

From K-Content to A-Content: The Ascent of Asian Storytelling on the Global Stage

Hojin Kwon (권호진)

Hojin Kwon is Senior Executive Director, Seoul Broadcasting System Medianet

Since I embarked on my journey in Korean entertainment more than three decades ago, I have witnessed the remarkable rise of Korean content from obscurity to global prominence. This odyssey, known as "Hallyu: The Korean Wave", has been an exceptional journey filled with setbacks, triumphs and deep pride in the capacity of Korean storytellers in captivating audiences worldwide.

My professional journey has been deeply intertwined with this cultural phenomenon. I remember my maiden voyage to MIPTV in Cannes in 1993, just one year after joining Seoul Broadcasting System Productions. Fuelled by passion and an unwavering belief in the potential of Korean storytelling, I set up a small booth at the Palais des Festivals in Cannes to showcase Korean content on the global stage, a bold move at a time when Korean content was struggling to gain international recognition.

Little did I know that this humble beginning would lay the groundwork for the "Hallyu" explosion that has since swept across Asia and beyond. Korean dramas, films, entertainment and music have attracted a fervent fan base, driven by their impeccable production standards, universal themes and skilful fusion of traditional Asian values with contemporary narratives.

In particular, the rise of K-pop has been instrumental in pushing "Hallyu: The Korean Wave" forward. K-pop acts have pioneered a visually stunning and genre-defining musical style that resonates with audiences around the world. With massive social media followings and meticulously choreographed performances, they have become global icons, drawing huge crowds across continents.



"Hallyu : The Korean Wave" making an impact at MIPTV, Cannes, France.

However, the influence of Korean content extends beyond music. Korean dramas have highlighted the depth and artistry of Korean storytelling. These dramas have struck a chord with viewers across cultural boundaries by

IN THIS ISSUE

ESSAYS

- 1 From K-Content to A-Content: The Ascent of Asian Storytelling on the Global Stage by *Hojin Kwon*
- 3 Making the Shrimps Stronger: Strengthening South Korea-ASEAN Security and Defence Cooperation by *Mae Chow*
- 5 **Book Review**
The Future of South Korea's Grand Strategy in the 21st Century? by *Lam Peng Er*

7 Media Interview

Yoon Promises Reform after Election Debacle

8 Highlights at the Korea Centre

10 Forthcoming Publication

Engaging North Korea by *Lam Peng Er (ed)*

11 Recent Publications

Contemporary Korea-Southeast Asian

Relations: Bilateral and Multilateral by *Lam Peng Er (ed)*

South Korea's New Southern Policy: A Middle Power's International Relations with Southeast Asia and India by *Lam Peng Er (ed)*

12 Primary Documents and Resources

ASEAN-Korea Relations: A Chronology of Key Events, January 2024 to March 2024



At the 28th Asian Television Awards in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

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skillfully exploring universal themes of family ties, friendship, sacrifice and social criticism through a distinctly Korean lens.

As someone who has been deeply involved in the planning, production, distribution and development of various content genres, including dramas, movies, animation and entertainment, my most cherished memories revolve around tirelessly promoting Korean content abroad when they were still a niche in Asia.

Today, I am filled with pride and gratitude as I witness the global phenomenon that Korean content has become. Its appeal extends far beyond Asia, captivating audiences around the world with its compelling stories and unique cultural perspectives.

With this success, however, comes a heightened sense of responsibility. As global audience expectations escalate, the Korean entertainment industry must strive to push boundaries and expand narrative horizons. The recent 28th Asian Television Awards in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, where I was privileged to serve as a judge, demonstrated the rising standard of content in Asia.

I believe it is time to move beyond labels like "K-content", "J-content", "C-content", or "T-content" and embrace the concept of "A-content" (Asian content), recognising that Asian storytelling has truly come into its own on the global stage. I hope that Korean content will continue to resonate with global audiences for many years to come, serving as a catalyst for growth alongside content from not only Asian countries but the world at large.

As I look ahead, I am filled with excitement and optimism for the continued growth and resilience of the Korean content industry. This journey has been a collective effort and I am grateful to have been a part of it. While challenges may lie ahead, I am confident that the innovation and artistry of Korean storytellers will continue to push boundaries and take Asian content to the next level, enthraling audiences worldwide and solidifying the legacy of "Hallyu: The Korean Wave" for generations to come.

...it is time to move beyond labels like "K-content", "J-content", "C-content", or "T-content" and embrace the concept of "A-content" (Asian content), recognising that Asian storytelling has truly come into its own on the global stage.

Note: Hojin introduced K-content to the world and is a member of the International Academy of Television Arts and Sciences and a jury member of Series Mania, Global Entertainment Awards, Asian TV Awards, Asian Academy Creative Awards, Asian Content Awards and Global OTT Awards at Busan International Film Festival

Making the Shrimps Stronger: Strengthening South Korea-ASEAN Security and Defence Cooperation

Mae Chow

Mae Chow is a Researcher attached to the Centre on Asia and Globalisation at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore

The Indo-Pacific region is rapidly evolving into a hotspot for geopolitical rivalry among great powers. As a Korean proverb aptly warns, “고래 싸움에 새우 등 터진다”, or “when whales fight, the shrimp’s back is hurt”, reiterating the harsh reality for smaller states. With a long history of being dragged into great power conflicts, South Korea must step up collaborative efforts with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to bolster strategic autonomy, leveraging partnerships to extend influence and contribute to upholding peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific.

IN RECENT YEARS, SOUTH KOREA HAS MADE CONCERTED EFFORTS TO ENHANCE SECURITY COOPERATION WITH ASEAN... HOWEVER, DESPITE IMPROVEMENTS, THE 2024 STATE OF SOUTHEAST ASIA SURVEY REVEALED THAT SOUTH KOREA REMAINS THE LEAST “PREFERRED AND STRATEGIC PARTNER” TO ASEAN.

Despite becoming a sectoral dialogue partner in 1989, Seoul has often neglected engagement with ASEAN on defence and security issues.¹ Consequently, South Korea has consistently been regarded as the least “preferred and trusted strategic partner for ASEAN to hedge against uncertainties of the US-China strategic rivalry” in the State of Southeast Asia Survey.² To substantiate strategic ties with ASEAN and position itself as a leading middle power, this paper argues that South Korea should actively participate in ASEAN-led security mechanisms and demonstrate agency by strengthening defence ties with ASEAN.

¹ See <https://en.asaninst.org/contents/30-years-of-asean-korea-partnership-from-prosperity-to-peace-with-people/> (accessed 17 April 2024).

² See <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/category/centres/asean-studies-centre/state-of-southeast-asia-survey/> (accessed 17 April 2024).

Not enough? Gaps in South Korea-ASEAN Defence Relations

In recent years, South Korea has made concerted efforts to enhance security cooperation with ASEAN. Initiatives such as President Moon Jae-In’s New Southern Policy Plus and the Korea-ASEAN Solidarity Initiative (KASI) under President Yoon Suk-Yeol’s Indo-Pacific Strategy have expanded comprehensive security cooperation to address pressing issues like maritime security. However, despite improvements, the 2024 State of Southeast Asia survey³ revealed that South Korea remains the least “preferred and strategic partner” to ASEAN. South Korea remains a key participant of ASEAN-led security mechanisms, notably the ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting Plus (ADMM+), which serves as the central entity for regional security cooperation involving the 10 ASEAN member states and eight key partners (Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, Russia and the United States). In addition to participating in meetings and training exercises, the Republic of Korea has also taken up leadership roles in key initiatives, such as co-chairing the ADMM+ Experts’ Working Group (EWG) on Maritime Security from 2017 to 2020.

While South Korea’s “active” participation within the ASEAN security architecture may seem apparent, its involvement is less robust than that of other ADMM+ members. For instance, though South Korea launched “ASEAN Cyber Shield” in 2023 to strengthen cyber resilience, it lags behind Japan, which established the ASEAN-Japan Cybersecurity Capacity Building Centre in 2018 and has conducted regular workshops to boost regional cyber resilience. From 2006 to 2023, South Korea hosted five ADMM+ meetings, fewer than Australia’s 12, New Zealand’s nine, India’s eight and tying with Japan at five. This suggests that Seoul has been less active in hosting these meetings compared to its regional counterparts, reflecting how it has fallen behind in regional defence cooperation. Thus, Seoul should proactively engage in the ADMM+ by demonstrating greater commitment to regional security through partnerships and leveraging its strengths to build substantial strategic engagement with ASEAN.

Furthermore, South Korea’s bilateral engagement with ASEAN displays a selective disproportionality. According to South Korea’s Ministry of National Defence releases from 2014 to 2023, partnerships with the Philippines were most frequent at five times, followed by Vietnam, Indonesia

³ See <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/centres/asean-studies-centre/state-of-southeast-asia-survey/the-state-of-southeast-asia-2024-survey-report/> (accessed 17 April 2024).

THE FREQUENCY OF CONTACT WITH MALAYSIA, THE PHILIPPINES, AND INDONESIA ALSO REFLECTS SOUTH KOREA'S INTERESTS IN THESE COUNTRIES BASED ON ITS DEFENCE EXPORT MARKET OUTLOOK POTENTIAL RATHER THAN A CONCERTED STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT.

and Malaysia's four times each. Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia were mentioned one to two times each, while other ASEAN member states were not mentioned. The frequency of contact with Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia also reflects South Korea's interests in these countries based on its defence export market outlook potential rather than a concerted strategic alignment.⁴ This highlights the necessity for South Korea to adopt a more inclusive engagement strategy across all ASEAN member states to foster stronger regional partnerships.

Aligning Interests: Areas for Strengthening Security Engagement

Firstly, South Korea's defence engagements with ASEAN have to be improved within ASEAN-led security mechanisms.

