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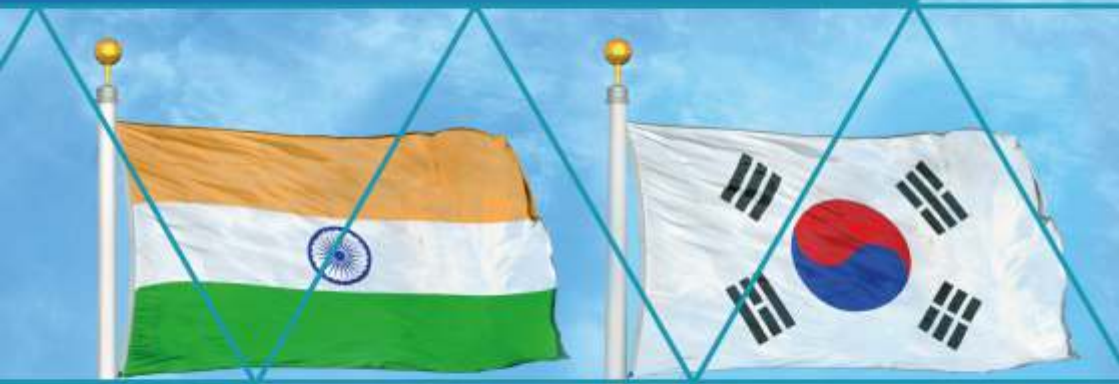
INDIA-SOUTH KOREA STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP:

TOWARDS A NEW HORIZON



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April 2022

India-South Korea Strategic Partnership: Towards a New Horizon

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First Published, 2022

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ISBN : 978-93-83445-63-9

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www.icwa.in

Printed by
ALPHA GRAPHICS
6A/1, Ganga Chambers, W.E.A.,
Karol Bagh, New Delhi-110005
Tel. : 9312430311
Email : tarunberi2000@gmail.com

Contents

1.	Introduction	7
2.	The era of (re)Discovery: India-Korea Relations in the Post-Cold Period	9
3.	Forging Strategic Partnership: Period of Consolidation	15
4.	Deepening the Relations through Special Strategic Partnership	24
5.	Developments in Bilateral Relations under Strategic Partnership Paradigm	31
6.	Indo-Pacific and the Future of India-Korea Relations	55
7.	Conclusion	65

India-South Korea Strategic Partnership: Towards a New Horizon

Abstract

India-South Korea (Korea) relations has gone from strength to strength in the past two decades. Significant milestones in the evolution of the relationship have been the signing of the Strategic Partnership agreement in 2010 and the Special Strategic partnership in 2015. Upgradation of bilateral relations status to strategic partnership highlights the priority that both countries attribute to the relationship and symbolises mutual recognition of each other's emergence as significant actors in international affairs. Along with domestic factors, the structural dimension of international relations has been an important variable in shaping bilateral relations. The post-Cold War era's benign international and regional order featuring globalisation and regional integration helped establish institutional linkages and provided a narrative framework that brought the two countries closer. However, the processes of structural transformation, augmented by forces of rebalancing and deglobalisation in the post-2008 Financial Crisis period and accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic featuring heightened geopolitical tension and great

power rivalry, pose challenges to bilateral relations. Contextualising structural and bilateral factors and mapping narrative, institutional and sectoral developments, the paper presents a comprehensive analysis of India-Korea relations under the 'Strategic Partnership' paradigm. In conclusion, it is observed that despite having significant bilateral interest, recent developments in regional order transition have the potential to undermine the dynamism of the relations if perception and expectations gaps are not adequately addressed.

India-South Korea Strategic Partnership: Towards a New Horizon

1. Introduction

India-South Korea (Korea) relations has gone from strength to strength in the past two decades. The up-gradation of the status of bilateral ties from 'Long-term Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Prosperity' in 2004 to 'Strategic Partnership' in 2010 and 'Special Strategic Partnership' in 2015 reflect the steady progress of the bilateral relations. Periodic up-gradation of the status of bilateral relations marks the narrative change reflecting political imperative. However, it has also been accompanied by developments in the form and substance of the relations.

Starting with a small foundation focusing on economic relations in the post-Cold War period, India-Korea relations have come a long way featuring comprehensive and multidimensional partnership. While economic partnership continues to be the strong pillar of bilateral relations with the signing of a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in 2009, the scope has expanded substantially to include defence and security, development

partnership, space, science and technology, regional issues, nuclear energy, maritime cooperation among others. Furthermore, along with the substance, the form of the relationship has also improved significantly. This dimension has been reflected in the intensification of political relations between the two countries through frequent high-level bilateral exchanges and institutionalised dialogue mechanisms at different levels. Also, awareness and visibility of the relationship have improved with more cultural and people to people interaction in recent years.

Development in the relations has also received attention in policy and academic discussions. However, limited efforts have been made to comprehensively analyse India-Korea bilateral relations under the strategic partnership paradigm.[1] The paper is an attempt to narrate the evolutionary story of the strategic partnership between the two countries focusing on the narrative, institutions and substance. Another gap in the existing literature is the limited attention paid to structural factors, for instance, the role of the changing global and regional balance of power in shaping bilateral relations. The benign international order of the post-Cold War period- featuring globalisation and regional integration- provided a favourable environment for strengthening bilateral ties. Though it appeared passive in the previous decades, the role of the international and regional factors has become more evident in recent years. The phenomenon of structural transformation, augmented by processes of rebalancing and deglobalisation in the post-2008 Financial Crisis period and accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, featuring

heightened geopolitical tension and great power rivalry, poses challenges to bilateral relations. Locating India-Korea relations in the evolving international context, the paper argues that the development in regional order transition can undermine the dynamism of the relations despite having significant bilateral interest if perception and expectations gaps are not adequately addressed.

The paper is organised into seven thematic sections. The second section, after the introduction, provides a brief background of India-Korea relations. The third section evaluates the context and drivers leading to the formation of Strategic Partnership in 2010. Critical developments in bilateral relations under Special Strategic Partnership has been evaluated in the fourth section. The fifth section provides a detailed empirical account of developments in India-Korea relations under the strategic partnership paradigm in the areas of defence, economic relations, science and technology and culture and people to people contact. The sixth section attempts to contextualise India-Korea relations in the evolving regional context of the Indo-Pacific. Finally, a summary highlighting crucial aspects of India-Korea relations under the strategic partnership and its future direction is discussed in the concluding section.

