

Korea Chair Monitor

July 16 - July 29, 2015

The Korea Chair team takes a biweekly look at events of interest in Washington, Seoul, and the region.

U.S.-ROK RELATIONS

U.S. Special Envoy for Six-Party Talks Visits South Korea

On July 27, U.S. special envoy for Six-Party Talks Sydney Seiler visited South Korea and met with South Korean government officials to discuss the North Korean denuclearization issue. He said that the United States is willing to show flexibility in nuclear talks with North Korea, if resumed, as demonstrated in the recent Iran nuclear deal. He also participated in a U.S.-Korea-Japan trilateral session in Tokyo on July 28 with director general for North Korean nuclear affairs Kim Gunn and Japanese deputy director general for Asian and Oceanian affairs Shigeki Takizaki.

Saenuri Party Leader Visits the United States

On July 25, Chairman of the ruling Saenuri Party Rep. Kim Moo-sung visited the United States for his first time while in office and met with senior members of Congress, government officials, and think tank researchers. He will visit New York (July 29–30) and Los Angeles (July 31–August 1) to meet with Korean Americans and UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon.

GLOBAL RELATIONS

Foreign Minister and Algerian Counterpart Meet

On July 16, Minister of Foreign Affairs Yun Byung-se met with his Algerian counterpart, Minister of Foreign Affairs Ramtane Lamamra at the Algerian Foreign Ministry. The two sides discussed ROK-Algeria relations, ways to increase cooperation on the international stage, and situations in different regions of the world.

South Korean Diplomat to Chair Key UN Body

On July 22, the ROK Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that Oh Joon, ROK's ambassador to the United Nations, will assume the presidency of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) for a one-year term. He was elected on July 24. Oh became the first South Korean to head ECOSOC, which is one of the six major UN bodies.

DOMESTIC POLITICS

National Assembly Passes Extra Budget Bill

On July 24, the National Assembly passed an 11.6 trillion won supplementary budget bill aimed at improving South Korea's sluggish economy in a 149 to 23 vote with 35 blank ballots. The amount was reduced from the initial 11.8 trillion won budget plan submitted by the government on July 6. The government plans to finance approximately 9.3 trillion won of the extra budget by selling treasuries. More than 400 billion won of the total budget has been set aside to cope with the negative economic impact of the MERS outbreak.



U.S. Pacific Fleet Commander Visits South Korea

The commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, Admiral Scott Swift, visited South Korea on July 19–21 as part of his first overseas trip after taking his position earlier on May 27. He held meetings with the chairman of the ROK Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Choi Yoon-hee; Navy chief of staff, Admiral Jung Ho-sup, and the U.S. ambassador to South Korea Mark Lippert.

Photo credit: : U.S. Pacific Fleet's Flickr Photostream.



Foreign Minister Visits Poland and Germany

Minister of Foreign Affairs Yun Byung-se is visiting Poland and Germany from July 28 through August 1. Minister Yun will meet his Polish counterpart Grzegorz Schetyna on July 29 to discuss ways to improve cooperation and to expand the bilateral strategic partnership forged in 2013. He will attend the "Eurasia Express" and travel with the participants from Warsaw to Berlin on July 30. In Berlin, Yun will attend events marking the end of the Eurasia Express' journey on July 31.

Photo credit: Nico Trinkhaus' flickr photo stream.

DOMESTIC POLITICS (continued)***Korea to Build Two New Nuclear Reactors by 2029***

On July 22, the ROK Ministry of Trade, Industry, and Energy announced a new 15-year power supply plan that includes building two new nuclear reactors by 2029 to meet South Korea's growing demand for electricity. South Korea currently operates 24 reactors with 10 more under construction. The 24th reactor, the New Wolsong 2, began its commercial operations on July 24, 2015.

Government Announces MERS Outbreak Is Over

On July 28, the Blue House announced that after 69 days, the outbreak of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) in South Korea has ended. In Korea 186 people were reported to have become ill from the virus, 36 of whom died.

ROK-CHINA RELATIONS***ROK Nuclear Envoy in China***

Hwang Joon-kook, ROK special representative for Korean peninsula peace and security affairs, visited Shanghai and Beijing from July 19 to 24 to expand cooperation and communications with China on North Korea. On July 19-22, he met with think tanks and scholars while in Shanghai. Hwang also met Wu Dawei, special representative for Korean peninsula affairs, and Liu Jianchaoon, assistant foreign minister, on July 23.

INTER-KOREAN RELATIONS***Koreas Discuss Joint Liberation Day Anniversary Event***

On July 23, North and South Korea's preparatory group for a joint anniversary event met on the DPRK side of Kaesong to discuss preparations for a joint 70th anniversary event of Korea's liberation from Japanese colonial rule on August 15. The two sides did not yet reach an agreement and will hold another round of talks on July 31.

NORTH KOREA***DPRK Ambassador to China Holds Press Conference***

On July 28, North Korean ambassador to China Ji Jae-ryong reiterated in a rare press conference in Beijing that North Korea is "not interested at all in dialogue to discuss the issue of freezing or dismantling nukes unilaterally first." Ji's remarks came after the historic U.S.-Iran nuclear agreement.

***Republic of Honduras - South Korea Summit in Seoul***

President Juan Orlando Hernández of the Republic of Honduras visited South Korea from July 19–22. Presidents Park and Hernández held a summit on July 20 and discussed ways to promote cooperation bilaterally and internationally. The two presidents agreed to work together for an early signing of a new free trade agreement (FTA) between South Korea and several countries in Central America.

Photo credit: John Colby's flickr photo stream.

***North Korea Holds Local Election***

On July 19, North Korea held its first local election since Kim Jong-un took power in 2011. The elections for people's assemblies are held every four years at the provincial, district, and county levels. According to the Korean Central News Agency, the election yielded a 99.97 percent turnout.

Photo credit: jensowagner's flickr photo stream.

Looking Ahead***Our Friday morning preview of events to watch in the weeks ahead.***

- **July 31** | The ROK and DPRK will meet for another round of talks on a joint event for the 70th anniversary of Korea's liberation from Japanese colonial rule.
- **August 6** | North Korean foreign minister Ri Su-yong will attend the ASEAN Regional Forum meeting of foreign ministers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
- **August 5-8** | Lee Hee-Ho, widow of former South Korean president Kim Dae-jung, will visit North Korea.

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