

India – Republic of Korea Bilateral Relations

Background

1. India-Republic of Korea (RoK) relations has made great strides in recent years and has become truly multidimensional, spurred by a significant convergence of interests, mutual goodwill and high level exchanges. Bilateral consular relations were established in 1962 which was upgraded to Ambassador-level in 1973. In course of time, RoK's open market policies and the New Southern Policy found resonance with India's economic liberalization, 'Look East Policy' as well as "Act East Policy".

2. According to "SamgukYusa" or "The Heritage History of the Three Kingdoms" written in the 13th century, a Princess from Ayodhya (Suriratna) came to Korea, married King Kim-Suro, and became Queen Hur Hwang-ok in the year 48 AD. Korean Buddhist Monk Hyecho (or Hong Jiao) visited India from 723 to 729 AD and wrote travelogue "Pilgrimage to the five kingdoms of India" which gives a vivid account of Indian culture, politics & society. Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore also composed a short but evocative poem – 'Lamp of the East' - in 1929 about Korea's glorious past and its promising bright future. He wrote:

"In the golden age of Asia
Korea was one of its lamp bearers,
And that lamp is waiting to be lit once again
For the illumination of the East."

3. India played an important and positive role in Korean affairs after Korea's independence in 1945. Mr K P S Menon of India was the Chairman of the 9-member UN Commission set up in 1947 to hold elections in Korea. During the Korean War (1950-53), both the warring sides accepted a resolution sponsored by India, and the ceasefire was declared on 27 July 1953. Lt. General K.S. Thimayya of India, served as the chairman of the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission [NNRC], after the armistice and contributed to resolving the humanitarian issues arising out of the War, which won appreciation from all quarters. A delegation of Indian Parliamentarians visited ROK on 26-27 July 2013 to participate in the events to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Armistice Agreement.

High Level Exchanges

4. The State Visit to RoK by President Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, in February 2006 heralded a new vibrant phase in India-RoK relations. It, inter alia, led to the launch of a Joint Task Force to conclude a bilateral Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which was operationalized on 1st January 2010. President Lee Myung-bak paid a landmark visit to India, as Chief Guest at India's Republic Day celebrations on 26 January 2010, when bilateral ties were raised to the level of Strategic Partnership. It was followed by President Smt. Pratibha Devisingh Patil's State Visit to RoK from 24-27 July 2011 when the Civil Nuclear Energy Cooperation Agreement was signed. Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh paid an official visit to Seoul on 24-27 March 2012 for both bilateral and Nuclear Security Summit when visa simplification agreement was signed. Traditionally close bilateral relations were elevated to a qualitative higher level, with the state visit to India of President Park Geun-hye from 15-18 January 2014.

5. Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid a state visit to Korea during 18-19 May 2015, within the first year of his government. During the visit the bilateral relationship was upgraded to 'Special Strategic Partnership'. Further PM Modi and President Park had bilateral meetings on the sidelines of East Asia Summit on 8 September 2016 at Vientiane, Laos and discussed progress made in the bilateral relations.