2. The era of (re)Discovery: India-Korea Relations in the Post-Cold Period

Modern-day relations between India and Korea began with New Delhi's engagement in the Korean Peninsula in the context of the outbreak of the Korean War. The issue in the Korean Peninsula was

the first major international preoccupation of independent India, even before the start of the Korean War, when the Korean issue was first referred to the United Nations (UN) in 1947. New Delhi chaired the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK), an international body set up by the UN to supervise the general election in the Korean Peninsula in 1948. It is important to note that India declined to recognise either the government of South Korea or North Korea, formed in 1948, because New Delhi believed that the division was artificial, and recognition would solidify the division further.[2] Following the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, New Delhi made efforts to contain the conflict through proactive diplomatic engagement in the UN.[3] It also attempted to mediate between the West and the Soviet bloc. New Delhi also despatched a medical mission to assist the humanitarian efforts during the Korean War. Furthermore, New Delhi played a vital role in peacekeeping by chairing the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission, which was tasked to the resolved thorny issue of the repatriation of prisoners of war (PoWs) and sent the Custodian Force of India to the Korean Peninsula to administer the repatriation process.[4]

Despite India's engagement in the Korean Peninsula, the relationship between India and Korea not only remained underdeveloped but was antagonistic during the 1950s. The main reason for Seoul's unfriendly attitude to New Delhi was the Korean leadership, especially President Syngman Rhee's perception of India as a close ally of the socialist bloc.[5] Unlike the Korean misperception, India's approach to Korean Peninsula was informed

by its non-alignment foreign policy, and New Delhi adopted a balanced approach in managing its relations with Pyongyang and Seoul through the Cold War period. New Delhi established consular relations with both Koreas in the early 1960s and full diplomatic relations in 1973. The establishment of diplomatic relations, however, did not add much substance to the relationship. Intensification of Cold War rivalry and their relatively low profile in international affairs kept each other out in their respective foreign policy outlook. Moreover, the diverging models of economic development that the two countries followed during the Cold War were India's import substitution policy and Korea's export-led development model-hindered bilateral relations gaining substance.[6]

In the 1990s, India-Korea relations picked up significant momentum. The environment that brought India and Korea closer can be explained by three structural convergence. First, the ideological framing of the Cold War, which separated New Delhi and Seoul from coming closer in the past four decades, dissipated with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Second, the opening up of the Indian economy in 1991 brought down the structural wall that kept the interaction of the Indian and Korean economies at bay in the previous decades. Third, foreign policy convergence, the post-1991 Look East Policy (LEP) adopted by India complemented Korea's *Segyehwa* foreign policy that aimed to expand Seoul's international outreach in bringing New Delhi and Seoul much closer.

The visit of Prime Minister (PM) P. V. Narasimha Rao to Korea in 1993 was a significant event that provided much needed political

breakthrough in developing bilateral relations. It was the first visit of an Indian PM to Korea. The focus of PM Rao's visit was to attract Korean investments to India by highlighting the new opportunities emerging in the context of the liberalisation of the Indian economy. Recognising the emergence of Korea and highlighting the significance of bilateral ties, PM Rao said,

> "We have noted with admiration how the Republic of Korea, together with the building up of a strong and vibrant economy, has been pursuing a dynamic, outward-looking foreign policy directed at strengthening its independent policies in favour of peace and security in North-East Asia. … Common elements in our positions and approaches to the changing international situation, particularly in Asia, provide many opportunities for India and the Republic of Korea to work together to mutual benefit... to take advantage of the new opportunities, which are opening up (in India). We would welcome more Korean businesses to come to India and take part in this process."[7]

In hindsight, the foreign minister and future Indian President Pranab Mukherjee in 2007 recounted the significance of PM Rao's visit highlighting the priority that Indian leaders attributed to New Delhi's relations with Seoul. He said,

> "As the international order witnesses this significant structural transformation, we are engaged in our own process of enabling change and in reformulating our external priorities. It began when India launched its "Look East Policy" in the early 1990s. That fundamental new step was not merely the outcome of economics; it was a strategic shift in India's vision of the world in the 21st Century. We were aware of the achievements of our neighbours to

> the East who, by emerging as economic powerhouses, also provided us with a message that enriching the flower bed of enterprise fires rapid economic growth. The Republic of Korea stood tall among the achievers and it is not a coincidence that the first visit by a Prime Minister from India was in 1993."[8]

Many Indian leaders, including PM Rao and finance minister and future PM Manmohan Singh, took note of East Asia's remarkable economic transformation, especially that of Japan and Korea and had a significant influence on Indian leadership while undertaking the ardours task of India's economic reform.[9] Former Indian Foreign Secretary Salman Haider has even claimed that PM Rao's visit to Korea marked the beginning of India's LEP.[10]

Korean President Kim Young-sam's state visit to India in 1996 further boosted bilateral relations. It was the first visit of a Korean President to India. The focus of President Kim's visit was to "raise the cooperative relationship between the two countries to a higher level of partnership, and for the joint prosperity of the new Pacific and Indian Ocean regions". In this regard, he proposed three ideas. The first task was to build an economic partnership framework to take advantage of economic complementarities of the two countries. He suggested working together to promote the idea of free trade. The third proposal was to make joint efforts to create a single economic sphere by integrating the Pacific and Indian Oceans regions.[11]

New Delhi's outreach to Seoul was an integral part of a strategic shift in Indian foreign policy necessitated by the end of the Cold

War and domestic economic reform. Strengthening economic ties between Korea was at the centre of this move, as has been the case with many other East Asian countries during the first decade of the Look East Policy. It is interesting to note that despite India's long years of friendly relations with Japan, Tokyo was not confident in India's economic reforms, hence was slow in responding to the LEP. On the other hand, Korea was quick in its response in an attempt to seize the opportunity offered by the opening up of the Indian economy.

Korea's emergence as an economic and technological power provided the opportunity for India to seek it as a partner in facilitating its economic transformation. Bilateral trade between South Korea and India grew from around $600 million in 1993 to approximately $15.6 billion in 2008.[12] The scale and quality of investment accompanied the significant trade growth since the mid-1990s. Korean conglomerates responded positively to PM Rao's call and were quick to seize the opportunity that was offered by the opening of the Indian economy. From scratch, South Korea became the most prominent Asian investor in India between 1996 and 2001, with an aggregate foreign direct investment (FDI) of US$1.9 billion.[13] This period witnessed investment by Korean conglomerates like LG, Samsung, Hyundai, and Daewoo making inroads and subsequently established themselves as significant players in the Indian economy.[14]

New Delhi's approach to Seoul in the post-Cold War period was also a clear case that manifested the emergence of a pragmatic and

materialistic approach to foreign policy, leaving behind the legacies of the Cold War era idealism. In this regard, by focusing on its relations with South Korea, New Delhi departed from equidistance in its relations with Seoul and Pyongyang.[15] During the 1990s, India and Korea went through a process of rediscovery. However, they could not keep up the momentum that gained in the early 1990s. Following the Presidential visit of Kim Young-sam to India in 1996, the next leadership visit happened after a gap of eight years. Similarly, the Joint Commission, a bilateral dialogue mechanism co-chaired by the foreign ministers though established during President Kim's visit to India, but convened only in 2002. The sluggishness in the relationship between the two countries can be mainly attributed to the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997 and the Nuclear Test conducted by India in 1998.

