



INDIA - SOUTH KOREA RELATIONS - GS II MAINS

Q. South Korea finds India a very acceptable partner. In this context, India and South Korea are celebrating 50 years of their diplomatic relationship this year. Discuss the major developments between the two countries. (15 marks, 250 words)

News: *Reigniting the flame of India-Korea defence cooperation*

What's in the news?

- In the intricate tapestry of global geopolitics, defence collaboration emerges as a foundational imperative, crucial for the preservation of international peace and stability.

Key takeaways:

- The recent diplomatic overture during the visit of General Manoj Pande, Chief of the Army Staff of India, in November 2023, to the Republic of Korea, signifies a critical juncture in the trajectory of India-Korea defence relations.
- While this visit fortified diplomatic ties, it also unveiled the challenges, necessitating meticulous consideration. This prompts an exploration of the challenges faced by India and Korea in enhancing their defence cooperation, along with an examination of opportunities for mutual growth.
- The imperative for India and Korea is to transcend the confines of bilateral cooperation, and embrace a paradigm shift that cultivates a more profound understanding of their roles in the swiftly evolving global scenario.

India - South Korea bilateral Relations:

Political relations:

- In May 2015, the bilateral relationship was upgraded to 'special strategic partnership'.
- India has a major role to play in South Korea's Southern Policy under which Korea is looking at expanding relations beyond its immediate region.
- Similarly, South Korea is a major player in India's Act East Policy under which India aims to promote economic cooperation, cultural ties and develop strategic relationships with countries in the Asia-Pacific.

Economic relations:

- India and South Korea set a bilateral trade target of \$50 billion before 2030,
- India and South Korea have signed the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), 2010 which has facilitated the growth of trade relations.
- To facilitate investment from Korea, India has launched a "Korea Plus" facilitation cell under 'Invest India' to guide, assist and handhold investors.



Cultural relations:

- Korean Buddhist Monk Hyecho or Hong Jiao visited India from 723 to 729 AD and wrote the travelog “Pilgrimage to the five kingdoms of India” which gives a vivid account of Indian culture, politics & society.
- Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore had composed a short but evocative poem – ‘Lamp of the East’ – in 1929 about Korea’s glorious past and its promising bright future.

Defence relations:

- The high-level interactions of Gen. Pande with the top Korean military leadership and his engagements with the leadership of top Korean defence institutions, such as the Defence Acquisition Program Administration (DAPA) and the Agency of Defence Development (ADD), are anticipated to further unite the defence communities of both countries.
- Leveraging their technological capabilities, India and South Korea are aiming to collaborate in developing advanced defence systems and equipment.
- Given their shared understanding of the pivotal role technology will play in future conflicts, the scope for cooperation in this sector is limitless. Such synergy can lead to a mutually beneficial defence technology and industry partnership, propelling both countries to the forefront of innovation and self-reliance.
- In an era where defence against space warfare, information warfare and cybersecurity is paramount, both nations can further explore opportunities for cooperation.
- Given Korea’s status as an advanced high-tech digital superpower, vast opportunities exist in the development of robust security measures in these areas to effectively counter emerging threats in the digital domain, ensuring the security of critical infrastructure and information.

Importance of India to South Korea:

1. One of the points that the Koreans have been making to India is that they see India as a country that is now strategically important to them.
2. South Korea also finds India a very acceptable partner.
3. India doesn’t have edges which can create problems for them. They are aware of one factor which they have grown up with, which is the Pakistan factor.
4. With new issues cropping up in ties with China and America, export-driven South Korea must find new markets.
5. South Korea’s economic growth has slowed, presenting it with important challenges.
6. South Korea is targeting economies with the greatest growth potential like India.
7. South Korea is too heavily dependent on China’s market. So, diversification is essential for South Korea.
8. Need cooperation for development in third countries, like capacity building programmes in Africa.



Challenges in the relations:

1. **Inadequate Trade:** In the last few years, India and South Korea have faced serious blockades to their economic ties. Trade between the two countries was sluggish and there was no major inflow of South Korean investment into India.
2. **Indian Diaspora:** Within South Korea, the integration of Indians in the local population is far from complete, with some instances of racial prejudice or discrimination toward Indians.
3. **Inadequate acknowledgment of Korean Culture:** To a certain extent Indians are unable to distinguish between the cultural and social characteristics of South Koreans from that of Japanese/Chinese.
4. **Unfulfilled potential of Cultural Centres:** Indian Culture Centre (ICC) was established in Seoul to promote people-to-people contacts.
 - However, ICC has to reach an exponentially wider audience and its focus has to expand beyond the urban, English-speaking elite of Seoul.
 - The same may be applicable to South Korean culture centres in India.
5. **Multi-dimensional challenges:** The current emerging alignment between India and South Korea, which has the potential to bring the two countries closer together, may prove short-lived if proper attention is not paid to the multi-dimensional challenges it faces.

WAY FORWARD:

1. **Strategic partnership:** India has evolved excellent strategic partnerships with Japan, Vietnam and Australia.
2. South Korea could be the fourth pillar in India's Indo-Pacific strategy along with Japan, Australia, and Vietnam.
3. This can bring about a paradigm shift in India's position and influence in the region.
4. The time has come for the Indian and South Korean bilateral partnership to be strategically scaled up at the political, diplomatic and security domain levels.
5. With South Korea's emergence as a leader in critical technologies, cybersecurity and cyber-capacity building, outer space and space situational awareness capabilities, South Korea can contribute immensely to enhance India's foundational strengths in the Indo-Pacific.
6. India can help South Korea withstand Chinese pressure and North Korean threats.
7. This new partnership can have a long-term positive impact for both countries and the Indo-Pacific region.
8. It is an opportunity that neither country can afford to miss.