese security guarantees and largesse. China has also shown itself willing to enforce sanctions harshly, at least temporarily, when it wants to signal displeasure with North Korea, as it did in 2013 and 2017 in the face of North Korean missile and nuclear tests. While China has not cracked down recently, the potential to apply painful pressure lurks in the background of Sino-North Korean relations.

What can Russia give North Korea? During Kim Jong-un's visit to Russia, he toured the Vostochny spaceport, and at the Putin-Kim meeting, Putin promised to cooperate with North Korea on developing new satellite technology. Help in satellite (and rocket) technology is no doubt welcomed by North Korea, which claimed to have successfully launched a reconnaissance satellite in November 2023 on the third attempt.

Putin's gift to Kim at the summit itself – a number of military drones – was itself a violation of UN sanctions. Indeed, what the Russia-North Korea deal signals is that new UN sanctions against North Korea will not happen, and even UN sanctions enforcement against North Korea is essentially dead. North Korea's deal with Russia is just putting a nail in the coffin. This opens up a new pathway for North Korea to get around sanctions. Since Russia is already under sanctions from the United States and the European Union, its companies are likely to be less concerned than Chinese companies about secondary sanctions for trading with North Korea.

At the same time, Russia is a poor long-term strategic partner for North Korea: while Russia can veto any new UN sanctions for North Korea and ignore the sanctions in place, it was already doing both before the Ukraine War. If Russia were able to provide war materiel at scale it would not need to approach North Korea in the first place, so arming North Korea with many sophisticated export versions of Russian weapons is not realistic.

While the deal is likely *profitable* for North Korea and thus useful for North Korea's foreign exchange reserves and technological development while it lasts, a Russia that is floundering in Ukraine and coming begging to North Korea for artillery shells is not a Russia that is able to serve as a security guarantor for North Korea. Since the invasion of Ukraine, the usefulness of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, for example, of which Russia is theoretically the main guarantor, has essentially fallen apart over Russia's unwillingness or inability to aid its members when they are attacked. The Ukraine War has also increased Russia's reliance on China, which decreases Russia's usefulness if North Korea wants strategic room for manoeuvre outside of China's orbit.

North Korea came to the opportunities provided by the Ukraine War after years of COVID-19 isolation. The DPRK's closure of its own border was so tight, at least for the first year, that it caused more economic damage than any sanctions from other countries could have inflicted: North Korea's markets ran short of supplies, refugee crossings into China essentially stopped and there were reports of starvation. Yet North Korea bent, but did not break. As the country has very tentatively opened up, it has sought to begin trade again and seek ways around sanctions, but on its own terms. The Russia deal, whatever the terms are, can be seen as an opportunity for North Korea, one that it is seizing, but not a sea change in North Korea's strategic position.

...what the Russia-North Korea deal signals is that new UN sanctions against North Korea will not happen, and even UN sanctions enforcement against North Korea is essentially dead. North Korea's deal with Russia is just putting a nail in the coffin.

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Dialogue on Korean Film: The Secret of Korean Film Success and the Future of Korea-Asia Cooperation

Parasite, winner of four Academy Awards in 2020, and Squid Game, winner of six Emmy Awards in 2022, are products of Korean filmmakers. In the 2020s, Korean films and filmmakers began sweeping the world's most prestigious film awards while receiving much love from people worldwide.

Distinguished speaker, Dr Park Hee Seong, who is

with the Korean Film Council, has 20 years of experience supporting Korean movies and conducting international exchange projects. She shared the secret of Korean film success and the characteristics of the Korean film ecosystem. Dr Park also discussed what Korea and other Asian countries can do together to keep advancing the film industry's future.



(Top From Left) Prof Bert Hofman, Director of East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore, H E Ambassador Choi Hoon, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Singapore, Mr He Shuming, Director of Ajoomma (Singaporean-South Korean drama film), Ms Chang Youjeong, South Korean director and writer, and Dr Park Hee Seong, manager of the International Relations Team at the KOFIC (Korean Film Council).



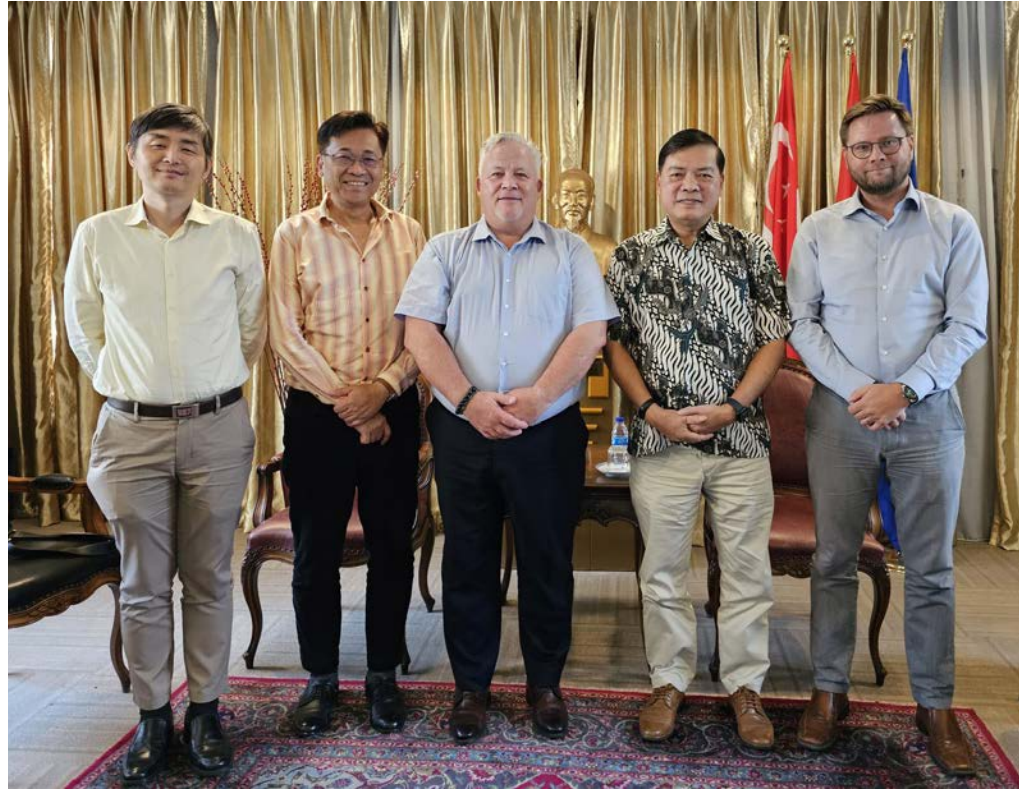
Highlights at the Korea Centre



(Photo Above) With His Excellency Republic of Korea Ambassador Choi Hoon in October 2023.

(Photos Below) Korea International Studies Association conference in Seoul from 24 to 25 November 2023.





(Above, left) November in Seoul with Mr Hojin Kwon, Senior Executive Director, Seoul Broadcasting System, Medianet.