3. Forging Strategic Partnership: Period of Consolidation

Since the mid-2000s, India-Korea relations acquired a new momentum. This phase of relations between New Delhi and Seoul featured four important characteristics. First, consolidation of political relations through frequent high-level visits and institutionalisation of bilateral dialogue mechanisms. Second, the relations acquired a comprehensive character with the expansion of bilateral agenda beyond commercial and economic ties to include defence, security, science and technology, infrastructure, etc. Third, the period witnessed a deepening and further consolidation of economic relations. The signing of the CEPA in 2009 was a

significant milestone in the development of bilateral economic ties. Finally, during this phase, the two countries officially recognised the strategic value of the relationship with the signing of the Strategic Partnership agreement in 2010.

The development in India-Korea relations from an Indian perspective during this phase was very much part of its reinvigorated East Asian engagement, articulated through the second phase of the LEP. Although the end of the Cold War created an environment for India's engagement with countries in East Asia, the nuclear issues complicated the process. However, New Delhi's post-Pokhran isolation in the international community not only was a short-lived phenomenon but paved the way for its enhanced standing in the region. New Delhi's successful resolution of the nuclear issues with Washington and the signing of the Indo-US nuclear deal indeed facilitated its relations, especially with the US allies in the region; Japan and Korea.[16] The reinvigorated LEP broadened the agenda beyond the economic ties and expanded the geographical scope to include Northeast Asia and Oceania. In announcing the second phase of India's LEP, Indian Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha in 2003 said:

> "The first phase of India's Look East Policy was ASEAN-centred and focused primarily on trade and investment linkages. The new phase of this policy is characterised by an expanded definition of 'East' extending from Australia to East Asia, with ASEAN as its aim. The new phase also marks a shift from trade to wider economic and security issues, including joint efforts to protect the sea lanes and

coordinate counter-terrorism activities. On the economic side, phase II is also characterised by arrangement for FTA and establishing institutional economic linkage between the countries of the region and India."[17]

India's second phase of LEP was also a reflection of the growing attention that has been given to India by the regional countries, including Korea, particularly in the context of its decade long, high economic growth.[18] The popularity of the BRIC Report published in 2001, which predicted India to become the largest economy in the world by the mid-twenty-first Century, further reinforced the image of "Rising India".[19] Building on the first phase of LEP, the second phase featured an expansion of India's engagement with East Asia, both at the multilateral and bilateral levels. On the multilateral front, the re-energised LEP opened the doors to India's membershipin the East Asia Summit (EAS) in 2005 and Asia–Europe Meeting (ASEM) in 2006.[20] Recognising its growing profile, Korea welcomed India's growing integration into the evolving East Asian regional community. On welcoming India's membership in the East Asian Summit, then Korean Foreign Minister Ban Ki-moon in 2005 said,

> "A great power status ... seems within (India's) reach as it is well on its way to emerge as the third-largest economy of the world in the decades ahead. March towards globalisation and emergence of regionalism have opened new vistas for Korea-India cooperation. To keep pace with the spread of globalisation and regionalism at the start of the 21st Century, Korea and India have been actively cooperating with each other on both global and regional levels. India's 'Look East' policy

has greatly contributed to strengthening its partnership with Asian countries, including Korea. I am pleased to say that Korea wholeheartedly welcomes India as a member of the 'First East Asia Summit'."[21]

Complementing New Delhi's outreach to East Asia has been Korea's emergence as a middle power in the 21st century, and its proactive diplomacy has also been an important factor in pushing Indo-Korea relations forward.[22] Korea's fast recovery from the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997 reinforced its image as an important economic and technological power in the 21st Century. As the first Asian country to chair the G20 Summit in 2010, the Nuclear Summit in 2012 and hosting many other high-profile international diplomatic initiatives further helped enhance Korea's status as a middle power.[23]

The credence of two structural narratives, which attributed agency to New Delhi and Seoul in international affairs, also helped frame the bilateral relations in a new light. The two narratives are 'Asian Century' since the dawn of the 21st Century and 'Rise of the Rest" emerged in the context of the 2008 financial crisis. The Asian Century narrative envisages Asia becoming the centre of the global political, economic, and cultural sphere helped improve bilateral relations in two ways. First, the imagination of Asia as the future centre of gravity of world affairs brought a spatial convergence in the foreign policies of India and Korea as they began adopting "Asia Centric" foreign policy practices. This has been reflected in the convergence of India's LEP and Korea's New Asia Initiative.[24] This spatial convergence was further reinforced through their

participation at many Asia centric regional institutions, including ASEAN centric regional forums. Secondly, the relationship between India and Korea, the third and fourth largest economies of Asia, has been viewed as an essential variable in realising the promise of the Asian Century. Highlighting India-Korea relations in the context of the Asian Century, late President Pranab Mukherjee, when he was foreign minister, stated that;

> "Strengthening India's relationship with Korea is a matter of high priority in our government's foreign policy…. India and Korea seek closer cooperation against this backdrop of a new Asian dynamics, and it is evident that our interactions are not important just bilaterally. We share the responsibility to fashion our collaboration in a way that helps liberate the creative energies of the entire region and puts in place political and economic architecture which is conducive to Asia's emergence as a pre-eminent region of stability and prosperity and which can make the 21st Century the Asian Century in the truest sense."[25]

The 'Rise of the Rest' narrative, in essence, presented the image of a reconfigured state of international affairs, highlighting the redistribution of power in the international system.[26] The narrative received much attention with the prominence of G20, displacing G7 as the most prominent forum for discussing issues of global governance in the post-2008 Financial Crisis period. Moreover, the reconstituted global power structure where India and Korea have become members of the high diplomatic table helped to recast their mutual perception and significance of their bilateral relationship in a new light.[27]

The new dynamism gained in bilateral relations was visible during the visit of Korean President Roh Moo-hyun to India in 2004. At the Summit meeting that was held after a span of eight years, the status of bilateral relations was elevated to "Long-term Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Prosperity". According to then Indian President Dr. Abdul Kalam, the elevation of the status of the relationship,

> "signalled our commitment to look at our relationship beyond its bilateral dimensions and in a long-term and strategic perspective. We recognise today that India-Korea relations have an important bearing on the peace, stability and development of our region and the Asian continent. With the irreversible trend of regional integration in Asia, we increasingly look at Korea as a key element in our "Look East" policy and a trusted partner in our vision for a dynamic and vibrant Pan-Asian Community of peace and prosperity."[28]

During the visit of President Roh, the two countries proposed a number of new initiatives toward strengthening bilateral relations. It was decided to establish a new dialogue mechanism - Foreign Policy and Security Dialogue at the joint secretary level. It was also agreed to expand the scope of the bilateral relations in the fields of defence and security, energy, science and technology, space, connectivity and people to people exchange. The Korea-India Joint Committee on Science and Technology at the vice-minister/ secretary-level was launched to promote collaboration in science and technology. The first joint committee meeting was convened in 2005. To deepen the economic relations, the leadership decided to

set up a joint study group.[29] The CEPA signed in 2009 was based on the recommendations of the joint study. Korea was the first OECD country with whom India signed a free trade agreement. On the defence front, the two sides signed the first agreement in 2005 in the form of an MoU on Defence Industry and Logistics. India and Korean Coast Guard signed an MoU to strengthen maritime cooperation between the two countries in 2006.

