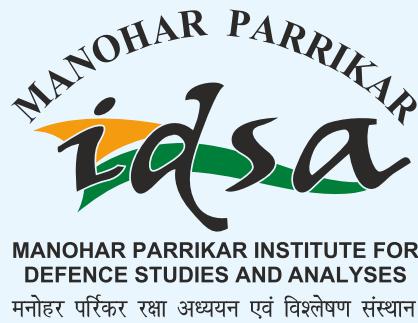


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South Korea Marks 1st Anniversary of Martial Law

In December 2025, South Korea marked the first anniversary of the declaration of the martial law in the country. Last year on December 3, then-President Yoon Suk Yeol made a sudden announcement of the declaration of martial law due to the alleged activities of the “anti-state and pro-North Korea” groups within South Korea. Reportedly, one year after the martial law, the political and ideological divisions have deepened in South Korea. The failed martial law declaration and impeachment of Yoon from his position propelled the Democratic Party of Korea (DPK) into power in June 2025, with Lee Jae Myung becoming the new South Korean president. Several members of the conservative People Power Party (PPP) which is now in opposition had supported the martial law decree by the former President Yoon Suk Yeol. The declaration of martial law had also apparently fueled the regional divisions within South Korea and had contributed in polarising the public opinion in the country. President Lee Jae Myung pledged to address the “acts of insurrection” related to the martial law declaration last year and prohibit any reoccurrence of this kind of incident in the future. During his special public address on December 3, 2025, President Lee proposed December 3 to be designated as the “People’s Sovereignty Day”. He also thanked the South Korean people for protecting the democratic institutions of the country through their strength and spirit.

South Korea and Nuclear Weapons

In December, the South Korean President Lee Jae Myung categorically rejected any policy to develop South Korea’s own nuclear arsenals. The opposition to the nuclear weapons by Seoul reflects its commitment to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Reportedly, there has been some demand in South Korea in the recent years to develop its own nuclear arms. Also, South Korea has been granted approval by the United States to enrich Uranium and reprocess the spent fuel from nuclear reactors to be used for Seoul’s development of the nuclear-powered submarines. However, any attempt to develop nuclear weapons by Seoul may derail the South Korean construction of the nuclear-powered submarines. President Lee asserted that nuclear weapons development by South Korea, similar to that of North Korea, would lead to international sanctions against Seoul and would be unreasonable. Also, the American consent to Seoul to construct nuclear-powered submarines was referred to as “a blood-forged alliance of 70 years” between the United States and South Korea by Rep. Jung Chung-rae, the leader of the ruling Democratic Party of Korea (DPK). On the other hand, President Lee Jae Myung called upon North Korea to “end hostility” and build a “nuclear-free Korean Peninsula”. Notably, since coming to power in June 2025, the Lee administration has taken steps to normalise relations with Pyongyang. However, Seoul has been concerned that China and US may accept North Korea’s nuclear weapons programme.

South Korea-Japan Relations

According to the reports in December, South Korea and Japan have been cooperating and competing in different fields of the economy. The business leaders of South Korea and Japan called for deeper engagement to overcome the global economic challenges. In the 14th Korea-Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry Meeting in Seogwipo on Jeju Island, the business leaders of both countries agreed to enhance cooperation in the backdrop of the similar economic problems being faced by Seoul and Tokyo at the domestic as well as in the international market. Notably, both South Korea and Japan are experiencing low birth rates and ageing population, and they are also facing global economic turmoil amidst emerging technologies. The businesses of South Korea and Japan deliberated on to deepen collaboration in the fields of artificial intelligence (AI) and jointly seek solutions to the common economic threats to them. On the other hand, Seoul has been competing with Tokyo in the field of tourism sector. Reportedly, South Korea is looking for new opportunities in the tourism industry in the backdrop of the recent rise in diplomatic tensions between China and Japan. In another report, the Supreme Court of South Korea upheld a judgment on the compensation by Nippon Steel for forced labour during the Japanese colonial period (1910-1945). Remarkably, the year 2025 marks the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the diplomatic relations between South Korea and Japan.

North Korea Detains South Korean Citizens

In December 2025, the South Korean media reported about the detention of some South Korean citizens by North Korea. The Presidential Office of South Korea accepted the information about the arrest of six South Koreans by Pyongyang in between 2013 and 2016, and pledged to get them released from the custody. Reportedly, while North Korea has released several foreign nationals from detention, some South Korean nationals were still held by the Kim Jong-un regime in Pyongyang on various charges. However, the South Korean President Lee Jae Myung confessed his ignorance about the detention of South Korean citizens by North Korea and he was criticised for being unaware on this issue in the South Korean media. On the other hand, Seoul is planning to repatriate those North Korean prisoners of war (POWs) who have not accepted the liberal ideology of South Korea even after spending several decades there and want to go back to North Korea. However, the South Korean Ministry of Unification denied any linkage to the repatriation of these North Koreans to the issue of bringing back detained South Koreans from North Korea. The Lee Jae Myung administration has also been following a flexible approach towards the North Korean refugees living in South Korea, such as on the issue of remittances sent by them to their relatives in North Korea. Notably, President Lee has pledged to improve relations with Pyongyang.