

# Korea Chair Bulletin

## INDIA - SOUTH KOREA

### Korea-India Relations Set for Big Growth in 2026

South Korea's Ambassador to India, Lee Seong-ho, says 2026 could be a landmark year for Korea-India ties as bilateral relations deepen across trade, investment, technology and culture. He highlighted faster, more comprehensive cooperation and growing Korean corporate interest in the Indian market. Both nations are exploring expanded economic partnership frameworks. Ambassador Lee expressed strong confidence that the relationship will take a "major leap" next year, building on shared strategic interests and ongoing diplomatic engagement.

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### Samsung Bullish on India as Spending Improves and AI Rollout Accelerates

Samsung expects a strong business year in India in 2026. The company plans to extend its artificial intelligence integration across products, from premium smartphones to home appliances. Samsung's India-based R&D centres are playing a key role in developing AI features. With supportive economic factors and new flagship launches planned after CES 2026, Samsung's leadership describes the outlook for India as "positive and bright." [Read more](#)

### South Korea Extends Visa-Fee Waiver for Group Tourists Including India

South Korea has extended its visa processing fee waiver for group tourists from India and five other countries, China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Cambodia, until June 2026. This exemption applies to short-term C-3-2 group visas and eliminates the usual fee, making package travel easier and more affordable. The move is aimed at boosting inbound tourism and supporting the travel sector as visitor numbers grow, especially ahead of the peak travel season. The extension reflects Seoul's efforts to strengthen tourism ties with key Asian markets.

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### Indian Embassy in Seoul Marks World Hindi Day, Highlights Cultural Ties with South Korea

The Indian Embassy in Seoul hosted a celebration for World Hindi Day in South Korea's capital on January 10. The gathering highlighted the cultural importance of the Hindi language and its global reach. Speakers at the event underscored Hindi's role in fostering cultural exchange and international communication. Activities included speeches, cultural performances, and expressions of support for promoting Hindi abroad. The event reaffirmed the language's value as a bridge between nations and cultures.

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### Hyundai Chief Highlights India as Key Hub in Global EV and AI Strategy

Hyundai Motor Group Executive Chair Chung Euisun began the year with an ambitious global tour, placing strong emphasis on India as a strategic hub for the company's electric vehicle (EV) and artificial intelligence ambitions. During visits to major markets including India, China and the United States, Chung focused on strengthening partnerships, expanding advanced EV production, and enhancing AI-driven mobility solutions. India's growing market, skilled workforce and policy support were underscored as central to Hyundai's long-term global growth plans amid rising competition in future mobility technologies. [Read more](#)



# TOP NEWS FROM THE KOREAN PENINSULA

## South Korea's Exports Top \$700 Billion in 2025 on AI-Driven Chip Boom

South Korea's exports reached a record over \$700 billion in 2025, led by surging global demand for AI-related semiconductors and high-priced memory chips. Semiconductor shipments alone topped \$173 billion, up sharply year-on-year, helping the country achieve its highest export value ever. Automobile exports also hit new highs, further boosting overall trade performance. This export surge reflects South Korea's strong position in the global tech supply chain, particularly in advanced chips used in artificial intelligence and data centres. [Read more](#)

## South Korea Reviews North Korea Military Agreement After Rising Tensions

South Korea's government has ordered a review of the previously scrapped 2018 inter-Korean military agreement, which aimed to reduce military tensions along the Korean Peninsula border. President Lee Jae Myung directed officials to consider possibly restoring elements of the pact, against the backdrop of recent drone incursions and renewed strain in ties with North Korea. This review comes as Seoul seeks ways to manage security risks and prevent unintended clashes, while exploring whether re-establishing parts of the accord could help ease rising tensions with Pyongyang. [Read more](#)

## South Korea's Ex-President Yoon Sentenced to Five Years in Prison

Former South Korean president Yoon Suk Yeol has been sentenced to five years in prison by the Seoul Central District Court in the first verdict tied to his failed December 2024 attempt to impose martial law. The court found him guilty of obstructing his arrest, abusing power and falsifying documents, saying he mobilized security forces to block investigators. This ruling, which Yoon's lawyers are appealing, is separate from other ongoing trials, including a serious insurrection case where prosecutors are seeking harsher penalties. [Read more](#)

## South Korean President Lee Returns from Japan to Boost Bilateral Ties

South Korean President Lee Jae-myung returned home after a two-day visit to Japan focused on strengthening diplomatic and economic cooperation between the neighboring countries. During the trip, Lee held talks with Japanese leaders to discuss issues of mutual interest, including trade, security and regional stability. The visit is seen as part of ongoing efforts to improve relations after years of historical and diplomatic tensions. Officials emphasized the importance of continued dialogue and collaboration to advance shared goals and address common challenges in the Indo-Pacific region. [Read more](#)