As mentioned before, the increased frequency of high-level visits helped maintain the momentum in the political relations between the two countries. In this regard, the visit of Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam in 2006, the first Presidential visit from India to Korea, is worth mentioning. During the visit, President Kalam emphasised the potential and importance of bilateral cooperation in science and technology.

Korean President Lee Myung-bak's visit to India in 2010 as the chief guest of the Republic Day celebration was a historic moment in India-Korea relations. During the visit, the two countries elevated the status of the relationship to Strategic Partnership. On the logic of establishing a strategic partnership with Korea, Indian Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee, during his visit to Korea in 2007, said that,

> "Our 'Long Term Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Prosperity' with your great country (Korea) is a corner-stone of India's Look East policy. My fellow Indians and I are amazed at the rapidity with which LG, Hyundai and Samsung have become

household names in India. We are now negotiating a CEPA and our trade is out-performing the targets that have been laid down from time to time. More recently, our relations have expanded into other areas as well, and I am of the firm belief that we need to give strategic orientation to our bilateral partnership in order to take it to the next level."[30]

The joint statement issued at the signing of the Strategic Partnership Agreement provided a detailed roadmap for strengthening the partnership between the two countries.[31] New Delhi and Seoul signed several important agreements and announced the up-gradation of the Foreign Policy and Security Dialogue to the Vice-foreign minister/Secretary (East) level. The agreements signed included an MoU on space cooperation between the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the Korea Aerospace Research Institute (KARI) and an MoU on Cooperation in Information Technology and Services. In promoting cooperation in science and technology, the two countries decided to establish a dedicated fund of $10 million (with a contribution of US$ 5 million by each side) to promote joint research. On the back of the CEPA agreement signed in 2009 and came to force in 2010, the two leaders also set an ambitious target of $30 billion for 2014. The Summit also witnessed a strong convergence of interest in civilian nuclear energy cooperation and initiated a process to take the cooperation forward. In this regard, the two countries concluded India-Korea Civil Nuclear Agreement during the visit of Indian President Pratibha Patil's visit to Korea in 2011.

Increasing defence and security cooperation between New Delhi and Seoul further underscored the strategic significance of India-Korea bilateral relations. With the first-ever visit of the Indian Defence Minister to Korea in 2010, defence relations acquired a new momentum. During Defence Minister AK Antony's visit, New Delhi and Seoul signed two important MoUs to promote defence cooperation. An MoU aimed to facilitate the exchange of service personnel between the two military forces and the other on defence industrial cooperation. India also established a permanent military attaché at its embassy in Seoul. The period also witnessed an increase in joint naval exercises and port calls between the two navies. During the visit President Park Guen-hye's visit to India in 2014, the two countries signed an Agreement on the Protection of Classified Military Information, and an MoU on Cybersecurity was concluded, elevating security cooperation between the two countries. The two sides also agreed to maintain regular consultation between the two national security establishments of the two countries.[32]

The two back-to-back visits to Korea by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, 2010 to attend the G20 Summit and 2012- a state visit, the Korean President's visit to India in 2014 and several Summit meetings on the sidelines of the international diplomatic events helped to sustain the momentum of the strategic partnership between the two countries. The period also witnessed an increasing exchange of Ministerial visits and the establishment of

several consultation mechanisms at the ministerial level, including the India-Korea Finance Ministers Meeting, India-Korea Science & Technology Ministers Steering Committee Meeting, India-Korea Defense Ministers Meeting, among others.

Another feature of bilateral relations during this phase is the emergence of para-diplomacy, where sub-national actors including state governments playing a role in bilateral relations.[33] The main channel of engagement has been the Chief Ministerial and other ministerial visits to Korea. Indian states are also engaged in a broad range of activities, including roadshows and other business meetings. Outreach to Korea by the Indian state governments has been an important feature of bilateral relations since the mid-2000s and has been accelerated in recent years. India's para-diplomatic efforts have been complemented by similar activities of Korean sub-national entities, including prefectures and cities, and most importantly, by the Korean Embassy in India through its outreach activities to Indian states. The Korean Embassy in New Delhi has been organising 'Korean Caravan', a cultural and business promotion event.[34]

4. Deepening the Relations through Special Strategic Partnership

The visit of PM Narendra Modi to Korea in 2015 provided a new momentum in India-Korea bilateral relations. During the visit, the status of the bilateral relationship was upgraded to 'Special Strategic Partnership'. According to PM Modi, the up-gradation "reflects how seriously we take the new framework of our relationship".[35] To strengthen strategic communication, the leaders agreed to establish

the "2+2 Foreign and Defence Dialogue" at the Vice-Minister/ Secretary level. Highlighting the priority attributed to Korea in Indian foreign policy, PM Modi said: "the Republic of Korea is the second country with which India will have a diplomatic and security dialogue in the 2+2 format".[36]

The leadership role of PM Modi has been an important factor in India's outreach to Korea. Even before becoming the PM of India, Modi was active in promoting India-Korea relations. While serving as the Chief Minister of Gujarat (2001-14), Modi admired Korea's economic transformation and viewed it as a model for India to follow. Modi said he "wants to make it (Gujarat) like South Korea".[37] After becoming the PM, he stated that "India wants to achieve a lot of what Korea has already done" and that the "sectors which are strong in Korea are very important for the development of my country".[38] Envisaging 'development partnership' as an essential pillar of India-Korea relations, PM Modi declared "Korea, a crucial partner in India's economic modernisation" during his visit to Seoul.[39] Priority areas identified for partnership included defence production, infrastructure development in particular smart city projects, maritime cooperation including shipbuilding, transport and logistics, and industrial collaboration focusing on steel and electronics hardware manufacturing.[40]

India's reaching out to Korea also reflected Modi's government's reinvigorated approach to foreign policy that aimed at enhancing India's regional and global profile.[41] A greater emphasis on

development aspects in foreign policy gave further impetus for New Delhi interest to promote development partnership with advanced economies like Korea.[42] In this direction, India encouraged Korea's participation in new government's key initiatives like 'Make in India', Digital India, and Smart City Projects. India's revamping of its East Asia engagement, up-grading the two-decade-old ', Look East Policy' to 'Act East Policy', further brought the two countries closer.[43] While the economic and development agenda took precedence in shaping India-Korea relations under Act East Policy, the strategic imperative has also been apparent. In the context of changing regional geopolitical order with the Rise of China, the Act East policy has been India's logical response through a multifaceted approach that appears to restrain Beijing's assertiveness in the region. Under AEP, India enhanced its regional posture by strengthening defence and security partnership with ASEAN countries, Japan, Korea and Australia and have been promoting its vision for regional security architecture through the concept of Indo-Pacific.[44]