Building on South Korea's previous leadership in promoting regional maritime security through the ADMM+ framework, Seoul can collaborate with ASEAN to develop stronger maritime security practices. This includes capacity-building programmes and joint exercises on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief and Search and Rescue drills. During these exercises, South Korea can also showcase the capabilities of its advanced submarines to enhance maritime security. Another critical aspect of cooperation could be on anti-piracy. South Korea can lead efforts to strengthen regional law enforcement by reporting and sharing information on piracy incidents and conducting specialised exercises to manage them. This would establish stronger maritime security partnerships in the region and create opportunities for potential arms sales.

As a member of NATO's Cooperative Cyber Defence Group with cybersecurity ties to the United States and United Kingdom, the Republic of Korea can leverage its strengths in cybersecurity to engage more effectively with ASEAN. With a high level of cyber resiliency, scoring 98.52 according to the Global Cybersecurity Index, South Korea surpasses all ASEAN member states and ties with Singapore and Japan to become the region's most active regional cybersecurity partner.⁵ Leveraging its expertise, Seoul can spearhead the

⁴ See <https://keri.koreaexim.go.kr/comm/getFile?svrclId=BB-STY1&upperNo=101523&fileTy=ATTACH&fileNo=2> (accessed 17 April 2024).

⁵ See <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Cybersecurity/Pages/global-cybersecurity-index.aspx> (accessed 17 April 2024).

development of regular cyber training programmes and conduct exercises to complement ongoing efforts aimed at enhancing cybersecurity. This initiative will solidify South Korea-led cybersecurity enforcement in the region. Following ASEAN regional cooperation strategy on cybersecurity, South Korea can extend support to vulnerable ASEAN member states at a bilateral level. This approach aids in narrowing the digital gap among ASEAN members, reinforcing cyber resilience within ASEAN while enhancing strategic ties between South Korea and ASEAN.

Beyond actively participating in ASEAN-led mechanisms, South Korea should consider conducting more frequent bilateral exercises to meet the specific needs of its Southeast Asian partners. In addition to maritime cooperation, South Korea can conduct jungle-based disaster relief simulations in landlocked countries like Vietnam. Under the United Nations Partnership Programme, Seoul can also engage in joint exercises, including medical training and operational support for peacekeeping efforts, tailored to the specific security interests of ASEAN. With these "soft boots" on the ground, South Korea will further security engagement with ASEAN and secure greater peace and stability in the region.

South Korea can also deepen its defence engagement by collaborating with Southeast Asian countries to modernise their military capabilities. This crucially requires the South Korean side to sustain the competitiveness of its highly tailored defence export strategy and ensure that it effectively meets the security demands and capabilities of ASEAN. This includes having favourable payment terms and allowing for technology transfer and collaboration. South Korea can also donate soon-to-be-retired arms to less developed ASEAN members as a goodwill gesture. While an ASEAN Defence Industry Collaboration may be out of reach in the near future,⁶ Seoul can initiate collaboration through small projects among ASEAN members and establish itself as a regional supplier and central hub for maintenance, repair and overhaul of defence equipment. This solidifies South Korea as a regional defence partner and opens avenues for future arms procurement and collaboration opportunities with ASEAN.

United as a Troupe: The Collective Strength of the Shrimps

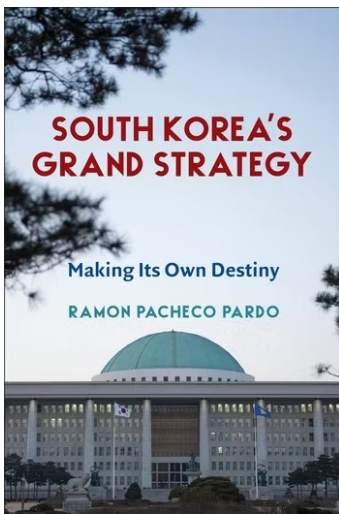
Evidently, there are many untapped opportunities for deeper security engagement between South Korea and ASEAN to improve their strategic autonomy and maintain the peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific. According to the saying, "the shrimp that falls asleep is carried by the current", South Korea has the potential of asserting its leadership as a leading middle power in the region instead of succumbing to the structural constraints of a middle power. By expanding strategic collaboration, South Korea and ASEAN can contribute to strengthening peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific amidst rising geopolitical tensions.

⁶ See <https://thediplomat.com/2024/02/the-case-for-greater-asean-defense-industry-collaborations/> (accessed 17 April 2024).

The Future of South Korea's Grand Strategy in the 21st Century?

Lam Peng Er

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



With *South Korea's Grand Strategy: Making Its Own Destiny*, Ramon Pacheco Pardo has written a pathbreaking, scholarly book that explains comprehensively, systematically, and persuasively why South Korea has swiftly emerged as a middle power shaping its own future. Not only does this book analyze South Korea's foreign policy and grand strategy very well, but it is also a useful case study

for comparison with the strategies of other quintessential middle powers. In the study, Pacheco Pardo illustrates that, notwithstanding the domestic politics of the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the political pendulum of progressive and conservative presidents, the country has maintained a strategic consistency in becoming a regional and global middle power.

To be sure, the ROK's quest for security, prosperity, and status is not unique; most states in the international system—small, medium, and great—pursue such aims. What is most impressive about the ROK case, however, is the vision, will, capability, and opportunities of the country amid geostrategic and material constraints to catapult from being a metaphoric “shrimp among whales” to become a big fish among whales within a generation or two since the end of the devastating Korean Civil War divided the peninsula and nation.

In the spirit of a friendly and respectful debate for the author and scholars of Korea, I have nine observations and suggestions for future research on the ROK's grand strategy. Indeed, although some of these issues with implications for South Korea's grand strategy touch on the book's discussion, others were not highlighted. Some of my proposals are speculative because they address black swans and future challenges in an uncertain world.

First, a detailed analysis of the ROK as a G-20 country would be welcomed. Indeed, being a G-20 member is a signifier of being a solid middle power. In what ways has South Korea shaped the agenda of G-20 summits and

working groups? How important is the G-20 in the ROK's grand strategy? What are the results, if any?

Second, there is a need for detailed research on the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS) based in Seoul. Arguably, the Northeast Asia subregion has suffered from an “institutional deficit” of regionalism in contrast with Southeast Asia. Through the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Southeast Asia leads the larger East Asian region in multilateral institutions, including ASEAN +3, the East Asia Summit, the ASEAN Regional Forum, and the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus. What is the ROK's leadership role in the nascent TCS? Does South Korea play a bridging role between China and Japan? How does the TCS feature in Seoul's grand strategy?

Third, the “brains” and thinkers of South Korea's grand strategy deserve more explicit attention. While Pacheco Pardo's book does a sterling job in describing and analyzing the change and continuities of the country's grand strategy through its various presidencies, the key advisers, top bureaucrats, and scholars—who presumably played a pivotal role in crystalizing the grand strategy for their presidents—remained anonymous in his main text. It would be interesting to see a few key strategists and their thoughts and roles in shaping grand strategy on behalf of their presidents highlighted.

WHAT IS MOST IMPRESSIVE ABOUT THE ROK CASE, HOWEVER, IS THE VISION, WILL, CAPABILITY, AND OPPORTUNITIES OF THE COUNTRY AMID GEOSTRATEGIC AND MATERIAL CONSTRAINTS TO CATAPULT FROM BEING A METAPHORIC “SHRIMP AMONG WHALES” TO BECOME A BIG FISH AMONG WHALES WITHIN A GENERATION OR TWO SINCE THE END OF THE DEVASTATING KOREAN CIVIL WAR DIVIDED THE PENINSULA AND NATION

Fourth, it would be useful to examine Korean public opinion and elite surveys on South Korea's foreign policy and role in the world. After all, the ROK is a democracy, and elite and public opinion do matter in certain areas of policymaking. Presumably there is a national consensus that supports the ROK's grand strategy, but it would be valuable to see if this hypothesis is supported by empirical evidence.

Fifth is the issue of North Korea's relentless nuclearization. Around 70% of the South Korean public favors going nuclear to counter threats from Pyongyang and Beijing.¹ Though the United States remains committed to extended nuclear deterrence of the ROK, there is the niggling untested question of whether the United States is willing to exchange Seattle for Seoul in a catastrophic nuclear war with North Korea if future U.S. presidents were to advocate "America first" at the expense of U.S. allies. Is it conceivable that Seoul would seriously consider the nuclear option for its security by paradoxically adopting mutual assured destruction as deterrence if there is the perception, rightly or wrongly, that a future U.S. president may waver in the commitment to unequivocally extend the nuclear umbrella to South Korea? How would this emerging debate within South Korea shape its future grand strategy?

Sixth, what role should the ROK have in arenas of human security and peacebuilding pursued by some middle powers? To be sure, the ROK has participated in many UN Peacekeeping Operations. But unlike Japan, Sweden, Norway, and Finland, South Korea has not been noted to seek the consolidation of peace in conflict or post-conflict areas that have suffered civil wars. Ideally, South Korea would acquire the knowledge, diplomatic expertise, and sense of mission to pursue a peacebuilding role often associated with quintessential middle powers as honest brokers in conflicts.

Seventh is the shadow of history cast on the mentality of South Korean elites and the public. Besides the residual historical issue of Japanese imperialism and colonialization (which colors contemporary South Korea–Japan relations) is the historical, tributary relations of various Korean kingdoms with the Sinic Middle Kingdom. In the past decade there have been few box office successes in South Korea that depicted the painful and asymmetrical relations between the Korean vassal state and its Sinic overlord, and, arguably, that such K-movies have done so well in the South Korean market means that there is a resonance among the public for such historical themes. To be sure, the international system in the 21st century is quite different from the traditional Sinic suzerainty system. But given the assertiveness of a rising China, it is an inescapable conundrum for a South Korean middle power that must maneuver between its most important security ally, the United States, and its most important economic partner, China, which are engaged in a hostile geostrategic competition. It would be illuminating if elite interviews and public opinion surveys could capture the disquiet, if any, about the Korean middle power coexisting with the Chinese Middle Kingdom. If indeed this hypothesis were to pan out, what might be the impact of this lingering perception of an overbearing China on ROK grand strategy in the 21st century?