## South Korea's President Seeks Reset with China

South Korean President Lee Jae-myung met Chinese leader Xi Jinping in Beijing as part of efforts to reset strained ties between Seoul and Beijing. The talks come amid regional tensions involving Taiwan and disagreements with Japan, and represent a diplomatic step to improve political and economic relations. Lee's visit highlights Seoul's attempt to balance relationships with major powers, as South Korea also maintains strong security cooperation with the United States. [Read more](#)



# SECURITY/NORTH KOREA

## South Korea Asks China's Xi to Mediate on North Korea Nuclear Crisis

South Korean President Lee Jae-myung said he asked Chinese President Xi Jinping to act as a mediator to help resolve the North Korean nuclear standoff and ease tensions on the Korean Peninsula during their summit in Beijing this week. Lee told reporters that all communication channels with North Korea are blocked, and Seoul hopes China, Pyongyang's main diplomatic and economic partner, can encourage dialogue and facilitate progress on denuclearisation and peace. Xi responded that patience is needed in dealing with North Korea's nuclear issue.

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## North Korea Calls U.S. "Shameless, Illegal and Immoral" at United Nations

At the United Nations, North Korea's diplomatic mission sharply criticized the United States, accusing Washington of actions that undermine the UN and labeling them "shameless, illegal and immoral." Pyongyang's statement condemned a U.S.-backed briefing on North Korea's sanctions violations as an attempt to discredit its government and claimed the U.S. disrespects the UN's role in international affairs. The remarks came shortly after the U.S. capture of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, which North Korea's leadership portrayed as a "hideous criminal act" and evidence of U.S. geopolitical aggression.

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## North Korea Tests Hypersonic Missiles as Kim Cites "Geopolitical Crisis"

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un personally oversaw recent hypersonic missile test flights, saying the drills are needed to strengthen Pyongyang's nuclear deterrent amid a "recent geopolitical crisis," according to state media. The tests were reported shortly after neighbours detected multiple ballistic missile launches and came just before South Korean President Lee Jae-myung's trip to China. Pyongyang framed the launches as a strategic necessity, linking them to international developments and the perceived threat from rival powers. [Read More](#)

## South Korea, Britain Deepen Defence Industry Cooperation in London

Senior South Korean and British defense officials met in London for two days of bilateral defense talks, focusing on strengthening ties in the arms industry and strategic cooperation. The meeting, led by Korea's Defense Acquisition Program Administration and Britain's Department for Business and Trade, covered partnerships between major firms such as Hanwha Ocean and Babcock as well as Hanwha Systems and BAE Systems on satellite technology and other defense projects. Both sides also proposed a new memorandum of understanding to expand cooperation in defense science and technology, aiming to formalize and accelerate joint initiatives.

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## North Korea Says No Chance of Improved Ties With South Korea

North Korea's Kim Yo Jong, sister of leader Kim Jong Un, has bluntly rejected the idea of better relations with South Korea, calling Seoul's hopes for rapprochement an "illusion" that can never come true. Her statement dismissed recent South Korean government suggestions of possible communication after alleged drone incidents near the border, insisting South Korea's expectations are unrealistic and criticizing its engagement with Japan and the United States. The remarks underscore persistent tensions on the Korean Peninsula and Pyongyang's unwillingness to engage in improved diplomatic ties at this time.

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## SCI-FI/ENVIRONMENT/INVESTMENT/SOCIETY

### South Korea to Enforce Special Bird Flu Quarantine Measures

South Korea's government will implement special quarantine measures in January 2026 to curb the spread of highly pathogenic avian influenza (bird flu) after 32 cases were confirmed this winter. Officials cited the simultaneous detection of three virus strains, H5N1, H5N6 and H5N9, including a highly infectious H5N1 variant, prompting intensified containment efforts. The plan includes inspections of hundreds of large layer farms, disinfection near migratory bird habitats, restricted access to affected sites, and emergency response teams to prevent further outbreaks and protect the livestock industry. [Read more](#)

### LG CNS Backs CHA Biotech to Advance AI-Powered Digital Health Care

South Korea's LG CNS is boosting its digital health care by making a ₩10 billion equity investment in CHA Biotech, part of a strategic partnership to develop AI-driven health solutions. The collaboration focuses on building a smart big-data platform, migrating systems to the cloud, and applying AI technologies to improve pharmaceutical production and patient care. The companies plan to commercialize an AI-powered health care service that analyzes data from hospitals, homes and wearable devices to support medical guidance and emergency responses. The initiative also explores global expansion of the digital health platform. [Read more](#)