The leadership of PM Modi and the formation of a majority government in New Delhi has gained significant attention in Korea. According to a Korean academic, the new political landscape in India generated the third 'India Wave' in Korea and viewed it as an opportunity for Korean business.[45] The new government's powerful developmental narrative and the promise of economic reforms were viewed to help overcome the pessimistic attitude of the Korean business about India following the failure of the POSCO investment in India.[46]

Seoul complemented New Delhi's approach with a reinvigorated India policy under President Moon Jae-in, when he assumed power in 2017. Under the vision of 'Northeast Asia Plus',[47] President Moon elevated New Delhi's status in Korean foreign policy on par with that of its traditional partners, viz., US, China, Japan and Russia. In a first of its kind gesture, President Moon sent a Special Presidential Envoy to India soon after he got elected to office. The symbolic gesture followed the announcement of 'New Southern Policy' (NSP) - a strategy involving eleven ministries headed by the President's economic advisor to strengthen Korea's relations with India and ASEAN countries.[48]

Two factors underline Korea's outreach to India; economic diversification aimed to reduce Seoul's dependence on China and to expand the diplomatic horizon beyond Northeast Asia. China factor loomed large in Seoul's pivot to India and ASEAN (Kumar 2018). Korea's China dilemma is associated with an increasingly negative perception of its deep economic engagement with China. In the past, Seoul viewed the Rise of China as an economic opportunity.[49] Subsequently, China became Korea's most significant economic partner. Over the years, China has emerged as Korea's most significant investment destination and accounts for about one-quarter of its total trade. The THAAD controversy between the two countries in 2016 and its economic fallout has forced Korea to reevaluate its approach to China.[50] Through NSP, Seoul appears to be adopting a diversification strategy on the view that the economic dependence on China has made Korea susceptible to political risks.

The second objective of NSP aimed to expand Seoul's diplomatic horizon beyond Northeast Asia. Korean foreign policy traditionally has had its focus on the Korean Peninsula affairs and managing bilateral relations with four regional power; the US, China, Russia and Japan.[51] A narrow-focused foreign policy that served Korea well in the past, however, is increasingly becoming incompatible for two reasons. First, Korea's strategic interest has expanded beyond the Korean Peninsula with its emergence as a middle power.[52] Meanwhile, Seoul has also been under pressure to make adjustments in its foreign policy to accommodate new regional strategic realities in the context of a rising China. During the last three decades, Korea successfully managed to strengthen its economic engagement with Beijing while maintaining its security alliance with Washington. However, an escalating strategic competition between the US and China is constraining Korea's room for manoeuvring and autonomy. Another factor putting pressure on Seoul to recalibrate its foreign policy posture is the uncertainty emerging from Washington. The isolationist and protectionist tendencies in American foreign policy under former President Donald Trump caused doubts among its allies, including Korea, regarding Washington's security commitments and its leadership to maintain the liberal international order.[53] While the 'America First' rhetoric is no longer part of the American foreign policy under President Joe Biden, the isolationist and protectionist tendencies still persist. In a context of uncertainty and change, Seoul's outreach to India and ASEAN countries should be viewed as a strategic move to enhance its diplomatic leverage in a changing regional environment.[54]

The Joint Vision document issued during the visit of President Moon to India manifests the convergence of interest between Act East Policy (AEP) and NSP. The document charts the future trajectory of India-Korea relations under three themes; people, prosperity and peace.[55] By adopting a people-centric approach to bilateral relations, the joint vision underlined the significant role of non-state actors in promoting bilateral relations. The vision stressed the importance of encouraging people to people exchange, connectivity and greater visibility and understanding of each other among ordinary people. On prosperity, the joint vision emphasised taking advantage of the complementarities between India's rapid economic growth and its highly-skilled workforce and Korea's technological prowess, manufacturing excellence and developmental experience. PM Modi's return visit to Korea in February 2019 helped sustain the narrative framework of bilateral relations through the meeting of AEP and Korea's NSP. During PM Modi's visit, India and Korea signed seven agreements to further cooperation, including start-ups, infrastructure development, media, trans-border and international crime.[56]

While the elevation of bilateral relations to Special Strategic Partnership (SSP) was a symbolic gesture necessitated by new domestic and international political realities, but in no way was a departure, rather should be seen as a reinvigorated attempt to sustain progress made over the last decade. Six features highlight the development of India-Korea relations under SSP. *First* is the deepening of political relations between the two countries through high-level

visits until it was disrupted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Even during the pandemic, a certain level of interaction was maintained through virtual meetings. During this phase, India and Korea had eight Summit level meetings, including meeting on the sidelines of multilateral diplomatic events, the exchange of twelve ministerial-level delegations from the Indian side to Korea and eleven ministerial delegations from Korea to India.[57] Strong personal rapport between PM Modi and President Moon is an important variable. Their messaging to each other through social media platforms helped to enhance the visibility of India-Korea relations. The other exchanges include six Chief Ministerial delegations of different Indian states to Korea and exchanges of parliamentary delegations led by the Lok Sabha Speaker.

The *second* feature has been the significant development in defence and security cooperation in the particular defence-industrial sector. Growing defence diplomacy and convergence of interest in maritime security further enhanced the scope of the India-Korea security partnership. In this regard, signing a military logistics agreement between the two countries during the visit of Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh to Korea in September 2019 underscores the growing convergence of interest between the two countries in the maritime sector. *Third*, under SSP development, development partnership has become a critical pillar of bilateral relations. Though Korea is a new player in India's infrastructure development, considering its development experience and technological capability, the potential for a development partnership

is high. *Fourth*, economic relations between India and Korea have seen new dynamism. The new dynamism features an upswing in Korean investment in India, an increasing trend of India-Korea joint ventures and an improvement in bilateral trade. A *fifth* trend is the emergence of a regional dimension to India-Korea relations. A shared vision for regional order and the agreement for partnership on regional issues highlight an increasing convergence of interest between New Delhi and Seoul in the emerging regional security architecture in the Indo-Pacific region. The *sixth* feature of bilateral relations under SSP has been the emphasis accorded to improving the visibility of historical and cultural ties between the two countries and strong political commitment to promote people to people relations.

5. Developments in Bilateral Relations under Strategic Partnership Paradigm

As discussed in the previous sections, along with narrative, political and institutional aspects, the substance of the bilateral relations in various sectors have also developed significantly to become comprehensive and multidimensional under the Strategic Partnership paradigm. Key developments in various sectors have already been highlighted while mapping the evolution of strategic partnership; this section will provide a detailed discussion focusing on defence, economic and development partnership, science and technology, culture, and people-to-people exchange.