Eighth, as a middle power, what should South Korea's

role be in global governance, especially in UN specialized agencies? There are at least fifteen specialized agencies, and two are reserved for the leadership of the United States (the World Bank) and Europe (the IMF). China leads four out of these fifteen agencies. To be sure, three South Koreans have led in the UN and its specialized agencies.¹ In 2022, however, former foreign minister Kang Kyung-hwa lost her bid to become the director-general of the International Labour Organization even though she had impressive credentials. This episode reveals the fact that it is not easy for a Korean middle power to win the leadership role of a UN agency, and South Korea's current role in global governance via the UN specialized agencies is very modest at best. It would be interesting to see if the ROK will become bolder and more skillful in engaging in multilateral coalition-building to secure the bids of its candidates for director-general roles in UN specialized agencies.

Lastly, South Korea's total fertility rate of 0.70 in 2023 is the lowest in the world. This worrisome trend has negative implications for the ROK's middle-power role over the long run, as the replacement level is 2.1 births per woman. South Korea's population may "decline to 36.64 million by 2060 and just 15.63 million in 2100—less than a third of South Korea's population as of 2021,"² and the country is facing the rapid aging of its workforce. Thus, the ROK may well be confronted with the "guns versus butter" dilemma—how to ensure its own security and remain a viable ally to the United States while increasing welfare payments to a rapidly aging society. Will future presidencies grapple with the politically sensitive issue of raising taxes? Confronted by sharp demographic decline and rapid aging, will South Korea in the next few decades have the wherewithal to pursue its grand strategy as a middle power? There are neither easy answers nor easy solutions to these questions in the decades ahead.

In conclusion, Pacheco Pardo's fascinating book, rich in information and balanced analysis, has opened new lines of enquiry in the study of South Korea's foreign policy and middle-power grand strategy. I hope that at least a few of my thoughts may contribute to this roundtable discussion and a better understanding and appreciation of the ROK as a middle power shaping its own destiny for a better world.

Note: Article reproduced courtesy of Asia Policy. The article appeared in volume 19, number 1 (January 2024), pp. 153-156.

¹ These three were former UN secretary general Ban Ki-moon, former director-general of the World Health Organization Lee Jong-wook, and the former secretary general of the International Maritime Organization Lim Ki-tack.

² Troy Stangarone, "South Korea's Demographic Trends Continue to Decline," *Diplomat*, August 9, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/08/south-koreas-demographic-trends-continue-to-decline>.

MEDIA INTERVIEW

Yoon Promises Reform after Election Debacle

The Republic of Korea's President Yoon Suk-yeol promised "reform" and the head of his ruling party resigned on Thursday, after the main opposition won a landslide victory in a parliamentary election.

Prime Minister Han Duck-soo and all senior presidential secretaries, except those in the Office of National Security, offered to resign to take responsibility for the election defeat, the presidential office said.

"I will strive to reform state affairs and stabilize the economy and improve people's livelihoods," said Presidential Chief of Staff Lee Kwan-seop, delivering Yoon's message in a televised briefing.

Yoon said he would humbly accept the will of the people in the general election, Lee said.

With all votes counted, the liberal opposition Democratic Party, or DP, won 161 out of 254 directly contested constituency seats, while Yoon's ruling People Power Party, or PPP, obtained 90 seats, tentative results from the National Election Commission showed.

Including proportional seats, the DP and its proportional representation satellite party won 175 seats in the 300-member National Assembly.

Also in the media spotlight is former justice minister Cho Kuk, whose newly launched liberal party won 12 seats.

The PPP, together with its satellite party, won a total of 108 seats.

DESPITE ITS OVERWHELMING VICTORY, THE OPPOSITION FELL SHORT OF SECURING A SUPERMAJORITY OF 200 SEATS THAT WOULD HAVE ENABLED IT TO OVERTURN PRESIDENTIAL VETOES, REWRITE THE CONSTITUTION AND EVEN IMPEACH THE PRESIDENT. IT STILL MEANS THAT YOON, IN THE REMAINING THREE YEARS OF HIS SINGLE FIVE-YEAR TERM, WILL STRUGGLE TO PURSUE HIS AGENDA WITH THE COUNTRY'S EXECUTIVE AND LEGISLATIVE BRANCHES SPLIT BETWEEN TWO POLITICAL PARTIES IN A DIVIDED GOVERNMENT

Despite its overwhelming victory, the opposition fell short of securing a supermajority of 200 seats that would have enabled it to overturn presidential vetoes, rewrite the constitution and even impeach the president.

It still means that Yoon, in the remaining three years of his single five-year term, will struggle to pursue his agenda with the country's executive and legislative branches split between two political parties in a divided government.

DP leader Lee Jae-myung said he is grateful for the people's support and called winning the general election not only a victory for the party, but also "a great victory for the people".

"The DP will actively take the lead in solving problems related to people's livelihoods," he said at a disbanding ceremony for the party's election committee on Thursday.

The bitterly fought race was seen by some analysts as a referendum on Yoon, who has suffered low ratings for months amid a cost of living crisis and a spate of political scandals.

"The election results have starkly reflected the public's strong dissatisfaction with the first two years of President Yoon's administration, placing him in a very difficult predicament," Yoo Sung-jin, a professor at Scranton College of Ewha Womans University, said.

The election result showed that voters primarily hold the president and the ruling party accountable for the current political and economic situation, Yoo said.

"Without a significant change in governance style, implementing the president's agenda will be challenging," he said.

Pushing Forward Agenda

Despite heightened polarization between the two main parties and a National Assembly dominated by the opposition, Lam Peng Er, principal research fellow of the Korea Centre at the National University of Singapore's East Asian Institute, said Yoon may still push forward his policy agenda.

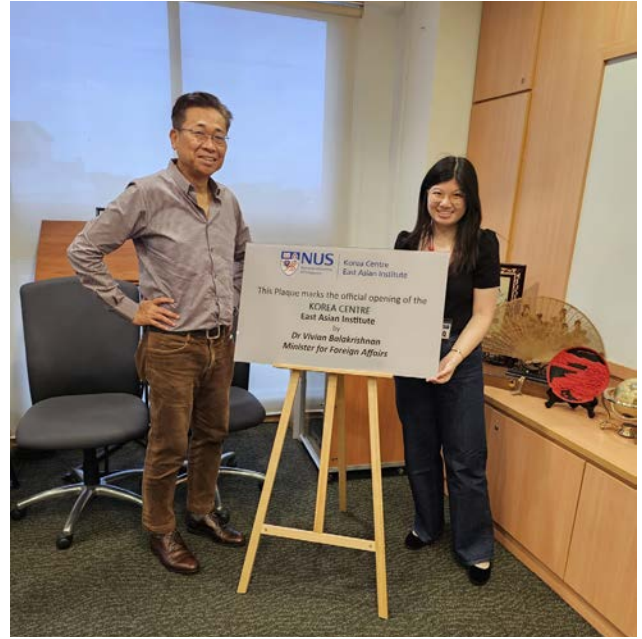
"I will not be so pessimistic by saying that the Yoon administration is doomed to become a lame duck for the next three years," Lam said. "It really depends on the skill of the leaders of the People Power Party to negotiate with the other parties."

Noting that general elections mainly focus on domestic issues, Lam said he expects Yoon to remain powerful in setting the direction for foreign policy.

Yoon will likely continue his policy to reinforce relations with the United States and Japan, while keeping a hard-line stance toward Pyongyang, Lam said, adding that the opposition-led legislature will still have a say in the national budget for diplomatic activities and defense.

Note: Article written by Yang Han in Hong Kong, China Daily, 12 April 2024. Reproduced courtesy of China Daily.

Highlights at the Korea Centre



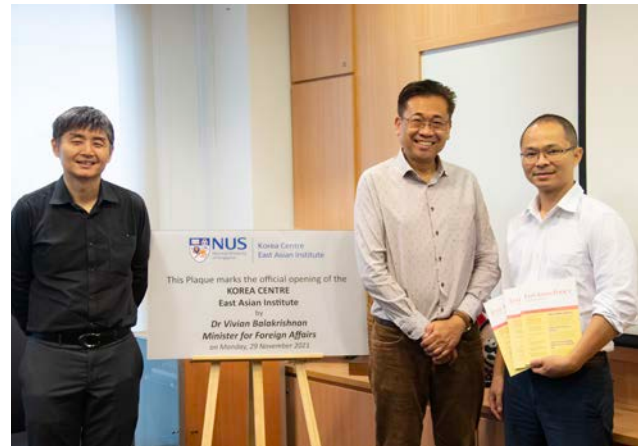
(From left) Discussions with Professor Shoji Tomotaka, National Institute of Defence Studies, Japan, Ministry of Defence and with Ms Mae Chow, Research Assistant, Centre of Asia and Globalisation, Lee Kuan Yew School, National University of Singapore.



Meeting with Mr Chun Young-Hee, director general for Korean Peninsula Peace Regime, Republic of Korea, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



With Dean Lien Hung-yi and Vice Dean Lu Yeh-chung, College of International Affairs, both from the National Chengchi University, Taiwan.



(From left) Meeting with Professor Kuik Cheng-Chwee, head of Asian Studies, National University of Malaysia and with the Vietnamese Political Counsellor, Mr Ha Anh Tuan.



At the DPRK Embassy in Singapore, marking the 82th Birthday Anniversary of former Chairman Kim Jong-il.

