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United States' Tariffs on South Korea

In February 2026, South Korea was reported to be making efforts to [resolve](#) the renewed threats by the United States to impose 25 percent “reciprocal tariffs” against Seoul. The ruling Democratic Party of (South) Korea urged for a bipartisan consensus to ratify a bill seeking US\$ 350 billion investment in the United States by the South Korean companies. The clearance of this bill was reported to be crucial for lowering the American tariffs from 25 percent to 15 percent after Seoul and Washington agreed upon a trade deal last year. However, as per the reports in February, there was not any [breakthrough](#) in the South Korean efforts to persuade the United States to lower the tariffs. According to the South Korean Prime Minister Kim Min-seok, the planned imposition of the tariffs by the Trump administration could not be entirely blamed on Seoul. The South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Hyun also visited the United States to diffuse the issue with the Trump administration. Before his departure to the United States, Cho had [said](#) that the last year’s trade deal between Seoul and Washington should not be considered as a failure. Foreign Minister Cho also informed the news reporters that he would explain the Americans about the procedures in passing any bill in the South Korean National Assembly. However, in February, the American Supreme Court decided to [strike](#) down the “reciprocal tariffs” by Trump.

9th Workers' Party Congress of North Korea

In February 2026, North Korea was reported to hold its 9th Workers' Party Congress. According to the South Korean media, the Workers' Party Congress would lay the plans for the next five years and would implement [resolutions](#) which would be crucial for the inter-Korean relations and North Korea's engagement with the United States. In South Korea there were speculations about the [issues](#) to be discussed in the North Korean Workers' Party Congress for the five-year period ahead, particularly regarding the strategy of Pyongyang towards Seoul and about the leadership of Kim Jong-un in North Korea. It was reported that North Korea [began](#) its Workers' Party Congress with huge celebrations in the North Korean capital city of Pyongyang. Reportedly, South Korea was closely monitoring the event as the outcomes of this meeting would have consequences for the Korean Peninsula and the Northeast Asian region. During his opening remarks, the North Korean leader Kim Jong-un largely spoke on the issue of economic development of North Korea. According to the North Korean state media *KCNA*, the Congress [opened](#) on 19th February to set the agenda for five years ahead and look into the achievements made on the basis of the targets made during the Eighth Congress of the Workers' Party of (North) Korea. Reportedly, the [goals](#) of the new Congress are to promote development in the national defence and economy of North Korea.

Lunar New Year in South and North Korea

The people in the Korean Peninsula celebrated the Lunar New Year in February 2026. The South Korean capital city of Seoul [prepared](#) for an extensive transportation planning and emergency medical services to deal with the holiday rush period during the three-day (16~18 February) New Year celebrations. During this traditional New Year festival, a large number of Korean people travel to their hometowns for family gatherings and to pay respects to their dead ancestors. Notably, this New Year celebration is also known as Spring Festival in China and in other countries of the East Asian region. According to a report in the South Korean media, large number of tourists from China [visited](#) South Korea ahead of the Spring Festival for cosmetic treatment. In the recent years, South Korea has gained popularity as a hub of medical tourism and cosmetic surgery. On the other hand, a notable number of South Koreans planned their [trip](#) to Japan for the Lunar Year celebrations. South Koreans who opted to remain in the country during the holiday period had the opportunity to [enjoy](#) the “K-holiday” experience in the events organised by various hotels and theme parks. These events were a mix of the traditional and modern art performances. In North Korea also, the traditional Lunar New Year was [celebrated](#) with joy and enthusiasm. The North Korean people play folk games and prepare traditional food to mark this occasion.

Inter-Korean Relations

The South Korean administration under Lee Jae Myung has been making efforts to improve relations with North Korea. In February, it was reported that South Korea has [allowed](#) its citizens to access North Korea newspaper *Rodong Sinmun*. Earlier, the common South Korean people were debarred from reading North Korean media under the National Security Law of Seoul. South Korean government feared about the detrimental impact of the North Korean propaganda in South Korea. However, the Lee administration has relaxed the rules for the South Koreans to read North Korean news media. According to another report, South Korea has proposed for the [reopening](#) of the inter-Korean Kaesong Industrial Complex. Notably, this inter-Korean joint economic project became functional in 2004 and was a symbol of increased economic interdependence between South and North Korea, where the South Korean capital collaborated with the North Korean labour. However, the Kaesong Industrial Complex was closed by the then Park Geun-hye administration (2013-2017) in South Korea as the inter-Korean tensions surged in February 2016. Then-President Park was opposed to the North Korean nuclear and missiles development programmes which led to the suspension of the inter-Korean economic exchanges. Reportedly, the current Lee Jae Myung administration in South Korea has also shown its eagerness to [provide](#) humanitarian aid to North Korea. Recently, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has exempted sanctions against the humanitarian aid missions in North Korea.