

India-Korea symposium

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Text of Opening Address by ORF Chairman Sunjoy Joshi

Excellency Shin Bongki, Ambassador Republic of Korea, Excellency Chung Eui-hae, Policy Coordinator; Presidential Committee on the New Southern Policy; Government of the ROK, Mr Suresh Reddy Joint Secretary Ministry of External Affairs, Gathered Excellencies, experts, members of the media and dear friends – a very warm welcome to this symposium on Building a More Robust India-Korea Partnership.

Well, you are going to hear a lot about the natural convergence of interests between President Moon's New Southern Policy and Prime Minister Modi's Act East Policy this evening as well as tomorrow

So let me begin by digressing and instead begin with what I think is the best place to begin with when talking about India and Korea. The first 'P' in President Moon's New Southern Policy is about people – the people who have been the foundation of the India-Korea partnership.

India is a country that loves its TV soaps. We are somewhat arrogant about the hegemonic soft power Bollywood wields.

How many of us know that one and a half years ago when the music channel VH1 began asking India's Twitter to send hashtag based music requests, they were not only surprised but overwhelmed by the armies of fans requesting for one band the channel's curators had never even heard of – BTS.

The requests didn't stop with BTS. Soon, they were asking for EXO, EXID and many more. Die-hard dyed in the wool Bollywood DJs woke up to a nation that had already got "K-popped".

Two weeks ago even Delhi played its KARD right, did it not Amb Shin? Amd Shin was there when the K-pop band KARD gave Indian fans the first major live performance of K-Pop at the Talkatora Stadium.

However, that should not surprise anyone. Korean serials such as Full House and Hwang Jini were being aired in India in 2008 much before Descendants of the Sun had become popular.

India's northeast encounter with the Hallyu wave goes back to the early 2000s where local cable networks had been airing KBS World and Arirang across regions like Nagaland and Manipur.

All this speaks of the cultural power house that Korea has been. This connect has inspired the people of India as a country. The connect was even recognized by one of the greatest Indian poets – Rabindra Nath Tagore.

At that time Korea was under the thrall of colonial regime intent on annihilating the culture and heritage of the nation. Tagore saw and understood the quiet soft and resilient power within the people of Korea which he described as the “lamp of the East”

The words from his poem The Lamp of the East,

"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."

In the present time, this seems uncannily prescient, presaging the world we find ourselves in.

This is a world, which only two years ago looked as if it had been overtaken by a bunch of blustering alpha males warring on twitter. Their bluster made the Korean peninsula all about missile and nuclear tests, military exercises and threats to give the other a bloody nose.

It was in that situation that we saw South Korea softly, unobtrusively, under the leadership of President Moon Jae-in take on the mantle of a quiet understated leadership. The world stepped back from the brink.

Peace still may face an uncertain future, but there is no doubt that at a troubled hour, President Moon did turn the tide and successfully re-established the importance of diplomacy rather than bluster for restoring peace and sanity.

Since then, South Korea has emerged as a force committed through its New Southern Policy to bring the two other Ps - Peace and Prosperity not just to the Peninsula but to the Asia Pacific which is our common maritime domain.

The inherent synergy between President Moon’s New Southern policy and India’s Act East policy is only too obvious. The main focus of India's Act East Policy is to shift the country's trading focus from the west to the booming South East Asian countries. The Moon administration's 'New Southern Policy' focuses on South Korea's development of its relations with India and ASEAN.

While Moon calls India “a central pillar of ROK’s New Southern Policy, PM Modi considers South Korea as an indispensable partner in India’s “Act East Policy.”

During Prime Minister’s first visit to South Korea in 2015 the two sides had agreed to upgrade their Strategic Partnership to a Special Strategic Partnership. With the “special strategic partnership” both sides have been moving to add more substance to their relations across areas as foreign affairs, defense, regional cooperation, trade and investment.

The ties were bound to get a further boost with President Moon Jae-in’s New Southern Policy. The joint statement signed by the two countries during President Moon Jae-in’s visit to India in July 2018 provided the roadmap on what the two countries could do together for

the peace and stability of the common region that has become the central theme of both countries.

Since then Modi's second visit to Seoul in February earlier this year saw the two countries sign six agreements covering infrastructure development, media, start-ups and combating trans-border and international crime.

The strong synergies in the outlook of the two countries found reiteration when the two leaders met again recently on the sidelines of the G-20 in Osaka.

Call it by any name – whether the Asia Pacific or the Indo-Pacific - the region which is the focus of India's Act East policy and the ROK's NSP is today the most important focal point of the world. We, together see the notion of the Indo-pacific not as an alliance against anyone but as a space shared by all. A shared space within which India and Korea along with like-minded countries are interested in ensuring an open, balanced, and inclusive architecture for security, for trade for commerce and for connecting people. Due to the common desire, the New Southern Policy finds deep resonance among all regional nations dependent on sea-borne trade for their economic prosperity for which they insist on a common commitment to the need for maintaining freedom of navigation and unimpaired commerce in the high seas.

We live in a complicated world – a world far too complex to be defined by twitter politics and microphone diplomacy. The responses it demands are going to get even more complex, even more nuanced. There will be a need to take into account the new Geo-matrix and the emerging new alignments and partnerships that go with it.

The notion of the Asia-Pacific or the Indo-Pacific signals the changing geo-Matrix that is at work in this world - one that is set to alter the geography of power. One that is redefining the strategic imagination of not just Asia, but the larger land mass that is the super-continent of Afro-Eurasia, and of the world.

President Moon Jae-un's New Southern Policy and India's own Act East are the embodiment of these changes in the geography of power.

The same changes have been influencing the trajectory of our defense ties. Co-production of the K9 Vajra self-propelled howitzer is become one of the many welcome touch-points in our ongoing defense and security collaboration. The joint production of the gun in India under an agreement between L&T and Hanwa Tech using technology transfer targets over 50% indigenous content as part of 'Make in India'.

In Trade and Commerce the global value chains that fueled Asian growth over the last two decades today face serious disruption. They are facing disruption because of mis-alignments in trade and they are facing disruption because of technology. Growing trade tensions are forcing the relocation of many industries. At the same time developing Asian economies such as India ASEAN that see themselves as new manufacturing hubs are constrained by poor infrastructure and need rapid upscaling and upskilling of their human capital. That is precisely what India's Act East and the NSP need to focus on.

As India aims to become a 5 trillion dollar economy within the next six years, it seeks partners who can play a role in helping develop the infrastructure that will come with and shape this growth. This includes not just its ports, shipping, roads, but also the digital highways, the connectivity so vital to new commerce and the Fourth Industrial revolution. Well, this is not just about India. The infrastructure, the connectivity, the digital highways, all are the needs of the greater region.

The volume of bilateral trade in 2018 had just reached \$ 22 billion. The two countries have set a target of \$50 billion by 2030. This cannot happen in auto-mode. Both countries need to work to make that happen so that they can reap the benefit of the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement. Effective measures must be taken to augment Korean investment in India which can buttress PM Modi's 'Make in India' program.

So through this symposium we will have experts who will drill into the finer details. By examining the pathways, they will be able to suggest weather the turbulence of trade skirmishes and the winds of de-Globalization that seem to be gathering around us. How should India and Korea work together to create the network of treaties and alliances, the common understanding of shared norms and values that can become the rules of the road for the larger region and the world, of which we all are part.

With that I would like to hand over the floor to Excellency Shin Bongkil, Ambassador of the ROK.