Forthcoming Publication

Engaging North Korea

Editor: Lam Peng Er

Publisher: Routledge of London and New York

Year of Publication: 2024

Contents

List of Figures and Tables

Contributors

Introduction

1. Engaging North Korea: A Task for Sisyphus? *by Lam Peng Er*

Superpowers and the DPRK

2. The United States' Diplomacy towards a Nuclearizing DPRK: Agreed Framework, Six-Party Talks and Summits *by Jihwan HWANG*

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

Regional Great Powers and the DPRK

4. Russia and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the 21st Century
by Vitaly KOZYREV

5. Japan and North Korea: Reminders of Forgotten Realities
by Haruko SATOH

Korean Middle Powers

6. Containment versus Engagement: South Korea's Polarized Politics and Different Approaches to the North Korean Conundrum *by Hahnkyu PARK*

7. North Korea's Relentless Nuclear Path: Advances in Nuclear Capability and Doctrine *by Sung Chull KIM*

ASEAN Middle Powers

8. Singapore-Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) Relations: Diplomacy and Humanitarian Assistance
by Gordon KANG

9. The Vietnam-DPRK Experience: Sharing and Engagement for Peace and Prosperity *by NGUYEN Thi Tham and HA Anh Tuan*

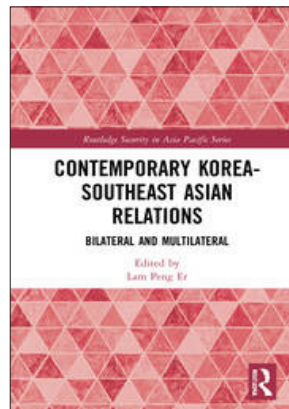
Discreet Roles of the European Union, Sweden and Ireland

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

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

Recent Publications

Contemporary Korea-Southeast Asian Relations: Bilateral and Multilateral



Editor: Lam Peng Er

Publisher: Routledge

Year of Publication: 2022

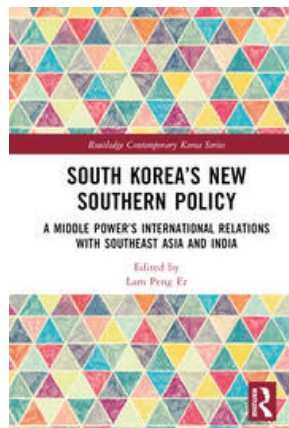
Description:

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=EAlaIqobChMI-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

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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.

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CHRONOLOGY

ASEAN - Korea Relations

A Chronology of Key Events: January 2024 to March 2024

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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 2024

9th	The ASEAN-Korea Centre, led by Secretary General Kim Hae-yong, organised the 11th ASEAN Connectivity Forum at The Westin Josun Seoul. The theme of this year's forum was Digital Connectivity; experts from ASEAN and Korea's government, private sector and academia were invited to discuss collaboration opportunities in digital connectivity. The first session, the 'ASEAN-Korea Expert Session', covered discussions on ASEAN Connectivity efforts and its future, regional cooperation for ASEAN's digital connectivity, internet infrastructure development, data management and collaboration between ASEAN and Korea. The second session, the 'ASEAN Digital Connectivity Project Presentation', featured government officials from 10 ASEAN member states sharing updates on digital connectivity projects and policies in areas such as 5G networks, digital currency, cybersecurity and e-commerce market analysis. Additionally, online business meetings took place from 10 January to 8 February, providing Korean companies with opportunities to explore connectivity projects in ASEAN.
9th	H E Hong Jin-wook, ambassador of the Republic of Korea (ROK), presented his credentials to Singapore President Tharman Shanmugaratnam at the Istana, officially commencing his role as ambassador. He expressed his commitment to enhancing bilateral relations, maintaining high-level exchanges and promoting meaningful cooperation between the Republic of Korea and Singapore, especially in anticipation of the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 2025.
9-13th	Indonesian Transport Minister Budi Karya Sumadi conducted a working visit to the ROK and China, where he met his counterparts to discuss enhancing cooperation in transport infrastructure for economic development, such as on railways and aviation sectors. He held meetings with ministers and industry representatives to deliberate plans for constructing a Light Rail Transit (LRT) in Bali, an Autonomous Rail Transit in the Nusantara capital city and advanced railway communication and signalling networks. Additionally, cooperation opportunities regarding commercial aircraft were explored. Budi also conferred with leaders and representatives from transport and banking agencies, specifically addressing plans and funding for projects like the LRT project in Bali to alleviate traffic congestion as the first rail-based mass transportation system on the island.
12th	Samsung C&T completed the construction of Merdeka 118, a 118-storey skyscraper in Malaysia, establishing it as the world's second-tallest building at 679 metres. The construction and trading firm, affiliated with the Samsung Group, held an opening ceremony in Kuala Lumpur's central area to commemorate the project's completion.
15th	ROK Deputy Minister for Political Affairs Chung Byung-won met H E Saleumxay Kommasith, Laos deputy prime minister and minister of foreign affairs, where they discussed bilateral ties and ASEAN-ROK cooperation. A handover ceremony was also conducted for protocol vehicles and IT equipment to support Lao PDR's ASEAN chairmanship. Chung also engaged in discussions with H E Thongphane Savanphet, deputy minister of foreign affairs, and held the fifth Korea-Lao PDR High-level Policy Consultation with Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Phoxay.

16th	ROK deputy nuclear envoy Lee Joon-il held meetings with Thai officials urging Bangkok's support in addressing the North Korean nuclear issue. Lee also met separately with Bolbongse Vangphaen, deputy director-general of ASEAN affairs at Thailand's foreign ministry, and Luejit Tinpanga, director of international security at the National Security Council. During these meetings, Lee outlined North Korea's recent escalation of tensions on the Korean Peninsula, including its labelling of South Korea as a 'principal enemy', to emphasise the significance of joint international efforts to deter Pyongyang's nuclear and missile development. He called on Thailand and other ASEAN members to participate in such efforts, highlighting the ASEAN Regional Forum as the only regional multilateral security forum where North Korea is present. Both sides also agreed to enhance cooperation against North Korea's cyber threats and combat illegal North Korean workers in the information technology sector, known for generating revenue for the regime's weapons programme.
17th	ROK Trade, Industry and Energy Deputy Trade Minister Yang Byeong-nae met Septian Hario Seto, deputy minister for Indonesia's Coordinating Ministry for Maritime and Investment Affairs, at Signiel Seoul to discuss strengthening economic cooperation between Korea and Indonesia. Yang emphasised the increasingly close bilateral relations following President Yoon Suk Yeol's assumption of office and expressed the desire to enhance bilateral trade and investment. He sought the Indonesian government's support for Korean automakers' and battery manufacturers' investment in Indonesia's resource-rich areas to develop the electric vehicle (EV) ecosystem and expand into ASEAN's EV markets. Both sides also discussed cooperation in nuclear power, hydrogen and clean energy sources, including President Yoon's Carbon-Free Initiative proposed during the United Nations General Assembly in September. MOTIE plans to leverage platforms like the Korea-Indonesia Economic Cooperation Committee to strengthen supply chain ties in electric vehicles (EVs), batteries and other advanced areas, and to expand collaboration in new industries based on their complementary industrial structures.
18th	Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN for ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Ekkaphab Phanthavong held discussions with the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Senior Officials' Meeting Leader of the ROK Chung Byung-won at the ASEAN Secretariat. They shared perspectives on ASEAN-ROK relations and deliberated on strategies to promote ASEAN-ROK collaboration and establish an ASEAN-ROK Comprehensive Strategic Partnership alongside the 35th Anniversary of Dialogue Relations this year.
19th	Thailand's Minister of Education Permpoon Chidchob met the Ambassador of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) to Thailand Kim Je-bong at the Ministry of Education. Permpoon commended North Korea's school system for its "discipline and patriotism" and sought North Korea's "educational support to discipline children with patriotism and respect for country leaders".
24th	Vietnam Social Security signed an agreement with the National Pension Service of the ROK as a final step towards implementing a bilateral agreement on social insurance that came into force on 1 January 2024. This agreement aims to safeguard the lawful rights and interests of workers participating in social insurance schemes in both countries. It aims to prevent double social insurance contributions by Vietnamese and Korean citizens working in each other's countries and enhance information sharing between enforcement agencies to improve labour management practices.
25-26th	The First ASEAN Plus Three (APT) Task Force Meeting was held at Luang Prabang View Hotel in Luang Prabang province. It was co-chaired by officials from Laos and South Korea, along with representatives from the Bank of Laos and Bank of Korea. It was also joined by participants from the finance ministries and central banks of APT countries, the ASEAN Secretariat and the APT Macroeconomic Research Office (AMRO). Discussions on the first day centred on regional financing arrangements, including transforming the Rapid Finance Facility, integrating new funding structures and utilising Freely Usable Currencies. Additionally, participants exchanged views on the Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralisation implementation, disaster risk financing initiatives, and updates from the World Bank and Asian Development Bank on various programmes. The second day focused on AMRO's achievements, governance issues, budget plans for 2024 and strategic matters, including performance evaluations and director selection processes.
26th	In a telephone conversation, Vietnamese Minister of Foreign Affairs Bui Thanh Son and his counterpart from the ROK Cho Tae Yul affirmed their commitment to enhancing trust between the two nations through high-level delegation exchanges and bolstering trade ties. They also pledged to accelerate the implementation of the action programme under the Vietnam-ROK Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Both ministers agreed to collaborate closely in economic investments, R&D, cultural development and education, amongst other domains. Cho recently assumed office as ROK foreign minister on 9 January 2024.