(Above, right) November 2023. With his Excellency Ambassador of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam Mai Phuoc Dung, former Swedish Special Envoy to Korean peninsula Kent Harstedt and Oskari Eronen, Head, Asia, CMI.

(Below) Finnish CMI-Martti Ahtisaari Foundation was at the Korea Centre for a dialogue with Korea Centre colleagues.



Forthcoming Publication

Engaging North Korea

Editor: Lam Peng Er

Publisher: Routledge of London and New York

Year of Publication: 2024

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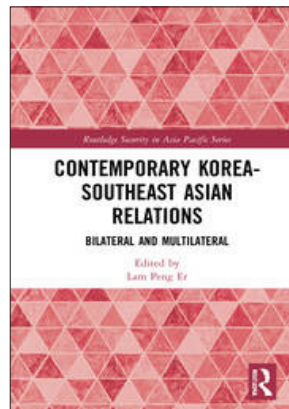
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10. Sweden's Enduring Relations with North Korea: Establishing Trust for Peace *by Kent HÄRSTEDT*

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Recent Publications

Contemporary Korea-Southeast Asian Relations: Bilateral and Multilateral



Editor: Lam Peng Er

Publisher: Routledge

Year of Publication: 2022

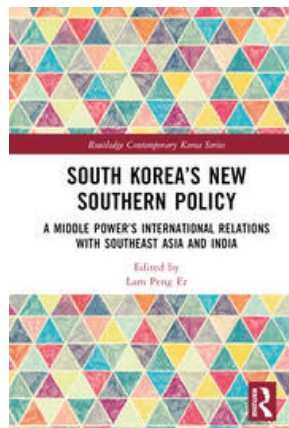
Description:

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.

For more details, visit:

https://www.routledge.com/Contemporary-Korea-Southeast-Asian-Relations-Bilateral-and-Multilateral/Peng-Er/p/book/9781032111797?gclid=EAlaQobChMI-duGysbl_gIVxYBLBR019w6SEAAAYASAAEgIMS_D_BwE

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



Editor: Lam Peng Er

Publisher: Routledge

Year of Publication: 2023

Description:

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

For more details, visit:

<https://www.routledge.com/South-Koreas-New-Southern-Policy-A-Middle-Powers-International-Relations/Er/p/book/9781032404479>

CHRONOLOGY

ASEAN - Korea Relations

A Chronology of Key Events:

October 2023 to December 2023

Gordon Kang

S Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University

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

October 2023

6th	The 23rd Meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Ministers on Agriculture and Forestry Plus Three took place in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia chaired by Datuk Seri Haji Mohamad bin Sabu, the minister of agriculture and food security of Malaysia. During the meeting, participants acknowledged the positive developments in implementing the ASEAN Plus Three Cooperation Strategy 2016-2025. Progress was recognised in key areas, such as strengthening food security and nutrition, sustainable forest management, climate change adaptation, animal and plant health, capacity-building and human resource development. Additionally, improvements in the productivity, quality and marketability of agricultural products, as well as advancements in information systems, knowledge networking and research and development were highlighted.
6th	Deputy Prime Minister of Cambodia and Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Sok Chenda Sophea received Park Jung-Wook, ambassador of the Republic of Korea (ROK) to Cambodia, during the ambassador's courtesy call at the ministry. The discussion centred on the advancement of relations between Cambodia and the ROK. Both parties emphasised the importance of fostering closer collaboration, particularly in convening the scheduled meeting of the fifth Cambodia-Korea Joint Commission later in October. They also expressed satisfaction with the current growth of relations and agreed to continue close cooperation on agriculture, industry, defence and high technology to assist Cambodia in achieving its goal of becoming an upper middle-income country by 2030.
11th-15th	Nguyen Xuan Thang, member of the Politburo of the Communist Party of Vietnam, director of the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics and chairman of the Central Theory Council, led a Vietnamese Party delegation on a trip to the ROK from 11 to 15 October. The delegation engaged in various meetings and working sessions, including discussions with Presidential Chief of Staff Kim Dae-ki, Minister of Foreign Affairs Park Jin and Chairman of the ruling People Power Party Kim Gi-hyeon. The itinerary included visits to Samsung Group, participation in the opening of the Global Samsung programme for Vietnamese leaders, talks with Seoul National University, the Korea National Diplomatic Academy and National Human Resources Development Institute. Additionally, meetings were held with the former minister of SMEs and Startups, vice chairman of the Korea Semiconductor Industry Association and director of the Korea Creative Content Agency. On 14 October, the delegation also had a working session with the staff of the Vietnamese Embassy and a meeting with the Vietnamese community in the ROK.
12th	In a collaborative effort to explore infrastructure opportunities, the Korean Embassy in Manila, in partnership with the Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA), organised the "Korea-Philippine Infrastructure and Plant Forum" in Taguig city on 12 October. The forum, attended by Public Works and Highways Secretary Manuel Bonoan, Transportation Secretary Jaime Bautista, Korean Ambassador to the Philippines Lee Sang-hwa and KOTRA Manila Director General Lee Sujung, provided a platform for around 60 Filipino companies and 34 Korean firms specialising in construction and engineering to connect and seek potential business partnerships. The Korean companies expressed interest in various sectors, including waste treatment, water treatment, renewables (solar, wind and hydrogen), carbon capture, utilisation, storage, power equipment, railways, roads, bridges, ports and airports.