6. The relationship witnessed new momentum following the inauguration of President Moon Jae-in's administration. President Moon sent Mr. Chung Dongchea, former Culture Minister, as his special envoy to India, first such instance in the bilateral relationship. This was followed by a bilateral meeting between PM Modi and President Moon on the sidelines of G-20 Summit in Hamburg on 8 July 2017.
7. Speaker of National Assembly Chung Sye-kyun visited India on invitation of Speaker of Lok Sabha from 7 to 10 March, 2018 further strengthened the relationship.
8. President Moon Jae-in paid a state visit to India from July 8-11, 2018 on the invitation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. During the visit, both countries discussed wide range of bilateral, regional and global issues and issued a vision statement outlining shared vision for people, prosperity, peace and future. Both leaders discussed possible synergies between India's Act East Policy and S. Korea's New Southern Policy, Indo-Pacific strategy, cooperation in defense industry and future technologies. Both countries concluded 11 MoUs/Agreements ranging from Queen Suriratna Memorial Project to ICT & biotechnology.
9. As a follow up to the Mayor of Seoul's visit to Delhi, Chief Minister of Delhi Mr Arvind Kejriwal visited Seoul from 12 to 15 September and discussed cooperation between Seoul and New Delhi and concluded a sister city agreement. First Lady of RoK H.E. Ms. Kim Jung-sook visited India from November 4-7, on PM Modi's invitation as a Guest of Honor for the 'Dipotsav' Festival and participated at the ground breaking ceremony for construction of new memorial for Queen Suriratna at Ayodhya. In addition, Deputy NSA Pankaj Saran visited RoK in October 2018 for 2nd NSCS Dialogue and ROK FM Kang Kyung-wha visited India on 19 December 2018 and co-Chaired the 9th session of the India-RoK Joint Commission Meeting in New Delhi.
10. PM Narendra Modi paid a state visit to S. Korea from 21 to 22 February 2019 at the invitation of President Moon Jae-in, during which both sides held wide ranging discussions on defense , economic, culture and science cooperation. Both the leaders unveiled a bust of Mahatma Gandhi at the prestigious Yonsei university of Seoul. PM Modi also gifted a Bodhi sapling to Gimhae City and received the Seoul Peace Prize. Six MOUs were signed on start-ups, joint issue of postal stamp, combating trans-border and international crime, trade facilitation, roadways and media. PM Modi and President Moon met again on the sidelines of G20 summit in Osaka, Japan on 28 June 2019 and exchanged opinions on diverse fields including economic and defense industry cooperation as well as people -to-people exchanges.
11. Shri Chaudhary Birender Singh, Hon'ble Minister of Steel visited RoK in February 2019. Three members of the India-Korea Parliamentary Friendship Group led by Chairman Song Young-gil visited India on July 3-6, 2019 and met with Mr Harivansh Narayan Singh, Deputy Speaker of Rajya Sabha, and MOS of Civil Aviation Mr Hardeep Singh Puri. Raksha Mantri(RM) visited ROK from September 4-7, 2019. He called on ROK Prime Minister Mr. Lee Nak-yon and had bilateral talks with Minister of National Defense Mr Jeong Kyeong-doo. President Moon attended a special event in UN premises in New York, to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Gandhi's birth at the invitation of PM Modi, in September 2019. Shri Ganeshi Lal, Hon'ble Governor of Odisha visited to ROK on October 30-November 4. Shri Pinarayi Vijayan, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Kerala visited to ROK from November 30- December 4.

Economic Relations

12. Trade and economic relations gathered momentum following the implementation of CEPA in 2010. For the past three years -2017, 2018 and 2019, the bilateral trade volume has constantly crossed USD 20 Billion. The bilateral trade in 2018 was USD 21.494 billion and USD 20.7 billion in 2019. In 2018, exports from India accounted USD 5.884 billion, registering a growth of 18.8% and exports from ROK accounted for USD 15.610 billion registering a growth of 3.6%. In 2019, exports from India accounted for USD 5.6 billion and exports from ROK accounted for USD 15.1. While there is a slight negative growth rate, the trade deficit has reduced over 2019. We are looking for a target of achieving USD 50 billion by 2030. CEPA upgradation negotiations are ongoing to further increase the trade volume.

13. Major items of India's exports to Korea are mineral fuels/oil distillates (mainly naphtha), cereals, iron and steel. On the other hand, Korea's main export items are automobile parts, telecommunication equipment, hot rolled iron products, petroleum refined products, base lubricating oils, mechanical appliances, electrical machinery & parts and iron and steel products.

14. India and South Korea launched an initiative 'Korea Plus', as proposed by Prime Minister Modi in June 2016 in India to promote and facilitate Korean Investments in India. A Korea India SME and Start-up centre was launched in September 2019.

15. The 1st India-Korea Business Summit, conducted jointly by Chosun Group, Korea's leading media group, and CII in New Delhi from 14-16 January 2016 created a conducive environment for trade and businesses between the two countries. The 2nd India-Korea Business Summit was held in New Delhi on 27 February 2018.

16. In 2017, 2018 and 2019 Minister of Industries of Telengana, Karnataka, Odisha and Tamil Nadu, Chief Ministers of Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Ministerial delegations from West Bengal and Assam visited South Korea exploring business ties and Korean investments in their respective states.

17. In 2018, Korea's investment to India crossed the \$1 billion mark for the first time, recording \$1.053 billion. Korea's total FDI to India up to September 2019 stands at \$6.29 billion. Investment from India to Korea are to the tune of approx. USD3 billion led by Tata Daewoo, Ssangyong and Novelis. In total, there are more than 603 large and small Korean firms operating in India. Novelis, a Hindalco subsidiary, acquired a Korean aluminium company by investing about USD600 million (their total investment in RoK is nearing USD2 billion now). Mahindra & Mahindra acquired a majority stake in SsangYong Motors, the country's 4th largest auto manufacturer, in March 2011, with an investment of about USD360 million. Tata Motors acquired Daewoo Commercial Vehicle Company for USD102 million in March 2004. Other Indian companies present in India include IT majors, Indian Overseas Bank etc. The State Bank of India opened a branch in Seoul on 13 Jan 2016 to provide wide range of services including loan services and project financing for Korean and Indian companies.