26-27th	During the ASEAN Tourism Forum 2024 held in Vientiane, Laos, the 44th Meeting of ASEAN Plus Three (APT) with China, Japan, and Korea was concurrently held, attended by H E Nguyen Trung Khanh, chairman of Vietnam National Authority of Tourism. Under the ASEAN Plus Three cooperation framework, supported by the ASEAN-China Centre, ASEAN-Japan Centre and ASEAN-Korea Centre, the three partner countries mainly offered technical assistance through training courses on tourism promotion, product development and exchange programmes. China organised three activities, including the China-ASEAN Expo Tourism Exhibition and the China International Tourism Fair. Japan hosted the ASEAN-Japan Tourism Ministers' Special Dialogue and conducted bilateral projects with several ASEAN member states. Meanwhile, Korea carried out various activities under the Korea Partnership Initiative for Sustainable Tourism and provided Overseas Development Assistance to the Philippines from 2023 to 2026.
29th	President of the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics (HCMA) Nguyen Xuan Thang and Chancellor of the Korea National Diplomatic Academy (KNDA) Park Cheol-hee held a working session in Hanoi, during which Chancellor Park expressed interest in expanding cooperation through specialised training for officials and lecturers provided by the HCMA, along with courses for trainees and the organisation of a semiconductor forum. They also discussed and agreed to collaborate on climate change response, particularly in maritime security in the region. At a seminar on maritime security cooperation and cooperation in the Greater Mekong Sub-region earlier, jointly organised by the HCMA and the KNDA, key measures to ensure a safe maritime environment were emphasised, highlighting the importance of collective efforts involving organisations or countries rather than unilateral actions. Additionally, areas such as preserving marine resources, protecting the marine environment and enhancing law enforcement capacity at sea were identified as requiring stronger regional cooperation and agreements.
31st	The ASEAN-Korea Centre, led by Secretary General Kim Hae-yong, collaborated with the Philippine Department of Tourism to host the inaugural 'Sustainable Development Forum' at the Princessa Garden Island Resort in Palawan, Philippines. Themed "Exploring Innovative Tourism Marketing Strategies", the forum addressed the evolving needs for digital marketing and sustainable tourism practices. It centred on digital marketing, big data and the broader implications of digitalisation in the tourism sector. The aim was to enhance the competitiveness of tourism professionals, deepen understanding of Korean tourists' behaviours and facilitate a collaborative platform for sharing insights and exchanging knowledge.
31st	ROK Second Vice Minister of Land, Infrastructure and Transport Baek Won-kug and Indonesian Minister of Transportation Budi Karya Sumadi signed an agreement permitting airlines to operate flights freely between their regional airports. During their talks, they agreed to open up flight routes between six regional cities in each country. Specifically, airlines are now allowed to operate flights between airports in six Korean cities – Busan, Daegu, Cheongju, Jeju, Muan and Yangyang – and Indonesia's Batam, Manado, Lombok, Yogyakarta, Balikpapan and Kertajati. Additionally, they established two new flight routes between ROK's Incheon and Indonesia's Batam and Manado, along with two more routes connecting regional cities in Korea to Jakarta and Bali. Moreover, both sides agreed to enable airlines from both countries to freely engage in code-sharing agreements for flights to Bali. This agreement is expected to address the inconvenience of limited direct flights from Incheon to Indonesia.

February 2024

6th	Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA) Director-General Hacheong Yun met with Deputy Secretary-General of the Council for the Development of Cambodia Suon Sophal in Phnom Penh. In line with plans to strengthen the ROK-Cambodia free trade agreement (FTA), they announced plans to host a forum aimed at promoting investment in Cambodia, with the goal of raising awareness among Korean investors about opportunities in the Cambodian market. Yun expressed gratitude for the council's collaboration in organising support activities and expressed confidence in the success of the investment stimulation plan. Deputy Secretary-General Sophal praised the establishment of the Korea Desk and welcomed KOTRA's initiative to raise Korean awareness of Cambodia's investment climate through the upcoming business forum, anticipating a significant increase in Korean investment in Cambodia as a result, though no date for the event was specified.
6th	Cambodian Under-Secretary of State of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation H E Ke Sovann welcomed a courtesy call from Director-General for Korean Peninsula Peace Regime of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the ROK H E Chun Young-Hee at the Cambodian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They discussed the enduring cooperation and friendship between their nations, along with shared interests in regional and global affairs, including adherence to United Nations Security Council Resolutions.

9-10th	Executive chairman of Samsung Electronics and leader of Samsung Group, Lee Jae-yong, visited Malaysia to oversee the group's battery business and show support to employees working abroad during the holiday season. Samsung SDI, the organisation's battery unit which operates in Seremban, Malaysia, runs Plant 1 and is in the process of constructing Plant 2 since 2022 to meet rising demand for cylindrical batteries. During his visit, Lee inspected both plants, interacted with employees, provided gifts and addressed their concerns. Additionally, he visited Southeast Asia's largest store, established in 2022 by Samsung Electronics and Malaysian retail company Senheng, to gauge consumer responses to IT gadgets.
12-14th	The Philippine Space Agency (PhilSA), headed by Director General Joel Joseph Marciano Jr, conducted a technical visit to the Republic of Korea. During the visit, Marciano met officials from Perigee Aerospace Inc. at their Rocket Development Complex (RDC) in Okcheon-gun, Chungcheongbuk-do, ROK, joined by Philippine Ambassador Theresa Dizon-De Vega and embassy staff. Discussions centred on areas of cooperation outlined in the 2022 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between PhilSA and Perigee Aerospace Inc, including plans for small space launch vehicles and the development of Perigee Aerospace's Blue Whale 1 launch vehicle. PhilSA also explored potential collaborations with Jeju University and Jeju Self-Governing Province for educational programmes and test launches. Additionally, discussions addressed the launch and recovery of space vehicles and potential commercial operations in the Philippines. Both parties discussed specialised educational programmes aimed at fostering space industry development, particularly focusing on manufacturing and utilising space launch vehicles.
13th	SK Nexilis Co Ltd (SK Nexilis) established the inaugural green syndicated term loan facility (green loan) through its Malaysian subsidiary, SK Nexilis Malaysia Sdn Bhd, to fund the construction of its first overseas copper foil manufacturing facility in Sabah. With an annual production capacity of 50,000 tons, the RM2.3 billion facility doubled SK Nexilis' global production capacity, with the copper foils exclusively intended for use in electric vehicle batteries and supporting sustainable, low-carbon mobility solutions in various regions, including Korea, Malaysia, Poland and North America. OCBC Bank (Malaysia) Bhd served as the green loan structuring adviser, playing a key role in structuring the green loan and advising on the underlying Green Financing Framework to align with SK Nexilis' Environmental, Social and Governance objectives. OCBC Bank also fulfilled roles as mandated lead arranger, facility and security agent, and joint lender, alongside AmlInvestment Bank Bhd as mandated lead arranger and AmBank (M) Bhd as the joint lender. In alignment with best practices, SK Nexilis engaged Moody's to issue a second-party opinion report, certifying the Green Loan Framework's compliance with green loan principles.
13th	ROK Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul held his first telephone conversation with Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi. Discussions include bilateral relations and significant regional and global matters. Retno congratulated Cho on his inauguration and proposed further cooperation to enhance Korea-Indonesia relations to mark their 50th anniversary the previous year. Cho expressed his appreciation for the well wishes and advocated the strengthening of collaboration to bolster the 'Special Strategic Partnership' between the two nations.
19th	The Apsara National Authority (ANA) of Cambodia and Korean Cultural Heritage Administration signed an MOU on "Cooperation for the Cultural Heritage Sector" in Seoul. The three-year plan from 2024 to 2026 focuses on conserving and restoring the main temple in Angkor Archaeological Park in Siem Reap province. This MOU follows a joint statement released last February in Siem Reap, Cambodia and includes sharing technologies, experiences and information on cultural heritage preservation, organising workshops and training sessions, conducting joint investigations and research, and collaborating on cultural heritage policy. ANA Director General Hang Peou and Korean Cultural Heritage Administration Director Choi Eung-Chon signed the MOU, marking the commencement of the "Angkor Wat Conservation and Restoration Project" with the support of South Korea's Official Development Assistance commitment. The project aims to train professional archaeologists, exchange conservation technologies and share knowledge with tourists.
19th	Cambodian Secretary of State of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and ASEAN Senior Officials' Meeting Leader of Cambodia H E Kung Phoak hosted the Ambassador of the ROK to ASEAN H E Lee Jang-keun. They explored avenues to bolster collaboration in the ASEAN-ROK Dialogue Relations, focusing on key areas outlined in ASEAN's three pillars. Additionally, they shared perspectives on regional and global matters during the meeting.
21st	ROK Minister of Foreign Affairs Cho Tae-yul met the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia Retno LP Marsudi during the G20 Foreign Ministers' Meeting. They discussed bilateral relations and global issues. Cho congratulated Indonesia on its recent successful elections and affirmed Korea's dedication to collaborating with the new Indonesian government. Retno welcomed the meeting and proposed enhancing the "Special Strategic Partnership" between the two countries. They agreed to ensure the progress of joint projects like fighter jet development and Korea's involvement in Indonesia's electric vehicle industry. Additionally, they pledged to boost cooperation in trade, investment and infrastructure, while addressing challenges faced by Korean businesses in Indonesia. Cho appreciated Indonesia's support for peace on the Korean Peninsula and sought its cooperation in sending clear messages to North Korea during key meetings.