Defence Partnership

Even though India did not engage in a combat role in the Korean War, its military was involved in two way- a humanitarian role by sending a military medical mission and a peacekeeping role by the Custodian Force of India.[58] As in the overall trend in India-Korea relations during the Cold War period, there was little development in defence cooperation. The only exception was in the mid-1980 when South Korean company Korea Tacoma built the first three Sukanya Class Offshore patrol boats for the Indian Navy. During the first decade after the Cold War, the two countries attempted to develop defence cooperation mainly through exchanges of visits between Indian and Korean armed forces officers.

A momentum in defence and security cooperation emerged in the mid-2000s. A major drive has been the reinvigorated approach to India's East Asian engagement under the second phase of LEP. Another factor has been the growing security linkages between the Korean Peninsula and the Indian subcontinent because of nuclear and missile technology exchanges between Pakistan and North Korea.[59] In this regard, Korean foreign minister Lee Joung-bin during his visit to New Delhi in 2000, stated that "India and South Korea are now fully conscious of the new security linkages between the subcontinent and the Korean peninsula. There have been disturbing reports, over recent years, of nuclear and missile cooperation between Pakistan and North Korea".[60] He also added that both Seoul and New Delhi are moving forward to strengthen

the cooperation "for mutual reinforcement of peace and stability between our respective regions".[61]

The first bilateral Defence Dialogue between the two countries was held in 2003, and the first Foreign Policy and Security Dialogue was held in 2005. In 2005, the defence ministries of the two countries signed an MoU on Defense Industry and Logistics Cooperation. The MoU established the dialogue framework of the Joint Committee for Defense Industry and Logistics Cooperation (JCM) at the secretary level. This was the first agreement signed between the two countries towards promoting long term defence cooperation. The first JCM was held in 2007. So far, seven JCMs have been held. Later the two sides have also established additional institutionalised dialogue mechanisms to strengthen defence cooperation. The Defence Policy Dialogue (DPD) instituted at the level of Deputy Minister in 2013 has been upgraded to the level of Defence Secretary and has incorporated to become a part of '2+2 Dialogue, between the two sides in 2015. Steering Committee Meeting (SCM) is another defence dialogue mechanism established in 2010, focusing on joint defence research and development (R&D) between the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) of India and the Defense Acquisition Program Administration (DAPA) and the Agency for Defense Development (ADD) of Korea. Viewing the potential of defence collaboration with Korea, India created a defence wing in its embassy in Seoul by sending a permanent Defense Attaché in 2012. Until then, defence matters with Korea was handled by Defense Attaché based in Tokyo.[62]

The momentum in the strategic partnership between the two countries was maintained through defence diplomacy at the highest level. First Defence Minister Dialogue between the two countries was held in 2007, during the first Korean -Defence Ministers' visit to India. The First Indian Defence Minister to visit Korea was AK Antony in 2010. Since then, Indian Defence Ministers have visited Korea in 2015, 2017 and 2019. In comparison, Korean Ministers of National Defense visited India in 2018, 2020 and 2021 and the Minister of Defense Acquisition Program Administration in 2016 and 2017. Defence diplomacy between the two countries was further sustained through exchanges of chiefs of military forces of the two countries.

Partnership in the defence industry has emerged to become an important aspect of bilateral defence cooperation. While two countries have been exploring cooperation industry and R&D through various dialogue mechanism, Modi government's efforts to make India a defence manufacturing hub under the rubric of Make in India initiative and efforts to diversify defence system suppliers provided a new context for the boosting defence partnership with Korea.[63] Korea's push to scale up its presence in the global defence market complements India's search for new defence partners.[64] India sees Korea as a potential defence partner for three reasons; advanced technological capability, minimal political risk and less stringent regulation on technology transfer.[65]

A vital feature of the emerging defence industrial partnership is the involvement of the private sector from the two countries.

The joint venture between India's Larsen & Toubro (L&T) and Korea's Samsung-Techwin to produce K-9 Vajra howitzers for the Indian Army is an example of the emerging India-Korea defence partnership.[66] The joint venture, estimated at US$ 700 million, is one of the most significant orders placed by the Ministry of Defense with a private company under the 'Make in India' initiative. Out of 100 guns delivered to the Indian Army, only ten were imported from Korea, and the rest were manufactured in India. Another development in this direction is the selection of Korean built Biho self-propelled anti-aircraft defence system as the only candidate qualified for acquisition by the Indian Ministry of Defense. In order to take the Biho project in the 'Make in India' route, Korean OEM, LIG Nex1 had teamed up with India's Adani Group to produce and market the Biho system.[67] Apart from the two partnerships involving the manufacturing of K-9 Vajra and the K-30 Biho, India's Reliance Defence Ltd also signed a partnership agreement with LIG Nex1 to manufacture military systems in India.[68] However, in 2020, Indian Defense Ministry announced that it had cancelled the tender for the procurement of the air defence system.[69]

Naval ship manufacturing is another area in which India and Korea see the potential for partnership. In this regard, an MoU on Defense Industry Co-operation in Shipbuilding was signed in April 2017.[70] It was an umbrella agreement between the two governments to facilitate the partnership between Indian and Korean shipbuilding companies. In this direction, attempts were made to team up with Hindustan Shipyard Limited (HSL) of India and Korea's Hyundai

Heavy Industries to build five Fleet Support Ships for the Indian Navy. However, over differences in technology transfer and price, the project could not take off.[71] A similar attempt was also made between Goa Shipyard of India and Kangnam Corporation of Korea to build 12 Minesweepers for the Indian Navy.[72] Korea's Daewoo Shipbuilding & Marine Engineering is a major contender for the construction of six Conventional Submarines for the Indian Navy under Project P 75 (I).[73]

To take the defence industry partnership further, New Delhi and Seoul finalised the 'roadmap for defence industry cooperation in 2020 during the visit of the Korean Defence Minister to India.[74] The idea of exchanging defence cooperation roadmap was first proposed by PM Narendra Modi during his meeting with President Moon Jae-in in February 2019. The roadmap envisages elevating the defence relations to one that focuses on co-production and co-development from the traditional buyer-seller model. In this regard, it lists potential areas of collaboration, including Land Systems, Naval Systems, Aero Systems and Guided Weapon Systems. It also foresees promoting defence cooperation through research and development, testing, certification, quality assurance and marketing. Indo-Korea roadmap modelled to promote cooperation between state-owned and private defence companies of the two countries with the Make in India format. In this regard, during the meeting between the defence ministers in New Delhi in 2021, it was agreed to set up a task force in charge of implementing the agreement.[75] The roadmap also envisages promoting Korean investment in the

newly established Industrial Corridors in Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.[76]