12th	The Philippines and ROK affirmed their joint commitment to strengthening maritime cooperation during the second Philippine-South Korea Maritime Cooperation Dialogue. The two delegations discussed various aspects of maritime cooperation, including the ocean economy, marine environment, maritime security and safety, and regional and multilateral maritime-related developments. Assistant Secretary Maria Angela Ponce who headed the Philippine delegation expressed the dialogue's importance in enhancing mutual engagement in the maritime domain as they approach the 75th anniversary of bilateral relations in 2024. The ROK delegation highlighted the success of the Maritime Dialogue with the Philippines as a potential model for similar mechanisms with other ASEAN member states in the future. The Philippine delegation included Ambassador Maria Theresa B Dizon-de Vega and other Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs officials, supported by representatives from national agencies overseeing maritime affairs. The ROK delegation, led by Foreign Ministry Director General Kim Dong Bae, consisted of representatives from key national government agencies.
12th	The 19th tripartite meeting of the secretary generals of the ASEAN-Korea Centre (AKC), ASEAN-China Centre (ACC) and ASEAN-Japan Centre (AJC) was hosted by the AKC at the International Peace Centre on Jeju Island, South Korea. This marked the first in-person gathering of the tripartite meeting in three years. Secretary generals of the three centres – Shi Zhongjun from ACC, Kunihiko Hirabayashi from AJC and Kim Hae-yong from AKC – discussed directions and work programmes post-COVID-19, potential collaborations and key issues in cooperation with ASEAN. The meeting was followed by a visit to the Jeju ASEAN Hall, an exhibition space showcasing the cultural heritage and collaborative efforts between ASEAN and Korea, established by the AKC in September 2022.
17th	ROK's Vice Minister of Trade, Industry and Energy Youngjin Jang met Tran Tuan Anh, head of the Vietnamese Communist Party Central Committee's Economic Commission, in Seoul to discuss the implementation of measures following the Korea-Vietnam summit. The discussions centred on enhancing bilateral trade and investment, reinforcing core mineral supply chains and progressing towards carbon neutrality. Jang stressed the significance of achieving the "US\$150 billion trade volume by 2030", a target set by both nations' leaders, and urged a reversal of the current downward trend in trade volume. The commitment to exploring practical measures for promoting bilateral trade through various high-level talks, such as the "Korea-Vietnam Plus" joint working group and "Korea-Vietnam Industrial Cooperation Committee", was re-emphasised. Jang highlighted that though Vietnam is currently Korea's largest investment partner within ASEAN, there is room for increased investment by Korean companies to contribute further to Vietnam's economic growth. He sought cooperation in addressing challenges faced by Korean companies, including delayed approvals for establishing Korean financial institutions and realising investment incentives.
17th-22nd	A delegation from the Department of National Defence undertook visits to two significant South Korean defence equipment manufacturers. Senior Undersecretary Irineo Espino led the delegation, which toured Hanwha Ocean and HD Hyundai Heavy Industries (HHI), during their participation in the 12th Seoul Defence Dialogue (SDD) and Seoul International Aerospace and Defence Exhibit (ADEX). Hanwha Ocean presented their Jangbogo IIPN submarine for the proposed submarine project of the Armed Forces of the Philippines Modernisation Programme for Horizon 3, scheduled from 2023 to 2028 at a planned budget of PHP110 billion for the acquisition of two modern diesel-electric submarines. The delegation, including Senior Undersecretary Espino, was briefed on the submarine's capabilities and toured Hanwha Ocean's maintenance and shipbuilding facilities in Geoje city, South Korea. Additionally, the delegation visited HHI facilities in Ulsan to learn about the progress of constructing two missile corvettes, the first to be delivered in 2025 and the second in 2026.
18th-19th	Malaysian Defence Minister Datuk Seri Mohamad Hasan was on a two-day working visit to the ROK from 18 October to discuss on enhancing defence cooperation between the two nations. The visit, at the invitation of the ROK's former National Defence Minister Lee Jong-Sup, included meetings with the newly appointed Defence Minister Shin Won Sik. Both ministers affirmed their commitment to strengthening existing cooperation and exploring new collaboration opportunities in the military and defence industry domains. Discussions also revolved around the roles of Malaysia and the ROK as co-chairs in the cyber-security field for the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus) Experts' Working Group. Defence Minister Mohamad also participated in the SDD 2023 and ADEX 2023 during the visit.
20th	Park Jung Wook, ROK ambassador to Cambodia, and representatives from the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) met Cambodian Minister of Civil Service Hun Many in Phnom Penh. Both parties affirmed continued efforts to increase cooperation in the field of civil services between the two countries. They also remarked on past instances of constructive cooperation, such as the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Human Resource Management in Civil Service in 2022 and a three-year capacity development project for the Royal School of Administration from 2019 to 2021.

24th	The ninth Meeting of the Vietnam-ROK Joint Committee on Science and Technology Cooperation took place in Seoul, co-chaired by Vietnamese Minister of Science and Technology Huynh Thanh Dat and ROK Minister of Science and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Lee Jong-ho. Aligned with the action programme to implement the comprehensive strategic partnership established during ROK President Yoon Suk Yeol's visit to Vietnam in June 2023, the meeting aimed to exchange major policies in science and technology. ROK presented its fifth Basic Science and Technology Plan for 2023-2027, while Vietnam outlined its science-technology renovation policy. Both nations discussed ways to expand collaboration, including in artificial intelligence (AI), digital transformation and core technology, and supporting Vietnam in the second phase of the Vietnam-Korea Institute of Science and Technology.
24th	United Nations (UN) Officer-in-Charge of the UN Tripartite Training Programme Julian Otinkorang met General Sem Sovanny, director general of the Cambodian National Peacekeeping Centre, to provide a report on Cambodia's readiness to host the Cambodia-Korea-UN Tripartite Project. The project, focusing on the use of heavy engineering machinery involving the ROK, the UN and Cambodia, was set to commence on 6 November 2023.
25th-27th	The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the ROK invited a delegation from five ASEAN countries to a seminar programme aimed at enhancing their capabilities to address the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK) evolving illegal cyber activities. Officials from Laos, Vietnam, Indonesia, Thailand and Philippines participated in the three-day seminar held in Seoul, South Korea. Co-hosted by the Korea Information Security Industry Association and Korea International Cooperation Agency, Lee Jun-il, director-general for North Korean nuclear affairs in the ROK Foreign Ministry, urged ASEAN countries to focus on the North's illicit cyber activities and maintain cooperation with South Korea on the issue.
26th	Indonesian Ambassador to the ROK Gandi Sulistiyanto received the honorary title of Citizen of Seoul at Seoul City Hall, South Korea. Mayor of Seoul Oh Se-Hoon conferred the title in recognition of Ambassador Sulis' commendable services and contributions to enhancing bilateral cooperation between the ROK and the Republic of Indonesia. The recognition specifically acknowledged his efforts in fostering collaboration between the Seoul metropolitan government and various city governments in Indonesia.
26th	The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the ROK and Department of State of the United States launched the inaugural collaborative scientific research project under the 'Embassy Science Fellows Programme'. The project was conducted by the Korea Institute of Geoscience and Mineral Resources (KIGAM) and US Geological Survey over three months at KIGAM's office in Hanoi. It receives support from both Korean and US embassies in Hanoi and involves close coordination with the Vietnamese government. It focuses on advancing environment-friendly technologies for extracting rare earth elements and other critical elements from coal ash. This joint effort aimed to enhance international cooperation in sustainable extraction and processing of critical minerals, and to contribute to the deployment of clean technologies in the global supply chain.
26th	The Vietnam-Korea AI (VKAI) Hub, situated in Da Nang, concluded five agreements with various entities from the ROK to collaborate on the development of AI technology in medical, health care, smart cities and automation in Da Nang. These included the Korea Artificial Intelligence Association, S-LAB (a Vietnamese Innovation Network in Korea [VINK] member), the research centre of Soonchunhyang University Seoul Hospital, OTOM company (specialising in portable X-ray manufacturing), Jayroun Soft Corp, ONYCOM Inc, LBS Tech and Polaris Consulting Group. VINK had previously introduced the Da Nang-Seoul Start-up Innovation Centre and VKAI Hub in Da Nang city in early October 2023.
30th	Training ship BADARO of the Korea Coast Guard (KCG) arrived at Hai Phong port for a five-day visit. Led by Kim Young Chul, head of the KCG Academy's Office, the vessel carried a crew of 100 members. The visit aimed to strengthen the cooperative relationship between the Vietnam Coast Guard and the KCG, providing an opportunity for officers and soldiers to exchange knowledge and share experiences. During their stay, the KCG delegation paid a courtesy call to municipal leaders, gaining insights into the city's socio-economic development and collaboration with the ROK. As part of the visit, representatives of the KCG also visited the Vietnam Coast Guard Region 1 Command on 1 November. In a related event, Member of the Politburo of the Communist Party of Vietnam and Minister of Public Security To Lam received Kim Byung Ro, commander of the central region coast guard of the KCG in Hanoi on 30 October.
31st	The fifth Meeting of the Cambodia-Korea Joint Commission was hosted by Cambodia at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Cambodia in Phnom Penh. Chaired by Secretary of State of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Cambodia Tuot Panha and First Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of the ROK Chang Ho-jin, the meeting reviewed the achievements and further enhancing of bilateral relations and cooperation. The deliberations spanned various sectors, including politics, trade and investment, infrastructure, agriculture, labour, rural development, health, human resources development and people-to-people exchanges. Additionally, regional and international collaboration of mutual interest within frameworks, such as ASEAN-ROK, Mekong-ROK and the UN, and the situation in the Korean Peninsula, were addressed. Subsequently, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Cambodia Sok Chenda Sophea received a courtesy call from First Vice Minister Chang.