21st	The ASEAN-Korea Centre convened the '16th Annual Meeting of the Council of the ASEAN-Korea Centre' in Lotte Hotel Seoul. High-ranking government officials from the 10 ASEAN member states and Korea and the council directors conducted a comprehensive review of the outcomes of FY2023 programmes and gave their endorsement to the proposed programmes and budgets for FY2024. A reception was held, attended by approximately 150 key stakeholders from ASEAN Embassies in Seoul, relevant organisations, academia and media.
21st	Cambodian Minister of Public Works and Transport H E Peng Ponea met H E Park Jung-Wook, ambassador of the Republic of Korea to Cambodia in Phnom Penh. Peng Ponea urged South Korea to increase investments, particularly those aligned with Cambodia's Comprehensive Intermodal Transport and Logistic System (CITLS) Master Plan 2023-2033, highlighting that the CITLS plan of 174 priority projects requires around US\$36.6 billion in investments. He also mentioned the upcoming construction of the Cambodia-Korea Friendship Bridge (Phsar Chas-Chroy Changvar-Areyksat) in 2025. Additionally, they explored further collaboration opportunities for infrastructure development and connectivity in Cambodia.
21st	Indonesia and South Korea agreed to resume collaboration on developing the next-generation KF-21 fighter jet during a bilateral meeting between their foreign ministers. Retno LP Marsudi and Cho Tae-yul discussed the project on the sidelines of the Group of 20 Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The KF-21, developed by Korea Aerospace Industries with partial support from Indonesia, serves as a cost-effective alternative to the US-built F-35, upon which South Korea relies. However, Indonesia had deferred payment of 20% of the development cost, causing uncertainty in the project. Jakarta withheld payments for nearly two years, with South Korea estimating Indonesia's outstanding debt at almost KRW1 trillion. In their meeting, the ministers committed to facilitating smooth progress in strategic cooperation projects, including the joint fighter jet development and South Korea's involvement in Indonesia's electric car ecosystem establishment. Additionally, they pledged to collaborate on revising Indonesia's import quota and the bilateral double taxation avoidance agreement to improve the investment climate for South Korean companies.
22nd	The sixth Consular Consultation between the Republic of Korea and the Kingdom of Thailand was held at the ROK Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Seoul, co-chaired by Director-General of the Consular Affairs and Safety Bureau of MOFA Yoon Chusokand Director-General of the Department of Consular Affairs at the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs Rooge Thammongkol. During the session, the two sides deliberated various consular matters. The ROK expressed appreciation for Thailand's active collaboration in managing incidents involving Korean nationals in Thailand and sought the Thai government's support to ensure the safety of Korean visitors in Thailand, especially with their increasing numbers post-COVID-19. Additionally, the ROK raised concerns about the rising number of undocumented Thai residents in the ROK and proposed joint efforts to address the issue. The Thai side urged the ROK to enhance scrutiny using the Korea Electronic Travel Authorisation (K-ETA) system to prevent entry denials of Thai nationals at ROK airports, highlighting its importance in mitigating dissatisfaction among Thai nationals. The ROK acknowledged the need for strict entry inspections due to the increase in undocumented residents and measures to prevent unintended harm to innocent Thai nationals.
26th	The National Assembly Secretariat of the ROK, led by Secretary General Jae Hyun Baek, visited the Brunei Legislative Council (LegCo) and met by LegCo Speaker Yang Berhormat Pehin Orang Kaya Seri Lela Dato Seri Setia Awang Haji Abdul Rahman bin Dato Setia Haji Mohamed Taib. They highlighted their longstanding cooperative relationship with Indonesia and expressed hopes for further strengthening relations. Discussions centred on the education systems in both countries, recognising education as a vital foundation for national and individual development. They agreed to enhance bilateral cooperation through people-to-people exchanges and mutual visits, and sharing best practices on areas of mutual interest.
26th	The Philippines advanced economic cooperation with the ROK through significant infrastructure projects aimed at enhancing the country's physical connectivity. Senior officials from the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), led by Senior Undersecretary Emil K Sadain, held official meetings in Seoul with Korean financing institution Korea Export-Import Bank (KEXIM) and Korean construction companies supporting key infrastructure projects. During discussions with KEXIM officials, Sadain emphasised the importance of close collaboration between the Philippines and Korea in supporting infrastructure development, covering roads, bridges and flood control structures. KEXIM has been instrumental in financing several flagship infrastructure projects in the Philippines, including the Samar Pacific Coastal Road Project Phase I, Panguil Bay Bridge, Integrated Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation Measures and the ongoing Panay-Guimaras-Negros (PGN) Island Bridges project. The PGN project, a priority initiative of the Marcos administration, receives consulting services from Yooshin Engineering Corporation, a leading Korean engineering firm, in joint venture with several Korean companies, for the engineering services of the 32.47-kilometre bridge connecting Panay, Guimaras and Negros Islands.

27th	South Korea's National Intelligence Service (NIS) established a consultative body with intelligence agencies from Cambodia, Laos, the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand and the Republic of Korea at an inaugural meeting to enhance efforts against drug trafficking, particularly with relation to the increasing use of cyberspace and presence of major drug syndicates across the region. They agreed to exchange real-time information on cross-border drug crimes and develop a joint response strategy to combat drug-related offences more effectively. The NIS highlighted that over 70% of seized drugs in Korea are believed to have been smuggled from abroad, primarily originating from the Golden Triangle, spanning the border regions of Thailand, Laos and Myanmar.
27th Feb - 8 Mar	Over 9,500 participants and observers from 30 nations convened in Thailand for Exercise Cobra Gold, the annual security cooperation drills co-hosted by Thailand and the United States. This edition, the largest post-pandemic gathering, featured a combined joint all-domain operation involving more than 2,200 military personnel from the ROK Marine Corps and Navy, the Royal Thai Air Force and Navy, and the US Air Force, Army, Marine Corps and Navy. Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the ROK, Singapore, Thailand and the United States engaged in combat rehearsals and other exercises during Cobra Gold, while Australia, India and the People's Republic of China participated in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief drills. Personnel from 20 other countries served as observers and planners.
28th	Indonesia's inaugural electric vehicle battery cell factory, the PT Hyundai LG Indonesia Green Power factory, commenced operations, according to the Investment Ministry/Investment Coordinating Board. Over 90% of the factory's output is expected to be exported to South Korea and subsequently to India. As a joint venture between Korea's Hyundai Motor Group and LG Energy Solution, the establishment of this factory underscores the commitment to advancing Indonesia's EV industry and fostering economic growth.

March 2024

3-5th	ROK Deputy Minister for Trade Yang Byeong-nae travelled to Jakarta, Indonesia for high-level discussions with Indonesian counterparts and meetings with Korean companies operating locally to strengthen bilateral economic cooperation between South Korea and Indonesia. The visit aimed to advance the agenda items agreed upon during the Korea-Indonesia summit in September 2023, focusing on EVs, batteries, critical minerals supply chain and foundational technology talent development. Discussions also explored expanding cooperation in areas supporting carbon neutrality goals and future industries, such as nuclear energy and carbon capture and storage in depleted oil and gas reservoirs. Yang's meetings covered various topics, including cooperation in EVs, critical minerals supply chain and clean energy with Indonesia's Energy and Natural Resources Ministry. Plans for launching the Korea-Indonesia E-Mobility Cooperation Centre were affirmed to closely collaborate on building an EV and battery ecosystem. Additionally, discussions with Indonesia's Ministry of Industry addressed issues faced by Korean companies entering the local market, resulting in an MOU on talent training in foundational technology. This MOU aimed to provide local Korean companies with quality industrial talent. Yang also sought support for resolving issues regarding Indonesia's import quota. Discussions with Korean company representatives focused on issues related to entering and expanding into Indonesian and ASEAN markets, and plans to incorporate these opinions into bilateral governmental cooperation channels to facilitate export and investment for Korean firms.
4th	Ambassador of the ROK to Thailand H E Park Yongmin, paid a visit to Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs H E Sihasak Phuangketkeow, as part of his new responsibilities. They discussed strategies to bolster bilateral cooperation so as to leverage each other's economic strengths. Encouraging high-level visits, they aimed to boost private sector confidence and enhance bilateral trade and investment, especially in sectors like EVs, biotechnology and semiconductors. On regional and global issues, they agreed to maintain close consultations on foreign policy and regional developments.
5th	The Philippine Embassy in Seoul celebrated the 75th anniversary of diplomatic ties with the ROK by hosting a launch reception to celebrate the enduring relationship and extensive collaboration between the two nations since 1949. The event welcomed guests from the Korean government, private sector, diplomatic corps and other international partners. Philippine Ambassador to the ROK Theresa Dizon-De Vega highlighted the historical ties predating formal relations in 1949, recounting early exchanges such as Moon Soon-deuk's role as an interpreter for Filipino shipwreck survivors off Jeju Island in 1801. President and Chair of the Global Green Growth Institute and the eighth Secretary-General of the UN General Assembly, H.E. Ban Ki-Moon, graced the occasion as a special guest.
6th	Indonesian Defence Minister Prabowo Subianto held discussions with the Ambassador of the ROK to Indonesia Lee Sang-deok at the Indonesian Ministry of Defence, regarding bilateral cooperation in defence technology transfer. Prabowo expressed openness to strengthening ties and his appreciation of South Korea's involvement in joint defence projects, particularly in submarine procurement. He urged the continued prioritisation of cutting-edge technologies and knowledge transfer. Lee congratulated Prabowo on his apparent victory in the 2024 presidential election and expressed optimism about maintaining strong relations with South Korea under his leadership.