### South Korea Unveils \$162M 2026 Agricultural R&D Plan

South Korea's Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs announced a KRW 234.8 billion research and development investment for 2026, marking a 16.9 % rise from 2025 as part of efforts to modernise farming and boost competitiveness. The plan targets five core areas including climate-resilient technologies, AI-driven smart agriculture, biotechnology and bio-innovation, commercialisation and skills development, and enhancing the global appeal of K-Food products. By combining advanced tech and workforce growth, the initiative aims to make Korea's agricultural sector more innovative, sustainable and globally competitive. [Read more](#)



### GM Korea Subcontractor Workers Rally After Being Fired

Workers from a logistics subcontractor formerly serving General Motors Korea took to the streets in Seoul to protest after being dismissed following unionization efforts. The employees and civic groups rallied in front of the Seoul Regional Labor Office, accusing the company of unfair labor practices, wrongful termination and retaliation against union activity. Demonstrators demanded reinstatement, job security and better working conditions. The protests reflect broader struggles facing subcontracted workers fighting for union recognition and employment protection. [Read More](#)

### Korean youth expect lower pay as entry level jobs disappear

Recent data shows that young job seekers in South Korea are lowering their starting salary expectations due to a shrinking pool of entry-level positions and tougher competition in the labour market. Graduates and early-career workers are adjusting their pay demands downward compared with a year ago, reflecting frustration over slow hiring and limited opportunities. The trend underscores broader concerns about youth employment and economic uncertainty, as many young Koreans struggle to find stable, well-paid jobs straight out of school, reshaping attitudes toward work and career prospects. [Read more](#)



# 10 MOST READ ARTICLES

**Korea Herald** in [Why lack of military service remains a line too far in Korea — and why dual nationals' choices are not just personal](#) explains how lingering resentment over military service obligations fuels South Korea's discomfort with dual nationals who look Korean but avoid conscription.

**Korea Times** in [Korea to offer \\$27.2 bil. to support local government mergers](#) talks about how the government plans to offer large financial incentives to encourage mergers of local governments to strengthen regional administration.

**Korea Times** in [Lee calls for bipartisan cooperation on diplomatic, security affairs](#), highlights the need for lawmakers in South Korea to focus on national security among global uncertainties.

**New York Times** in [Drum Diplomacy: Leaders of Japan and South Korea in Sync to K-pop](#) highlights warming ties with Japan as the world leaders ended their summit with a jam session.

**Reuters** in [North Korea's Kim Jong Un views submarine construction, oversees missile launch](#) underscores Pyongyang's continued weapons development as North Korean leader Kim Jong Un oversaw the test-firing of a long-range surface-to-air missile near the East Sea as well as progress on constructing an 8,700-ton nuclear-powered submarine.

**Korea Times** in [Sanctions watchdog links North Korean hackers to 1.65 billion dollars in crypto theft this year alone](#) highlights Pyongyang's growing reliance on sophisticated cyber networks to evade sanctions, launder stolen assets, and fund its weapons programs.

**Chosun Ilbo** in [Medvedev Expects Russia-North Korea Cooperation Expansion in Message to Kim](#) emphasises on growing Russia-North Korea relations as Dmitri Medvedev, deputy head of Russia's National Security Council sent a congratulatory message to Kim Jon Un highlighting new possibilities.

**Korea JoongAng Daily** in [Korea, Netherlands to bolster cooperation in semiconductors, quantum tech amid global supply chain shift](#), highlights the agreement between South Korea and Netherlands to strengthen cooperation in semiconductors and quantum technology amid shifts in global supply chains.

**Korea JoongAng Daily** in [North Korea likely stole over \\$2 billion in cryptocurrency last year: U.S. official](#) highlights concerns on how virtual asset heists are being used to help fund North Korea's weapons programs.

**Korean Herald** in [Hanwha Aerospace to sign 5.6 tln-won Chunmoo export contract with Poland](#) reports on a significant defense export deal between Hanwha Aerospace and Poland.



*The Korea Chair Bulletin provides research-driven insights into India-South Korea relations, covering policy shifts, strategic dialogues, and emerging trends. It also highlights key developments and news from the Korean Peninsula.*

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*The Republic of Korea Chair at CSDR aims to enhance the understanding and cooperation between India and the Republic of Korea through research and policy engagement. Launched in Jan 2025, with a grant from the Korea Foundation, the Chair intends to create broader awareness and in-depth understanding of the India-ROK relationship, which remains limited despite growing governmental engagement.*

Prof. C Raja Mohan - Distinguished Fellow & ROK Chair, CSDR



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