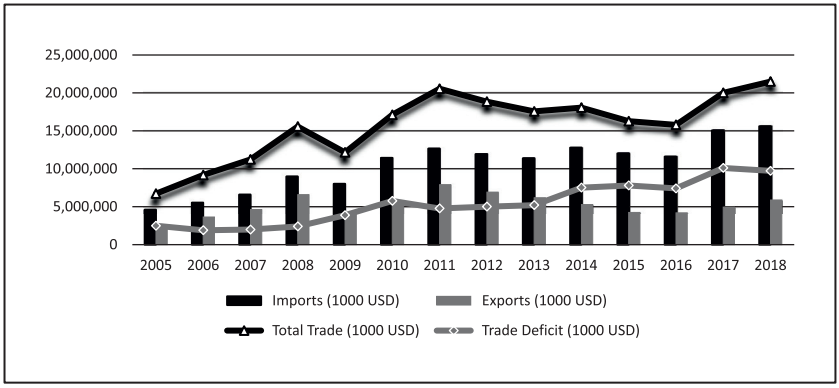
As discussed in the previous section, maritime security figures prominently in India-Korea security cooperation. The signing of a military logistics agreement between the two countries during the visit of Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh to Korea in September 2019, underscores the growing convergence of interest between the two countries in maritime security. The agreement would help the two navies expand their operational capability through the use of each other's bases for refuel and maintenance and enhance interoperability between the two navies.[77] Maritime security cooperation has been further expanded through joint exercises between the two naval forces and regular port call visits. The two navies conducted the latest joint exercise in 2017 off the coast of Mumbai. In addition, five Indian Navy vessels have sailed to Korea over the past five years, extending the military-to-military cooperation between two countries. According to the Indian Navy, these visits were to "demonstration of India's 'Act East' policy and Indian Navy's increasing footprint and operational reach to enhance maritime cooperation between the Indian Navy and the ROK Navy to contribute to security and stability".[78] Development in maritime security cooperation has also been reflected through growing collaboration between the Indian and Korea Coast Guard. Since the signing of an MoU in 2006, the two Coast Guards have been undertaking joint exercises on a regular basis. In April 2018, a scaled-up version of the bilateral Coast Guard exercise called

'Sahyog-Hyeoblyeog 2018' was conducted near Chennai to improve maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region.

Economic Relations

Economic relations continued to remain the main pillar of India-Korea relations. The signing of the CEPA in 2009, was a significant milestone in the economic ties between the two countries. CEPA covers goods, services, investments, bilateral cooperation, intellectual property rights and competition. After ratification by the two countries, it came into force in 2010. The bilateral trade increased 40 per cent in the first year following CEPA, from $12 billion in 2009 to $17 billion in 2010 and in 2013, two-way trade was about $20.5 billion. However, bilateral trade has seen a downward trend since 2012, recording $15.8 billion in 2016, only to revive since then to reach $21.5 billion in 2018.[79]

Fig 1. India-Korea Trade



(Source: Korea International Trade Association)

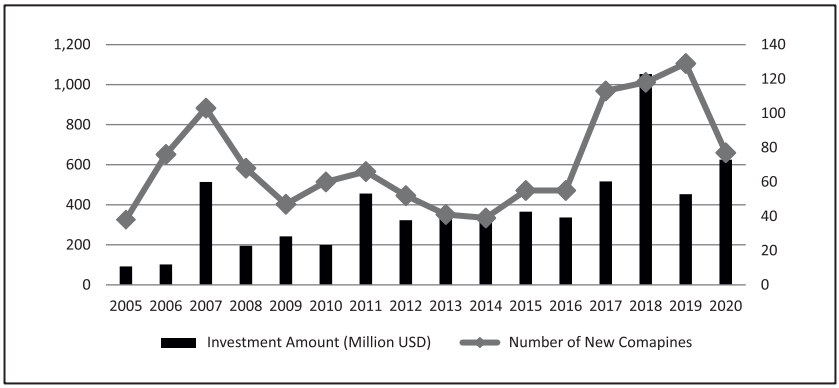
An increasing trade deficit since the CEPA came into force has been an issue of concern from an Indian perspective. As the bilateral trade increased, the deficit also increased, marking $5 billion in 2010, $7.4 billion in 2016, reaching 10.6 billion in 2017. During the CEPA up-gradation negotiation, India demanded better implementation of the agreement to ensure commensurate benefit for Indian exports. In this direction, India pitched on better market access for pharmaceuticals, agricultural items and IT services.

Another area of concern is India's export basket (See Appendix 1). Even after ten years of implementation, Indian export to Korea consists of largely primary materials and intermediate goods, while it imports mostly high-value goods. This is a problem not just specific to India-Korea bilateral trade but a larger issue with India's overall trade. However, what is interesting about India-Korea trade is that for certain categories of finished goods that India imports from Korea, it tends to export raw materials for the same category of goods. Encouraging Korean investment in India to make products in such categories is a way forward to address the trade deficit issue and the less advanced product basket of Indian exports.[80]

Observing stagnation and the low utilisation of CEPA, the Indian and Korean leadership in 2015 agreed to upgrade the CEPA. Agreeing to continue the process of CEPA up-gradation, an interim agreement of an 'Early Harvest Package' was announced during the visit of President Moon in 2018. Both countries also set the goal of achieving $50 billion bilateral trade by 2030. In the Early Harvest

Package, Korea agreed to give free access to 17 Indian products to its market, while 11 Korean products will get similar access to the Indian market. Indian products that received zero market access in Korea include mangoes, beer, popcorn, maise and its derivatives, jelly and jam. The package also agreed that India could send yoga trainers and Indian yoga institutes would be permitted to set up training centres in Korea. Similar concessions are given to Korea to promote Taekwondo in India.[81]

Fig 2. Korean Investment in India



(Source: Exim Bank, Republic of Korea)

Korea emerged as the 13th largest investor in India for the period 2000-2021, with a cumulative FDI of US$4.89 billion, according to the Indian government's Department of Investment Promotion.[82] As per the data from Korean Exim Bank, the total Korean investment for the same period is $6.3 billion.[83] The difference between Indian and Korean data count for Korean investment coming via other countries, mainly Singapore. The actual Korean investment would be much more

if one were to take the reinvestments made by Korean companies already operating in India. Korea's total investments in India constitute only 1.24 per cent of its total investment worldwide. Manufacturing accounts for about 84 per cent of the Korean investments, wholesale and retail trade about seven per cent and financial and insurance activities about 4 per cent. Around 800 Korean companies have business operations in India. Indian investment in Korea was estimated to be around $1 billion. Major Indian investments in Korea include; Tata Motors' acquisition of Daewoo Commercial Vehicle Co. for $102 million in 2004, Novelis Inc., a subsidiary of Hindalco Industries Limited, made a capital investment of $600 million in Novelis Korea Limited in 2005. Mahindra and Mahindra (M&M), acquired a 70 per cent stake in Ssangyong Motors with an investment of $458 million. However, no major Indian companies have invested in Korea after the M&M takeover of the Ssangyong in 2010.[84]

Of late Korean investment in India is witnessing an upward trend with announcements of new projects.[85] Korea's economic diversification strategy under New Southern Policy is a major factor facilitating this new wave of investments.[86]Another important development in India-Korea economic relations is the positive trend of joint ventures between India and Korean companies in India. It is a significant development because the predominant model of Korean investment in India has so far been in the form of wholly-owned enterprises.[87]

To promote investment and economic cooperation, New Delhi and Seoul have taken a number of initiatives. During the visit of President Park to India in 2014, both sides agreed to establish a CEO's Forum, which would be mandated to submit a report on further enhancing economic cooperation between the two governments. Both countries have agreed to establish the 'India-ROK Joint Trade and Investment Promotion Committee' at cabinet-level as an expanded and restructured replacement of the current 'India-ROK Joint Investment Promotion Committee.' They also welcomed the opening of a Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA) office in Bangalore and a Korea International Trade Association (KITA) office in New Delhi, hoping that both offices will serve to expand trade and investment between the two countries.