8th	At the ASEAN headquarters, Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN for Political-Security Community H E Dato' Astanah Abdul Aziz met Ambassador of the ROK to ASEAN H E Lee Jang-keun. They discussed ASEAN-ROK relations and explored avenues to enhance cooperation, particularly in light of the 35th Anniversary of ASEAN-ROK Dialogue Relations occurring this year.
8th	Cambodian Minister of Labour and Vocational Training Heng Sour met the Minister of Labour and Employment of the ROK Lee Jung Sik in Seoul to discuss labour and vocational training cooperation. During the meeting, Heng Sour expressed gratitude for the ongoing cooperation on labour and vocational training, particularly the work permit system established since 2006, which has enabled Cambodian workers to earn substantial incomes to support their families and gain valuable experience. He also requested further coordination on the Skills Workers Programme (E-7) and proposed enhancing cooperation between the Korean Occupational Safety and Health Agency and the Department of Occupational Medicine. On 9 March 2024, Heng Sour met around 250 members of the Cambodian community in Korea.
12-13th	Director General for FTA Policy at the ROK Trade, Industry and Energy Ministry Ahn Chang-yong led a Korean delegation to the 20th Korea-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (FTA) Implementing Committee meeting in Jakarta, Indonesia. The meeting aimed to evaluate FTA implementation and explore avenues for upgrading the FTA, alongside joint research projects to adjust to the evolving landscape following the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement signed in 2020. They discussed strategies to enhance the Korea-ASEAN FTA, focusing on aspects like digital trade and supply chains. The Korean delegation also engaged in separate discussions with the ASEAN Secretariat to explore contributions to RCEP and economic cooperation measures.
13th	During the Second Vice Ministers' Strategic Dialogue between Indonesia and the ROK in Seoul, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia Pahala Nugraha Mansury and First Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of the ROK Kim Hong Kyun reaffirmed their commitment to enhancing the Special Strategic Partnership through mutually beneficial cooperation. They highlighted the significance of ongoing bilateral mechanisms like the Joint Commission's Meeting, Strategic Dialogue, High-Level Dialogue on Investment and the Joint Committee on Economic Cooperation to foster cooperation. Specifically in economic cooperation, they aimed to maximise the Indonesia-Korea Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, focusing on sectors such as EVs, energy transition, infrastructure and health. Additionally, they reiterated their support within ASEAN-ROK, MIKTA (Mexico, Indonesia, the ROK, Türkiye and Australia), APEC, G20 frameworks and discussed various global issues including Palestine, Myanmar and the Korean Peninsula. The ROK pledged support for Indonesia's accession to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. Alongside the dialogue, Indonesian representatives engaged in meetings with prominent ROK companies to promote the "Indonesia Go Global" initiative and foster investment and partnerships between Indonesian SOEs and ROK partners.
13th	Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Kim Hong Kyun conducted the Second Vice Ministerial-Level Strategic Dialogue with Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia Pahala Nugraha Mansury in Seoul. Discussions encompassed various cooperation domains, spanning bilateral relations, defence, economic security (including EV batteries and critical minerals), nuclear energy, maritime collaboration, climate change and regional and global affairs. Kim stressed the importance of completing the joint development programme for fighter jets (KF-21/IF-X) with Indonesia's assistance, while Pahala affirmed Indonesia's commitment to active engagement. Kim expressed a desire to enhance collaboration with Indonesia in areas like the EV ecosystem, batteries and critical mineral supply chains, while raising concerns regarding challenges faced by Korean firms in Indonesia, such as the import approval system. Additionally, he sought Indonesian support for Korean companies' involvement in infrastructure projects, notably the construction of its new capital city.
14th	The president of the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), Chang Won Sam, held a meeting with Cambodian Prime Minister Samdech Thipadei Hun Manet at the Peace Palace in Phnom Penh to discuss strengthening development cooperation between the ROK and Cambodia through KOICA's grant aid programmes. Hun Manet acknowledged the past achievements of the partnership with KOICA and expressed gratitude to South Korea for enhancing bilateral relations and contributing to global peace and development. Chang highlighted Cambodia as the third-largest recipient of grants from KOICA and announced plans to allocate \$14 million for projects focusing on improving a Referral Hospital in Dangkor district and digitising the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum in Phnom Penh in 2024. He further conveyed that KOICA would consider supporting six new projects totalling \$64 million in areas including public administration, health care, education, agriculture and transportation in 2025.

15th	The First ROK-Vietnam Maritime Dialogue took place in Hanoi chaired by ROK director-general for ASEAN and Southeast Asian Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kim Dong-bae, and vice chairman of the National Boundary Commission of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam, Ambassador Trinh Duc Hai. The dialogue aimed to strengthen substantive maritime cooperation outlined in the "Action Plan on the Implementation of Comprehensive Strategic Partnership" signed during ROK President Yoon Suk Yeol's state visit to Vietnam in 2023. This marked the third bilateral maritime dialogue initiated by Korea, following those with China and the Philippines. Discussions to enhance substantive cooperation between the two nations included ocean economy, marine environment, maritime safety and security cooperation, regional and multilateral maritime-related agendas, and areas of interest for collaboration.
15th	Two Indonesian nationals from the Indonesian state-owned aircraft manufacturer PT Dirgantara Indonesia, working on the ROK-Indonesia KF-21 fighter jet project in Seoul, were instructed not to leave the country as authorities probed a suspected technology leak from Korea Aerospace Industries (KAI). The engineers allegedly violated the ROK's Defence Acquisition Programme Act and leaked technology related to the KF-21. While no arrests were made, they were restricted from leaving South Korea pending verification. For two days, South Korean police conducted raids on KAI's head office in connection with the suspected leak.
16th	An annual general meeting of the DPRK-Laos Friendship Association convened in Pyongyang, with the chairman of the Pyongyang Municipal People's Committee and the association, Choe Hui Thae, alongside other association members in attendance. During the meeting, Pak Kyong Il, vice chairman of the Korean Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries and the association, delivered a report. The report highlighted the association's efforts over the past year in fostering friendly and cooperative ties between the two nations.
19th	Vietnamese Deputy Prime Minister Tran Luu Quang hosted a reception in Hanoi for president of the KOICA, Chang Won-sam. During the meeting, President Chang announced an increase in official development assistance (ODA) from the ROK to Vietnam, reaching over US\$52 million, nearly doubling the amount provided in 2023. Deputy PM Quang expressed deep appreciation for the ROK's ODA contributions, highlighting their significant role in Vietnam's socio-economic development. He expressed hope for the ROK to become Vietnam's leading ODA provider in the future. Quang underlined the importance of development cooperation within the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries and proposed continued support from KOICA to further strengthen bilateral ties. He urged for an increase in non-refundable aid, particularly in areas like innovation, digital transformation and high-tech development. Additionally, he sought the assistance of KOICA in suggesting to the ROK government to fund a rural power supply project in Dien Bien province. Chang's visit aimed to evaluate KOICA's projects in Vietnam and discuss cooperation plans for the 2024-2027 period, following commitments made by President Yoon Suk-yeol during his previous visit to Vietnam.
20th	ASEAN secretary-general, Dr Kao Kim Hourn, met the permanent representative of Vietnam to ASEAN, Ambassador Nguyen Hai Bang, at the ASEAN Secretariat. They discussed preparations for Dr Kao's upcoming working visit to Vietnam, following an invitation from Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh to participate in the ASEAN Future Forum scheduled for April. Additionally, Dr Kao expressed gratitude for Vietnam's continuous support to the ASEAN Secretariat's work and leadership as the country coordinator for ASEAN-Japan Dialogue Relations from 2018 to 2021 and ASEAN-Republic of Korea Dialogue Relations from 2021 to 2024.
20th	A North Korean individual, Nam Chol Ung, was identified in a new report from the UN Panel of Experts on the DPRK, to have allegedly used a network of businesses in Thailand and Laos to unlawfully bring in brandy and other goods for the regime and gain access to the international financial system, contravening UN sanctions. The report indicated that Nam purchased lubricating oil from a Thai firm for the Sobaeksu United Corporation, a branch of North Korea's Munitions Industry Department, in May 2023. Additionally, the report stated that he had acquired 2,108 cases of brandy worth \$45,141 from an unidentified Indian company in 2023 for export to North Korea. While alcohol is not generally sanctioned, the Panel has previously noted that some beverages could be considered luxury items subject to UN sanctions. The report also mentions that the North Korean individual falsified trade contracts for importing items, including lubricating oil shipments. Apart from engaging in sanctioned trade, Nam purportedly owns businesses, resorts and restaurants in Thailand and Laos.

21st	At the 11th Meeting of the ASEAN-ROK Joint Cooperation Committee (JCC) held at the ASEAN headquarters on 21 March, ASEAN and the ROK reiterated their commitment to advancing their partnership. Co-chaired by permanent representative of Vietnam, Ambassador Nguyen Hai Bang, and Ambassador of the RoK to ASEAN Lee Jang-keun, the meeting marked Vietnam's final JCC role as the coordinator for ASEAN-RoK relations in the 2021-2024 period. Progress in ASEAN-ROK cooperation over the past year, including follow-up activities from the 24th ASEAN-RoK Summit and implementation of the ASEAN-ROK Plan of Action (2021-2025), was acknowledged. The ROK's continued support for ASEAN Centrality and community building efforts was appreciated, along with its commitment to strengthening cooperation, exemplified by initiatives like the Korea-ASEAN Solidarity Initiative. Both sides welcomed the 35th Anniversary of ASEAN-ROK Dialogue Relations and looked forward to establishing an ASEAN-RoK Comprehensive Strategic Partnership at the 25th ASEAN-ROK Summit in conjunction with the anniversary celebrations.
21st	Myanmar's Ambassador to South Korea U Thant Sin attended the International Day of Forests 2024 event held in Seoul. He acknowledged the partnership between the Korean Forest Service and Asian Forest Cooperation Organisation (AFoCO) for Korean forest conservation and reiterated Myanmar's commitment to forestry development through bilateral initiatives, particularly the Regional Education and Training Centre under AFoCO. Myanmar pledged to adhere to UN and AFoCO directives for forestry sector development and strengthen forestry cooperation with the ROK.
22nd	At a breakfast meeting held by ASEAN Secretary-General Dr. Kim Hourn with ROK Ambassador to ASEAN Lee Jan-keun, the discussion centred on Dr Hourn's upcoming visit to the ROK for the Jeju Forum for Peace and Prosperity scheduled in May 2024, along with exchanging updates on ASEAN-ROK cooperation.
25th	Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam Central Committee Le Hoai Trung was in discussions with Director Kim Song Nam of the International Department of the Central Committee of the Workers Party of Korea in Hanoi. Trung reiterated Vietnam's enduring commitment to its friendship with the DPRK across all levels. He proposed increasing exchanges to bolster mutual understanding and collaboration in various sectors. Trung also suggested effective utilisation of existing cooperation mechanisms and expanding cultural, sports and people-to-people exchanges, together with enhanced coordination at multilateral forums. Kim, who led the DPRK delegation to Vietnam, emphasised the importance of advancing Vietnam-DPRK friendship and party-building efforts. He affirmed the DPRK's appreciation for the longstanding friendship with Vietnam and expressed readiness to strengthen ties. Both parties discussed and assessed cooperation outcomes, agreeing on measures to enhance their roles and implement cooperation directions set during Kim Jong-un's 2019 visit to Vietnam.
25th	Approximately 30 international experts from institutions such as the Korea Atomic Energy Research Institute (KAERI), the Indonesian Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, the Thai Atomic Energy Research Institute and Vietnam Atomic Energy Research Institute, participated in a symposium centred around "International joint research symposium on water and wastewater treatment using E-beam technology". During the symposium, participating countries shared insights into environmental challenges and ongoing research concerning wastewater treatment, solidifying objectives for future collaborative research and outlining plans. Notably, Indonesia had previously engaged Dr Yoo Seungho's research team from KAERI in 2023 to address dyeing wastewater treatment and is actively pursuing radiation technology transfer requirements. Vietnam and Thailand expressed their interest in acquiring effective technologies for treating non-degradable sewage and wastewater. Participants also sought to collaborate with the ROK on water treatment technology utilising mobile electron accelerators, technology transfer opportunities and joint research cooperation.
25-27th	The Agency of Foreign Trade under the ROK Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy and the ASEAN Secretariat convened a joint session of ASEAN and Korean experts to discuss the transposition of ASEAN-Korea Free Trade Agreement (AKFTA) product-specific rules from harmonised system codes HS 2017 into HS 2022. Representatives from the ROK and 10 ASEAN member states participated in the three-day event held in Quang Ninh province. The delegates reviewed nearly 7,000 tariff lines of the product-specific rule transposition list in AKFTA for converting them from codes HS 2017 to HS 2022. Discussions also centred on the progress and mechanism for implementing rules of origin in line with the new HS code.