31st	The Minister of Environment of the ROK Han Wha-jin visited Vietnam from 31 October to 2 November for the 15th annual Korea-Vietnam Environment Ministers Meeting and related events. The meeting focused on key environmental issues, aiming to strengthen cooperation and friendship between the two nations. Han reviewed past cooperation progress, particularly in environmental education and training with his Vietnamese counterpart, Minister of Natural Resources and Environment Dang Quoc Khanh. They explored future collaborations, including green official development assistance (Green ODA) and biodiversity. The ROK emphasised its support for South Korea's green industry companies looking to enter Vietnam's growing green market. As part of the visit, the ROK Ministry of Environment also hosted a Korea-Vietnam Green Technology Presentation to showcase upcoming green technologies.
31st	The AKC organised the 2023 ASEAN-Korea Forum at Sogang University. Themed "Elevating ASEAN-Korea Strategic Partnership in a Changing Global Landscape", the forum brought together scholars and government officials to discuss the strategic partnership between ASEAN and the ROK, ahead of the 35th Anniversary of ASEAN-Korea Dialogue Partnership in 2024. The event included opening remarks by Secretary General of the AKC Kim Hae-yong, congratulatory remarks by Sogang University President Sim Jong-hyeok and a keynote speech by Dr Hassan Wirajuda, former foreign minister of Indonesia. The forum covered various sessions addressing policy perspectives, emerging challenges and insights from young individuals representing the future of ASEAN-Korea relations.

November 2023

1st	The ASEAN-ROK Day was held, featuring a forum titled "Towards an ASEAN-ROK Comprehensive Strategic Partnership for peace, security and prosperity". Michael Tene, deputy secretary-general of ASEAN for Political and Security Community, delivered a keynote speech, tracing the evolution of ASEAN-ROK dialogue relations. First Vice Foreign Minister Chang Ho-jin emphasised that South Korea would continue working to deepen a mutually beneficial relationship with ASEAN based on the bilateral ASEAN-ROK comprehensive strategic partnership. A tourism exhibition and cultural performances were also part of the event, culminating in a gala dinner. Initiated by Vietnam, the country coordinator for ASEAN-ROK Dialogue Relations (2021-2024), and co-organised by Vietnam and the ROK, the event aimed to contribute to the strengthening of the ASEAN-ROK Strategic Partnership and comprehensive cooperation, in anticipation of the 35th Anniversary of ASEAN-ROK Dialogue Relations in 2024.
1st	Foreign Minister of Vietnam Bui Thanh Son hosted First Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of the ROK Chang Ho-jin in Hanoi during his visit to Vietnam for the fifth Deputy Foreign Ministerial-level strategic dialogue on diplomacy, security and defence between the two nations. Concurrently, Permanent Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam Nguyen Minh Vu and First Vice Minister Chang co-chaired the dialogue, addressing strategic issues in the bilateral relationship and discussing international and regional concerns. The two sides agreed to enhance delegation exchanges and high-level meetings, deepen defence-security cooperation within the upgraded relationship framework and establish a maritime dialogue mechanism at the general director level between their foreign ministries.
3rd	The National College of Arts and the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism of Laos and Asian Cultural Exchange Association of the ROK signed an MOU to enhance cooperation and cultural exchange between the two nations in performing arts. This collaboration includes the establishment of the "Lao Youth Orchestra", with substantial support from the ROK in the form of training, equipment, musical instruments and performance experts. The Lao Youth Orchestra will be featured in recordings and programmes for broadcasting on television channels in both countries. The MOU was co-signed by Viengphone Soukkhavong, director of the National College of Arts and Ko Do-on, president of the Asian Cultural Exchange Association.
3rd	Sarun Charoensuwan, permanent secretary for foreign affairs of Thailand, co-chaired the fourth Policy Consultation between Thailand and the ROK with Chang Hojin, first vice minister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the ROK. The meeting, held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bangkok, updated on the progress of the Strategic Partnership between Thailand and the ROK and evaluated the achievements made under their Five-Year Joint Action Plan towards Strengthening Strategic Partnership (2022-2027). Agreement was reached to upgrade the Policy Consultation mechanism to a Strategic Dialogue, reflecting the nature and focus of the discussions. Both parties discussed progress on concluding a bilateral Economic Partnership Agreement to boost trade and investment flows, and further opportunities for increased Korean investment in Thailand, particularly in electric vehicles (EV) and related industries, infrastructure development and public health cooperation. Following the meeting, an MOU on Academic Exchange and Cooperation was signed to promote collaboration in diplomat training between the Korea National Diplomatic Academy and the Devawongse Varopakarn Institute of Foreign Affairs. The agreement includes exchanges of experts and researchers, as well as the sharing of research materials and publications.