18. The Indian Chamber of Commerce in Korea comprising Indian and Korean companies play a constructive role in promoting trade and investments linkages between the two countries and assist Embassy in organising seminars and events on business promotions.

Cultural Relations

19. To further enhance cultural exchanges between India and Korea, an Indian Cultural Centre (ICC) was established in Seoul in April 2011. Another Culture Centre was established in Busan in December 2013 on Public Private Partnership mode. A bust of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore was unveiled in Seoul by the Speaker of the Lok Sabha Smt. Meira Kumar in May 2011.

20. As a gesture of friendship and goodwill to the Korean people, Prime Minister of India gifted a sapling of the sacred Bodhi Tree under which Lord Buddha had attained enlightenment. A bust of Mahatma Gandhi, presented by ICCR, was unveiled at the Hongbeop-sa temple in Busan on 21 July 2014. As part of the 150th birth anniversary celebrations of Mahatma Gandhi, a Korea-India Peace Park was unveiled on June 3, 2019 and 150 trees planted at the historic Independence Park, Seoul.

21. ICC in Seoul and Busan offers regular classes on yoga and dance, both contemporary and classical for promotion of Indian culture. Sarang, the festival of India in Korea has been organised every year by the Embassy since 2015, to showcase diverse Indian culture and art forms in various parts of South Korea.

22. Various institutional arrangements between organisations and entities continue to promote people-to-people exchanges. This includes MoU between FSI and Korea National Diplomatic Academy (KNDA) signed in March 2012, JNU's MoUs with Yonsei University, Korea University, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies (HUFS) and Busan University of Foreign Studies. DU also has signed an MoU with Korea University. In addition, HUFS in Seoul, and Busan University of Foreign Studies have Indian Studies Departments and JNU & DU offer programmes in Korea Studies and Korean Language Courses respectively. Madras University has also opened a Department of Korean Studies encouraged by the sizeable presence of Koreans including Hyundai Motors in Tamil Nadu.

23. In 2012 Seoul National University established a New Department of Asian Languages and 4 Civilizations wherein they are offering a major on Indian Studies. Various other Universities in Korea offer degree courses in Indian Philosophy, Yoga and Ayurveda.

24. Seoul Forum for International Affairs and Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations have been jointly organizing the India-Korea Dialogue that makes recommendations on policies and practical measures to strengthen bilateral relations between the countries. Eighteen rounds of Dialogue have been held till date, with the last one held in Delhi in November 2019. Similarly there are other think tank interactions which are meeting on an annual basis.

25. Government of India offers scholarships and fellowships to Korean nationals for various programmes and disciplines covering research work and non-formal courses every year to study in India. Ayush Scholarship Scheme facilitates courses in Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha, Yoga and Homeopathy, while Hindi language scholarship is being offered by the Kendriya Hindi Sansthan, Agra. RoK Government also offers scholarships to Indian nationals each year to study Korean Language and Literature at Masters and PhD level at select Korean Universities.

26. Good air connectivity between the two countries has been established with direct flights operated by Air India and Korean Air. Further, as part of our effort to promote tourism and greater people-to-people exchanges, Government of India granted Visa on Arrival facility to Korean nationals coming through 6 designated international airports in India since 1 October 2018.

Indian community

27. The total number of Indian nationals living in ROK is estimated to be around 12,000, which includes around 300 PIOs. A large number of Indian scholars are pursuing post-graduate and Ph. D programmes, mostly in pure sciences in Korea. During the past few years, many professionals mainly in the areas of IT, shipping and automobile have immigrated to ROK. They are working mostly with companies like Samsung, LG, Hyundai TATA Daewoo, TCS. There is also significant number of students and academicians in the universities.

28. With the aim of bringing the Indians into closer coordination, the Embassy brought various Indian Associations in ROK onto a common platform as part of a Coordination Committee. The Committee has proved to be an effective platform for dissemination of information and coordinating cultural events/activities. Prominent associations of expatriate Indians in RoK include the Annapurna Indian Women's Association (AIWA), Indians in Korea (IIK) - comprising mostly of professionals, Indian Student Association in Korea and Indian Merchants' Association (IMA). The Associations function under the aegis of the Embassy and undertake various cultural as well as social activities every year including organizing Holi and Diwali functions which provide the community an opportunity to socialize with other members and stay in touch with Indian culture.

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