26th	<p>Permanent member of the Party Central Committee's Secretariat and head of the Party Central Committee's Organisation Commission of Vietnam, Truong Thi Mai, hosted a reception for a delegation from North Korea's Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) in Hanoi. Led by Director of the International Department of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party Kim Song Nam, the delegation visited Vietnam from 25 to 28 March 2024. Mai commended the WPK delegation's visit, which coincides with the upcoming 75th anniversary of Vietnam-North Korea diplomatic relations in 2025. She expressed confidence in North Korea's economic development and people's welfare under the WPK's leadership. Mai reiterated Vietnam's commitment to an enduring friendship and cooperation with North Korea. She praised the productive talks between the North Korean delegation and Le Hoai Trung, head of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) Central Committee's Commission for External Relations, and discussed future cooperation plans. Mai proposed continued collaboration between the CPV Central Committee's Commission for External Relations and the WPK Central Committee's International Department to bolster bilateral relations and party cooperation. Kim conveyed his satisfaction with Vietnam's socioeconomic progress under the leadership of the CPV led by Party Chief Nguyen Phu Trong, affirming North Korea's strong regard for its relationship with Vietnam.</p>
26th	<p>A Korean delegation comprising 13 companies, led by Director General of Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency in Cambodia (KOTRA Phnom Penh) Hacheong Yun, held a meeting with Deputy Prime Minister and First Vice President of the Council for the Development of Cambodia (CDC) H E Sun Chanthol, at the CDC headquarters. The Korean delegation aimed to explore trade and investment prospects in various sectors in Cambodia. Sun highlighted Cambodia's appeal as an investment destination, citing factors such as political stability, economic growth and favourable investment laws. He emphasised the benefits of Cambodia's connectivity to global markets through various trade agreements and encouraged investment in heavy industries, including electronics, automobiles and technology projects. The Korean delegation consisted of companies such as Samsung Electronics, Hyundai Motor and LG Electronics.</p>
26th	<p>The General Department of Science, Technology and Innovation of the Cambodian Ministry of Industry, Science, Technology and Innovation and the Korea Institute for Robot Industry Advancement signed an MOU on the occasion of Cambodia's National Day of Science, Technology and Innovation. The agreement seeks to strengthen the bilateral commitment to advance Cambodia's robotics industry, promote technology transfer and foster research initiatives. It also outlines a strategic framework for joint efforts in key areas such as policy development, technology integration and research and development initiatives within the robotics sector.</p>
26th	<p>In Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnamese and Korean experts convened for the Vietnam-ROK Copyright Forum 2024, a collaborative initiative by the Vietnamese Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and the Korea Copyright Protection Agency (KCOPA). It aimed to address copyright protection challenges in the digital realm. Discussions centred on navigating complexities in digital copyright, emerging policy trends amidst the rise of artificial intelligence, and the obligations of on-line intermediaries in combatting digital copyright violations. Participants explored potential solutions and avenues for enhanced bilateral cooperation. Deputy Director of the Copyright Office of Vietnam Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism Pham Thi Kim Oanh underscored the importance of robust technological solutions for copyright tracking and transparent usage. KCOPA President Park Jung-young highlighted South Korea's success in developing automated software to detect global eavesdropping apps and expressed interest in collaborating with Vietnam to transfer this technology, bolstering monitoring capabilities and safeguarding authors' rights and works.</p>
26th	<p>ROK Trade Minister Inkyo Cheong met Malaysia's Minister of Investment, Trade, and Industry Tengku Zafrul Aziz in Kuala Lumpur. They announced the restarting of bilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations that had been paused since 2019. The declaration followed a hiatus of four years and six months since the third official negotiating round in September 2019, with both sides agreeing to establish new working groups to address service, investment, digital, green and bio sectors, apart from ongoing efforts, to pursue a more comprehensive FTA. Malaysia ranks as Korea's third-largest trade partner and fourth-largest investment partner among ASEAN nations, with a trade structure centred around natural gas, petroleum products, semiconductors and fine chemicals, indicating potential benefits for Korea's trade and investment in ASEAN through the FTA. Additionally, during the Korea-Malaysia trade ministerial discussions preceding the FTA announcement, both sides agreed to establish a bilateral trade ministerial dialogue to enhance economic cooperation and deepen collaboration in areas such as supply chains and emerging industries. Cheong also held a conference with Korean companies operating in Malaysia to address on-site management issues, including investment incentives and customs challenges, during the visit.</p>

27th	Politburo member of the Communist Party of Vietnam and Secretary of the Ho Chi Minh City Party Committee Nguyen Van Nen expressed the city's desire to enhance collaboration with DPRK regions during a meeting with Kim Song Nam, director of the International Department of the Workers' Party of Korea Central Committee. Nen underscored the city's enduring commitment to nurturing the longstanding friendship and cooperative ties between Vietnam and DPRK. He highlighted ongoing efforts to implement cooperation agreements established by Vietnamese Party General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong and DPRK Chairman Kim Jong-un during the latter's 2019 visit to Vietnam. Nen also informed Kim about the city's socio-economic situation and its plan to despatch a delegation for a working visit to the DPRK in June. In response, Kim commended the city's development achievements and expressed hope for stronger implementation of bilateral cooperation directions agreed upon by the two countries' leaders. He thanked the Ho Chi Minh City Party Committee for selecting DPRK localities for expanding cooperation and wished for strengthening relations through closer ties between their respective regions.
27th	At the "Korea-Cambodia Trade Ministers' Meeting", ROK Minister of Trade, Industry and Energy Jeong In-kyo was in discussion with acting Commerce Minister Kemsitan in Phnom Penh on ways to enhance cooperation between South Korea and Cambodia. The meeting, held in the third year of the bilateral FTA, aimed to review FTA implementation and explore opportunities for collaboration in areas such as trade investment, infrastructure and carbon neutrality. Discussions covered various topics, including expanding trade investment, development cooperation and a joint carbon-neutral response. Chung highlighted South Korea's significant investment in Cambodia and requested for active support from Cambodia, including tax benefits for Korean-invested companies. Both countries also agreed to establish a technical guidance centre for food processing site challenges and collaborate on reducing greenhouse gas emissions abroad. Additionally, plans were made to convene the first meeting of the Korea-Cambodia FTA Joint Committee in the first half of the year to diversify trade items, strengthen supply chain value chains and enhance corporate FTA utilisation.
28th	ROK Deputy Minister for FTA Negotiations Roh Keon-ki met Thailand Commerce Minister Phumtham Wechayachai in Bangkok to initiate negotiations for an economic partnership agreement (EPA) with the aim of finalising a free trade deal between the two nations by late 2025 or early 2026. Wechayachai pointed out that despite South Korea's reference to the agreement as an EPA, it effectively operates as an FTA. It would enhance Thailand's global competitiveness and attract more investments from South Korea, particularly in sectors like electric vehicle manufacturing and information technology. The EPA would also help expand ROK's exports and promote bilateral cooperation in biotechnology, supply chains and the green economy, in line with the AKFTA and the RCEP.
28th	During Thailand Defence Minister Sutin Klungsang's visit to South Korea, Korea Aerospace Industries (KAI) CEO Kang Goo-young proposed selling FA50 light fighters to the Royal Thai Air Force (RTAF). Sutin, accompanied by Defence Permanent Secretary Gen Sanitchanok Sangkhachan, also accepted an invitation from South Korea's defence ministry to observe the delivery of the final two Korean-made T-50 advanced trainer jets to the RTAF in August 2023. The delegation was transported by helicopter to KAI's facility in Sacheon. The RTAF had previously acquired eight T-50 advanced trainer jets and six FA50 light fighters from KAI in 2015; the aircraft has been gradually integrated into operations at Wing 4 in Nakhon Sawan since 2018.
31st	A senior North Korean delegation, led by Director of the International Department of the Workers' Party of Korea Kim Song-nam, visited Laos and emphasised North Korea's commitment to enhancing its defence capabilities. During the visit, Kim met the Head of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party's external relations committee Thongsavanh Phomvihane. This visit to Laos marked the final leg of Kim's three-nation trip, which also included China and Vietnam. Additionally, Kim paid a courtesy visit to Secretary-General of the Communist Party of Laos Thongloun Sisoulith and conveyed a "verbal letter" from North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, expressing Pyongyang's determination to strengthen cooperative ties with Laos for the advancement of the socialist cause.

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 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; Laos News Agency; The Star; The Philippine News Agency; The Straits Times; Bangkok Post; Nhan Dan; Vietnam News Agency; Vietnam Plus; The Korean Central News Agency; NK News; Yonhap News Agency; and The Korea Times.