6th	The third Vietnam-Korea Digital Forum convened in Hanoi to provide an avenue for both sides to exchange collaboration needs in the realms of information technology and digital transformation. The two-day event, co-organised by Vietnam's Ministry of Information and Communications, the Embassy of the ROK in Vietnam, Korea IT Cooperation Centre and ROK's Ministry of Science and ICT, facilitated discussions on policies related to digital technology, technology development and human resource training. Businesses from both countries engaged in AI solutions for health care, smart cities, digital security and smart mobility. On the same day, the Vietnam-Korea IT Cooperation Alliance was established to represent a partnership of IT companies in both nations. The alliance is anticipated to foster collaboration, provide information on governmental business support programmes and assist companies in accessing each other's markets.
7th-10th	A delegation from the Vietnam News Agency (VNA), led by General Director Vu Viet Trang, conducted a working visit to the ROK from 7 to 10 November at the invitation of the President and CEO of the Yonhap News Agency Seong Ghi-hong. While in Seoul, Trang met ROK Minister of Foreign Affairs Park Jin on 8 November. On the same day, Trang and Seong held talks, during which VNA and Yonhap, with the support of the Korea Chamber of Commerce and Industry, signed an MOU in Seoul focusing on reports of corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes of Korean companies operating in Vietnam. Yonhap News Agency and VNA agreed to regularly cover and publish CSR activities of South Korean firms in Vietnam to strengthen economic ties and partnerships. The content provided by Yonhap will be published in VNA's electronic newspaper to enhance mutual understanding between the people of both countries through media.
8th-9th	The ROK Ministry of Defence conducted the Cyber Training and Exercise in Seoul with ASEAN members and other nations. The multinational cybersecurity exercise aims to enhance coordinated responses to cyber threats. A total of 17 participants from ADMM-Plus were engaged in the exercise, their first in-person gathering since the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout the two-day exercise, attendees simulated the investigation of cyberattacks and analysed malicious codes in a cross-border network environment.
8th-12th	The Ministry of Finance of the ROK initiated annual training programme for senior financial officials from 13 Asian nations to share financial policies and strengthen cooperation with regional partners. The 16th edition of the training programme brought together 20 director-level officials from finance ministries and central banks in countries such as Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, Kazakhstan and Mongolia. The programme focused on sharing major ROK financial policies and developmental experiences through meetings with experts and visits to institutions like the Bank of Korea. Launched in 2006, the programme aims to enhance economic and financial exchanges and cooperation with ASEAN and central Asian nations; the face-to-face programme resumed last year after a two-year hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
9th	Secretary General of ASEAN Dr Kao Kim Hourn met Commissioner of Metropolitan Transport Commission, Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport of the ROK Kang Hee-up to discuss advancements in the implementation of projects and activities outlined in the ASEAN-ROK Transport Cooperation Roadmap 2022-2025.
13th	The Korean Agency for Technology and Standards, operating under the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy (MOTIE) of the ROK, hosted a joint research workshop to enhance standards cooperation between Korea and ASEAN. Attended by 120 individuals, including 56 standards officials from 10 ASEAN countries, the workshop served as a platform to exchange findings from collaborative research since 2019 and discuss future growth strategies, such as expanding collaboration areas. Experts from both Korea and ASEAN presented on technical aspects and standardisation trends in smart manufacturing, smart cities and green construction, and proposed measures for tangible outcomes.
13-14th	The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) Ministerial Meeting was held in San Francisco, California. The 14 IPEF partners, including Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, ROK, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, the United States and Vietnam, declared the "substantial completion" of negotiations for the IPEF Clean Economy Agreement, IPEF Fair Economy Agreement and Agreement on the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity. The IPEF ministers had previously achieved substantial conclusion for the IPEF Supply Chain Agreement during the Ministerial Meeting in May 2023, where it was formally signed. The meeting detailed next steps for IPEF members, including further domestic consultations and a legal review to prepare the final texts of the three proposed agreements. Upon finalisation, these agreements will undergo domestic processes within IPEF partners for signature, followed by ratification, acceptance, or approval.
14th	Foreign Minister of the ROK Park Jin was in separate meetings with Malaysian Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Dr Zambry Abdul Kadir and Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation ministerial meetings in San Francisco, California. Park sought both countries' endorsement for ROK's bid to host the 2030 World Expo. He sought Malaysia's support for advancing the ROK's relations with ASEAN to a "comprehensive strategic partnership" 2024. The two nations also agreed to enhance economic cooperation by working towards a bilateral free trade agreement. Park also urged Indonesia's commitment to the joint KF-21 fighter jet development project, addressing concerns over overdue payments.

14th	Kim Song Nam, director of the International Department of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, held discussions with Sisavath Khamsaly, ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary of the Lao People's Democratic Republic to the DPRK, during the latter's farewell visit to the Mansudae Assembly Hall. Officials and staff from the Lao embassy in Pyongyang also attended the meeting.
14th	During a meeting between Korea Customs Service Vice Commissioner Lee Myeong-ku and Charge d'Affaires Nazarudin Jaafar of Malaysia in Seoul, an agreement was reached to enhance collaboration in combating drug crimes in response to a recent increase in cross-border drug smuggling. Both parties agreed to implement stronger measures, including enhanced security checks and information sharing, to thwart drug smuggling attempts.
15th	Kang Yun Sok, vice chairman of the Standing Committee of the Supreme People's Assembly of the DPRK met Sisavath Khamsaly during the latter's farewell visit to the Mansudae Assembly Hall. Choe Hui Thae, chairman of the Pyongyang Municipal People's Committee and Chairman of the DPRK-Laos Friendship Association, also attended the meeting alongside relevant officials and staff from the Lao embassy. On the same day, the Lao ambassador was honoured with the Order of DPRK Friendship First Class.
15th	During a meeting between the Minister of Labour and Vocational Training of Cambodia Heng Sour, ROK Ambassador to Cambodia Park Jung-wook and Kim Dong-il, deputy general director of HD Hyundai Heavy Industries Co Ltd, an agreement was reached between the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training of Cambodia and HD Hyundai Heavy Industries Co Ltd to collaborate on human resource development for Cambodia's heavy industry shipbuilding sector. This agreement aims at enhancing the skills of Cambodian workers in the shipbuilding industry.
16th	<p>The 10th ADMM-Plus took place in Jakarta, Indonesia with the participation of ASEAN defence ministers and their eight dialogue partners. The meeting, chaired by Indonesia as ASEAN chair for 2023, included sideline meetings. During the event, the ADMM-Plus Joint Statement on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) was adopted, which emphasised the commitment to implement the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on WPS. ROK Vice Defence Minister Kim Seon-ho called for strengthening international cooperation against the DPRK's nuclear and missile development, and held separate bilateral talks with the Philippines' Secretary of National Defence Gilberto C Teodoro and Laos' Defence Minister Chansamone Chanyalath on the sidelines of the meeting.</p> <p>A day before, the 17th ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting held on 15 November adopted the Jakarta Joint Declaration and guidelines for Timor-Leste's observer status. Additionally, the meeting discussed the Concept Paper on the Implementation of ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific from a Defence Perspective. Informal meetings between ASEAN and the United States, as well as between ASEAN and Japanese defence ministers, were also held on the sidelines of the ADMM and ADMM-Plus.</p>
18th	ROK Minister for Trade Dukgeun Ahn held a meeting with Thailand's Trade Representative Nalinee Taveesin in Seoul to discuss follow-up actions after the summit meeting during the UN General Assembly in September 2023. Both sides agreed to advance cooperation in the new industries and green economy, along with enhancing trade and investment in alignment with the Korea-Thailand joint action plan for 2022-2027. Negotiations for an Economic Partnership Agreement to establish a foundation for expanding trade and investment were also discussed. Suggestions were also raised on resuming the ministerial-level Joint Trade Commission for increased high-level exchanges and for Thailand to participate in the Carbon-Free Alliance initiative, focusing on achieving net zero through active utilisation of clean energy sources like nuclear power and hydrogen.
19-20th	The AKC successfully organised the "ASEAN-Korea Startup Week 2023" which featured an offline pitching contest for ASEAN startups from 19 to 20 October. The event brought together 30 promising early-stage startups from the 10 ASEAN member states, representing diverse sectors such as AI, e-commerce platforms, fintech, education and tourism. Hosted since 2018, the programme aims to foster connections between ASEAN and Korean startups and provide investment opportunities for ASEAN startups. During the pitching contest, these startups presented their business ideas to Korean venture capitalists, with the winner receiving a prize of \$30,000 and an invitation to attend NextRise, Korea's largest startup exhibition in 2024. The pitching sessions occurred on 19 October, followed by an award ceremony, lecture series and networking session on 20 October.
20th	The halal food authorities of the ROK and Indonesia finalised a reciprocal certification recognition agreement, as confirmed by Seoul's Agriculture Ministry. The Korea Muslim Foundation and Korea Halal Authority Corp, both based in Seoul, entered into this agreement with Indonesia's Halal Product Assurance Organising Agency in Jakarta. The deal stipulates that South Korean agricultural and food companies, after obtaining halal certification domestically, can export their products to Indonesia without the need for additional certification from the local halal certification agency. This agreement holds particular significance as Indonesia intends to mandate halal certification for all imported food items (excluding fresh agricultural products) starting from October 2024.

20th	Myanmar's Ambassador to the ROK U Sane participated in the International Seminar on Strengthening Climate Resilience through Mangrove Forest at Seoul National University, organised by the Korea Forest Service of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. A working lunch, led by Dr Thuang Naing Oo, director general of the Forestry Department, was held with the Myanmar delegation. The lunch discussions revolved around the ROK's commitment to provide financial support and technical assistance to the Korea-Myanmar REDD+ (Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries-plus) Joint Project. The talks also encompassed ongoing cooperation in rural development and forestry-related research activities between Korea and Myanmar. Following the lunch, Ambassador U Sane, along with the Myanmar delegation, visited the National Institute of Forest Science. Discussions included exploring areas of collaboration between the two nations and a tour of a research facility engaged in advanced lumber production.
21st	The AKC-hosted ASEAN-Korea Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Forum aimed to mark the launch of the book titled ESG Practices in ASEAN and Korea: Pathways Towards Sustainability. ESG experts from ASEAN and Korea gathered to discuss strategies for addressing and leveraging ESG issues in the dynamic international trade landscape. As part of a two-year project initiated in 2022, the AKC published a report examining the current state of ESG in ASEAN and Korea. The report highlighted ESG policies and practices in each country and various industries.
21st	The Grand Opening Ceremony of the Hyundai Motor Group Innovation Centre Singapore (HMGICS) took place in Singapore's Jurong Innovation District, featuring a speech by Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance Lawrence Wong. Operational since early 2023, the HMGICS has an annual production capacity of over 30,000 EVs, focusing on manufacturing Hyundai Motor's flagship IONIQ 5 EV and autonomous robo-taxis. The facility is equipped with fifth-generation (5G) network systems for efficient data transmission and analysis. Notably, a 3D virtual space mega-factory was established to simulate and control manufacturing processes. Hyundai plans to develop its smart manufacturing platform at HMGICS and extend its application to key manufacturing facilities in Korea and the United States to enhance manufacturing efficiency.
24th	The Consulate General of the ROK in Da Nang hosted a conference focusing on expanding investment cooperation between the ROK and central Vietnamese localities. Kang Boo-sung, ROK consul general in Da Nang, emphasised the consulate's commitment to working closely with regional areas to assist Korean businesses operating in the region and to enhance the economic partnership between the ROK and Vietnam's central region. Ho Ky Minh, the standing vice chairman of the People's Committee of Da Nang, presented information on the investment climate in Da Nang and central Vietnamese localities. He highlighted various incentives, including those related to tax, land rent, labour and equipment, which these areas provide to foreign investors. Minh also emphasised ongoing efforts to streamline administrative procedures to ensure optimal support for investors.
24th	Meas Kim Heng, secretary of state and Cambodia's Senior Officials' Meeting leader for Mekong co-chaired the 11th Mekong-ROK Business Forum with Chung Byung-won, deputy minister for Foreign Affairs of the ROK in Seoul. The forum, which included representatives from the Cambodia Chamber of Commerce, Korea International Trade Association (KITA) and investors from both the ROK and Mekong countries, offered an opportunity to enhance partnerships and deepen economic collaboration, trade and investment between the Mekong countries and the ROK.
24th-25th	The inaugural Korea Game Week 2023 was held in Da Nang, showcasing the latest gaming technologies from the ROK and its cultural aspects to central region's residents. The event was co-organised by the ROK Embassy in Vietnam, KOICA and the Vietnam-Korea University of Information and Communication Technology. Activities included a game programming and designing contest, an e-sport competition, discussions with popular gamers, streamers and influencers, an exhibition of works from the Game Graphic Design Contest, and a showcase of the Korean game industry and Korean culture space.
25th	Singapore condemned the DPRK's launch of a reconnaissance satellite on 21 November 2023, stating that it violated UN Security Council resolutions prohibiting the DPRK from using ballistic missile technology in its launch. Singapore strongly urged the DPRK to refrain from any further plans for satellite launches and reiterated its call for the DPRK to cease all provocations and adhere to its international obligations and commitments.
29th	The People's Committee of Bac Ninh province and the administration of the ROK's Gyeongsangbuk province formalised an MOU on friendly cooperation in Bac Ninh city. The MOU outlined plans for increased delegation and people-to-people exchanges to enhance mutual understanding. The provinces committed to sharing information and experiences in various sectors such as economics, trade, agriculture, culture, tourism, health and education and training. Additionally, they pledged to create favourable conditions for their respective business communities. Both provinces also agreed to accelerate the implementation of the Vietnam village project in Gyeongsangbuk province's Bonghwa county. In an earlier related event on 27 November, Secretary of the Ho Chi Minh City Party Committee Nguyen Van Nen received the same delegation prior to the commencement of the Ho Chi Minh City-Gyeongsangbuk culture and tourism festival.

29th	Korea's MOTIE and Indonesia's Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources hosted the 14th Indonesia Korea Energy Forum. The forum, comprising sessions on oil and gas, electricity and energy, and cooperation, covered various topics, such as unexplored oil and gas basins in Indonesia, the investment climate, cost recovery, gross split schemes for contractors, CCS-CCUS (Carbon Capture and Storage – Carbon Capture Utilisation and Storage) development and bidding process mechanisms. Other topics included the potential establishment of a Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) and Clean Energy Technical Centre, related Official Development Assistance plans, investment opportunities for Korean investors and launch of the KIGAM-ITB International Research Centre for Critical Minerals and Energy.
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December 2023

1st	The fifth ASEAN-Korea Day Reception was held in Jakarta. Secretary General of ASEAN Dr Kao Kim Hourn attended the event and commended the achievements made in the 34 years of ASEAN-ROK Dialogue Relations, expressing ASEAN's gratitude for the ROK's support in community-building endeavours. Dr Kao reiterated ASEAN's commitment to working closely with the ROK to further enhance ASEAN-ROK ties for a more substantive, meaningful and mutually beneficial relationship. Both sides are aiming to establish a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership by 2024, coinciding with the 35th Anniversary of ASEAN-ROK Dialogue Relations.
1st	The Philippines, led by Secretary of Budget and Management Amenah F Pangandaman, signed an MOU on Public Procurement Cooperation with the ROK in Seoul. The collaboration between the Philippines' Department of Budget and Management and the ROK Public Procurement Service (PPS) was to facilitate the exchange of ideas and explore innovative strategies for transforming the Philippine procurement landscape and enhancing bureaucratic efficiency. Prior to the MOU signing, the Philippine delegation visited the ROK PPS headquarters in Daejeon on 30 November to gain insights into KONEPS, Korea's online e-procurement system, and its daily operations. During the visit, Pangandaman met Director General for Fair Procurement Bureau Moon Kyung-rae, Director for e-Procurement Planning Han Shin-woo, Cooperation Officer Jihyoung Shin and other members of the PPS to observe their daily operations pertaining to online procurement, real-time monitoring and evaluation of procurement processes.
1st-2nd	The "Thai Binh Homecoming Day" programme, aimed at fostering cultural exchange and connecting Vietnamese businesses with their counterparts from the ROK, took place in the northern province of Thai Binh. The provincial People's Committee initiated the two-day programme and Red River Delta International Agriculture Fair on 1 December, with notable attendees including former ROK President Lee Myung Bak, ROK Ambassador to Vietnam Choi Young Sam and former Vietnamese President Truong Tan Sang. The events served to facilitate Korean firms' access to the Vietnamese market, particularly in Thai Binh, and create opportunities for domestic enterprises to expand their networks and promote their products. The programme also sought to enhance cooperation between businesses from both sides, provide Korean investors with insights into the Vietnamese market and foster collaboration across various sectors.
4th	The ROK and Cambodia conducted their inaugural joint exercise to improve the engineering capabilities of Cambodian peacekeepers under a UN partnership programme. Ten South Korean military engineers trained 32 Cambodian counterparts in facilitating logistics support for UN peacekeeping missions from 6 November to 1 December near Phnom Penh. Japan and Australia participated as observers. The exercise was part of the UN Triangular Partnership Programme, focusing on enhancing peacekeepers' capabilities in engineering, medicine and other areas through training and operational support. A bilateral agreement signed in 2022 saw South Korea handing over military equipment to Cambodia in February 2023, with plans for additional heavy equipment provision, including graders, bulldozers and vibratory rollers. The ROK Defence Ministry intends to expand combat engineers' exercises to involve other Southeast Asian nations contributing to UN peacekeeping missions, such as the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia and Thailand, starting in 2024.
5th	A delegation from the ROK Chungcheongnam province was in discussions with authorities in the northern province of Bac Giang to formalise a cooperation agreement. Chairman of the provincial People's Committee Le Anh Duong noted that the ROK holds the top position in the number of projects and is second in investment capital among 30 countries and territories investing in Bac Giang. Following the talks, both parties signed a cooperation agreement encompassing regular delegations exchange for sharing managerial experiences, cultural exchanges to enhance understanding of each other's history and culture, economic collaboration in industrial and agricultural development, and partnership in health care, education, training, high-quality human resources and labour exchange, among other areas.
5th	Secretary-General of ASEAN Dr Kao Kim Hourn participated in a briefing session organised by the AKC on its recent publication, Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) Practices in ASEAN and Korea: Pathways Towards Sustainability, held at the ASEAN Secretariat. Dr Kao commended the AKC for its ongoing support to ASEAN and praised the guidebook for facilitating private sector engagement in promoting environmental friendly and responsible business practices between ASEAN and Korea. Additionally, Dr Kao and the Secretary General of the AKC Kim Hae-yong held a meeting on the AKC's initiatives, activities and projects aimed at advancing ASEAN-ROK cooperation considering the 35th Anniversary of ASEAN-Korea Dialogue Relations in 2024.

5th	The ROK Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement condemning the attack on civilians at Mindanao State University in Marawi, the Philippines, on 3 December. The ROK's government strongly condemned the violent act, emphasising its unwavering stance that attacks on civilians are unjustifiable under any circumstances. The ROK government expressed solidarity with the people and government of the Philippines, reiterating its commitment to supporting their efforts for peace and stability.
6th	Ureerat Chareontoh, director general of Thailand International Cooperation Agency (TICA), held a courtesy meeting with Chang Won-Sam, president of KOICA, to discuss various aspects of Thailand-ROK development cooperation initiatives. Both parties acknowledged the successful conclusion of the fourth Action Plan in July 2023, indicating significant progress in overall Thai-ROK development cooperation. Examples of collaborative efforts under the fourth Action Plan included fisheries, water resource management, science, technology, innovation and human resource development. The discussion also encompassed future areas of cooperation between TICA and KOICA, particularly related to ROK's past successes in modern technology, health, environment, creative economy and culture. Focus was also placed on KOICA's five-year co-forming project and three-year fellowship programme viewed as initiatives to enhance human resource development in Thailand and improve the quality of life for people in the CLMV (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam) region.
6-7th	The ASEAN+3 Finance and Central Bank Deputies' Meeting was held in Kanazawa, Japan. Vice-finance ministers from South Korea, China, Japan and ASEAN agreed to enhance a currency swap mechanism as part of broader efforts to strengthen financial cooperation. Senior representatives from each country's respective central banks were also present. Participating officials also agreed to work towards launching the Rapid Financing Facility (RFF) under the Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralisation agreement, which offers swift financial assistance to its members facing urgent balance of payments needs. The approval for the envisioned RFF is anticipated during a ministerial meeting in 2024, with the next ASEAN+3 Finance Ministers' and Central Bank Governors' Meeting scheduled for May 2024 in Tbilisi, Georgia.
12th	The Korea-Indonesia Joint Committee meeting was held in Bali. The ROK delegation was led by Director General for Free Trade Agreement (FTA) Policy of the MOTIE Ahn Chang-yong, while Djatmiko Bris Witjaksono, Indonesia's director general of International Trade Negotiations at the Ministry of Trade, led the Indonesian delegation. This meeting marked both countries' first interaction following the entry into force of the bilateral Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) on 1 January 2023. The ROK delegation included representatives from relevant ministries, such as the Ministry of Economy and Finance, Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries and Korea Customs Service. During the Committee meeting, the two sides shared outcomes from subcommittee meetings covering trade in products, economic cooperation, tariffs and trade facilitation. They reviewed the progress in implementing the FTA over the past year, addressing trade issues, business challenges and discussing measures to enhance CEPA implementation. The discussions particularly emphasised challenges related to Indonesia's import licensing system and the establishment of an electronic certificate of origin system.
12th	Hyundai Mipo Dockyard, a leading shipbuilding company from the ROK, announced the signing of an MOU on human resources development for the shipbuilding sector with the Vietnamese Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MoLISA). According to the agreement, the company will collaborate on basic and specialised training in welding, painting and electricity with vocational training schools in Vietnam designated by MoLISA. Simultaneously, the ministry will actively seek skilled human resources and assist with immigration procedures. Participants who successfully complete this joint training initiative will undergo basic Korean language training and subsequently be despatched to work at shipyards in the ROK, including Hyundai Mipo, under the E-7 visa programme for skilled workers.
13th	An agreement was signed between Indonesia and South Korea for the development of an EV ecosystem for public transportation services in Bali. Vivi Yulaswati, deputy for maritime affairs and natural resources at the National Development Planning Agency (Bappenas), represented Indonesia, while Jaeseung Lee, the country representative of the Global Green Growth Institute, represented South Korea. The electric bus ecosystem was planned for the Greater Denpasar metropolitan area, encompassing Denpasar city and adjacent regencies of Badung, Tabanan and Gianyar (Sarbagita). The initial implementation occurred in Greater Denpasar due to its well-prepared infrastructure. Subsequently, the transition to EVs will extend to Klungkung, where economic growth potential is identified with the construction of the Bali Cultural Centre. The public transportation project has been part of the Regional Action Plan since 2020.
19th-21st	Vietnamese Minister of Planning and Investment Nguyen Chi Dung visited the ROK from 19 to 21 December, meeting with ROK agencies, organisations and businesses in the semiconductor, hydrogen, LNG and green agriculture sectors to foster cooperation in innovation and technology. This included SK Hynix's memory chip factory, an LNG storage facility in Boryeong city, SK Group's liquid hydrogen plant in Incheon city and Samsung Electronics' Samsung Digital City in Suwon city.

21st	Two Singaporeans were brought to court for their alleged involvement in the export of gas oil to North Korea. Kwek Kee Seng, 64, faced a total of 17 charges, including seven for supplying a designated export item to North Korea, violating UN (Sanctions – DPRK) Regulations 2010. His charges also included five related to acquiring benefits from criminal conduct and two for obstruction of justice. Kwek, a director at Anfasar Trading and Swanseas Port Services, faced charges along with the companies. Justin Low Eng Yeow, 54, faced nine charges for conducting financial transactions facilitating the prohibited supply of gas oil to North Korea through ISA Energy. Low, a director at ISA Energy, faced similar charges. The police statement on 21 December indicated that Low and Kwek were accomplices. Between 13 September and 2 November 2019, Kwek allegedly conspired with five others to supply over 12,000 tonnes of gas oil to North Korea through the vessel MT Courageous.
21st	Singapore strongly condemned the recent ballistic missile launches by the DPRK, including the launch of an Intercontinental Ballistic Missile on 18 December 2023. Singapore urged the DPRK to refrain from any further plans for satellite launches and reiterated its call for the DPRK to cease all provocations and adhere to its international obligations and commitments.
21st	KITA successfully hosted the second Korea-Cambodia Business Forum in Seoul in collaboration with the Embassy of Cambodia in South Korea. The forum was attended by Jeong Marn-ki, executive vice-chairman of KITA, Chring Botum Rangsay, ambassador of Cambodia to the ROK and Piseth Sok, vice president at Cambodia Chamber of Commerce, along with more than 150 Cambodian government delegates and Korean businessmen. According to KITA, ROK businesses were considering Cambodia as their third entry point into ASEAN after Vietnam and Indonesia. The FTA between the ROK and Cambodia, which came into effect in December 2022, also provided ROK companies with market access advantages.
22nd	Hanlim Architecture Group, a real estate services company from South Korea, successfully concluded an agreement to assist South Korean convenience store operator E-mart 24's entry to the Cambodian market. The collaboration is established through a joint venture named Saihan Partners. Formed earlier in 2023, Saihan Partners is a collaboration between Hanlim Architecture Group and Cambodian retail company Seasons Brother Holding Corp. The joint venture originated from a three-party MOU signed in August 2023, involving E-mart 24, Cambodia's Saison Group and Hanlim Architecture Group. Under the agreement, Saihan Partners aims to inaugurate E-mart 24's initial outlet in the first half of 2024 in Phnom Penh, with plans to progressively increase the count to 100 by 2028. Hanlim intends to position itself as a hub for Korean food cultural experiences through E-mart 24 convenience stores and is set to expand to include food delivery services in collaboration with local delivery companies after the first outlet launch.
22nd	A delegation of Philippine officials, led by Ministry of Foreign Affairs Undersecretary for Migrant Workers' Affairs Eduardo José A de Vega, visited officials of the ROK Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Seoul. The ROK delegation was headed by Deputy Foreign Minister and Representative to Korean Nationals Overseas Protection and Consular Affairs Hong Seok-in. Both parties acknowledged the importance of migration for bilateral relations and expressed anticipation for strengthened cooperation in this domain. Discussions also included recent incidents impacting regional security, and both parties reaffirmed their shared commitment to a rules-based international order.
25th	President of the State Affairs Commission of the DPRK Kim Jong Un received a floral basket and a congratulatory letter from the diplomatic corps in the DPRK in celebration of the New Year, Juche 113 (2024). The Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam to the DPRK Le Ba Vinh presented the floral basket and letter to a DPRK official on 25 December on behalf of the diplomatic corps. Additionally, Ambassador Vinh conveyed a floral basket to President Kim Jong Un on the same day.
27th	Cambodian Minister of Labour and Vocational Training Heng Sour signed an MOU with ROK Mayor of Chuncheon city Kangwon province Yook Dong Han to provide opportunities for Cambodians seeking employment as seasonal workers in South Korea. The signing ceremony was held at the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training in Phnom Penh. Alongside seasonal recruitment, the minister urged the mayor to encourage the city's factories to welcome skilled Cambodian workers. In return, Yook expressed appreciation for the ministry's reliable cooperation, citing its experience in sending workers to the ROK under the Employment Permit System and signing an MOU on sending seasonal workers to various Korean cities and districts.
27th	As part of its seventh circumnavigation to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Korean War Armistice agreement, two Korean Navy vessels carrying over 400 sailors visited Manila. The Korean Navy cruise training task group, consisting of helicopter training ship ROKS Hansando and combat support ship ROKS Hwacheon, docked at Manila South Harbour on 27 December as part of a seven-day port call until 2 January. Various activities were conducted during this time. These included a wreath-laying ceremony at the Korean War memorial, attending a Defence Industry Exhibition on board ROKS Hwacheon and showcasing Korea's Navy Sea GHOST (Guardian Harmonised with Operating manned Systems and Technology-based unmanned system) to Philippine Navy officers. Additionally, a passing exercise with the BRP Jose Rizal of the Philippine Navy was held to strengthen the relationship between the two navies. This Manila port call marked the 28th of its kind in the country, the highest recorded for ROK Navy port calls in any Asian nation.

29th	The Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs condemned the DPRK's ballistic missile launch on 18 December.
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This chronology of events is cross-referenced from the following ministries, institutions and news sources:

The ASEAN Secretariat; The ASEAN-Korea Centre; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brunei Darussalam; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Kingdom of Cambodia; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the 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 Government of Timor-Leste; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea; The Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy 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; Vietnam Plus; The Korean Central News Agency; NK News; NK Pro; Yonhap News Agency; and The Korea Times.