To promote Korean investment in India, a new mechanism called 'Korea Plus' was launched in June 2016 under the Ministry of Commerce in New Delhi. With a mandate to facilitate and follow-up, 'Korea Plus' has emerged as the first contact point for Korean investors in India. In the first two years of its operation, 'Korea Plus' facilitated more than 100 Korean investments.[88] 'Future Strategy Group', a bilateral mechanism involving Commerce, and Science and Technology ministries of both countries to promote cooperation in future technologies to harness the benefits of the 4th industrial revolution was launched in 2018.[89] It is mandated to identify and initiate projects jointly funded in the areas of future technology, including smart city, green technology, artificial intelligence, IoT. To facilitate commercial linkages India-Korea CEO Forum and India-

Korea Business Summit were also launched during this period. Furthermore, during the visit of PM Modi to Korea in 2019, it was announced for the establishment of an India-Korea start-up hub, a one-stop platform to bring the Indian and Korean start-up ecosystems closer to facilitate joint innovation. The start-up hub has emerged from an MoU signed between KOTRA and Invest India in July 2018.

Another important area of economic ties that has taken momentum is Korean participation in Indian infrastructure and development projects. In this regard, the Export-Import Bank of Korea (K-EXIM) and India Infrastructure Finance Company Ltd (IIFCL) have signed an MoU to strengthen cooperation in infrastructure financing. The MoU between the two institutions will facilitate information sharing and co-financing regarding Indian infrastructure projects and is likely to bolster opportunities for Korean companies to participate in such projects. Previously in April 2008, Korea Eximbank and IIFCL had successfully co-financed the $ 4.26 billion Mundra Coal-fired Power Plant Project. The MoU laid the foundation for the entry of Korean companies into the Indian infrastructure market by establishing a long-term relationship with IIFCL and would place Korean companies in an even more favourable position to win contracts in India.

Special dynamism that the bilateral relations found under the leadership of Modi and Park clearly manifested in maritime cooperation. The maritime sector is being identified as the key

sector of the Make in India initiative between India and Korea. In an effort to promote India's maritime sector, the government of India organised the first Maritime Summit in April 2016 in Mumbai, with Korea as the only partner. The Summit focused on the promotion and investment in port-led development, shipbuilding, ship repair and ship recycling, dredging, shipping and logistics, hinterland connectivity, inland water transport, green energy, security, education and training, financing, island development, cruise and lighthouse tourism, marine food and aquaculture. More than 50 Korean companies and a strong 200 plus delegation led by Minister of Oceans and Fisheries Kim Young-Suk represented Korea at the Summit. During the Summit, India and Korea signed an MoU for cooperation and mutual assistance in developing ports.

During the visit of Prime Minister Modi to Korea in 2015, infrastructure development in India was highlighted as another important area of collaboration. Korea announced a financial package support of $10 billion dollars for infrastructural development. The offer was subsequently repackaged as a $1 billion official development assistance (ODA) from the Korean Economic Development Cooperation Fund (EDCF) and concessional credit of $9 billion from the Korea Export-Import Bank (KEXIM). An MoU in this regard was signed during the visit of Indian Finance Minister Arun Jaitley to Korea in June 2017.[90] To accept Korean ODA, India amended its ODA law, which previously limited the acceptance of bilateral assistance only from G7 countries. In September 2017, it was announced that the fund would be used

for three mega infrastructure projects in the state of Maharashtra; Nagpur-Mumbai super communication expressway (NMSE), Kalyan-Dombivali smart city and Bandra Government colony redevelopment.[91] In this regard, an MoU was signed between the Maharashtra State Government and the Korean Ministry of Land, Transport and Maritime Affairs.[92] Korean Construction Company Korea Expressway Corporation (KEC) and Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation (MSRDC) later signed an MoU to look into implementing the Nagpur-Mumbai Expressway project specifically. Another MoU was signed between the Korea Land and Housing Corporation (LH) and Kalyan-Dombivali Corporation to collaborate in the construction of the Kalyan-Dombivali smart city project.[93]

In view of harnessing India's vast coastal lines as a potential source of economic growth envisaged under the 2015 initiative of Sagarmala, the maritime sector focusing on port development, shipbuilding, transport, and logistics has emerged as a promising area of bilateral collaboration under the Special Strategic Partnership. Selecting Korea as the partner country for the first India Maritime Summit in 2016 underscores India's emphasis on building a bilateral partnership in the maritime sector.[94] In this direction, a bilateral agreement on mutual assistance in port development was signed in April 2016.[95] The purpose of the agreement was to promote cooperation in areas including the sharing of technology and experiences in port development and operation and joint participation in port-related construction, building and engineering projects of mutual interest, amongst others.[96] In April 2018, India and Korea signed

an agreement on mutual recognition of competency certificates of seafarers, paving the way for Indian mariners to seek employment on more than 500 Korean ships.[97]

Rail and road infrastructure are also emerging as potential areas of bilateral partnership. The agreement between India's Research Design and Standards Organisation (RDSO) and Korea Railroad Research Institute (KRRI) during the visit of President Moon's visit to India in 2018 is set to explore cooperation in railway research and exchange of railway-related experience and development of railway industries. It also envisages joint research projects, including setting up an advanced railway R&D facility in India and studying the feasibility of a Korean model high-speed train. Furthermore, an MoU was signed during the visit of PM Modi's visit to Korea in 2019 between the National Highway Authority of India and Korea's Express Way Cooperation to promote cooperation in road and transport infrastructure development in India and exchange technical experience.

Partnership in Science and Technology (S&T)

Cooperation in science and technology has emerged to become an important agenda of the India-Korea strategic partnership. Attempts to explore potential areas of cooperation began with the first meeting of the India-ROK Joint S&T Committee in Seoul in 2005. The meeting identified specific project proposals in Biotechnology, Nano Science &Technology and Information Technology for cooperation between the two sides. In this regard, an MoU on Scientific and

Technical Cooperation between the Department of Science and Technology and the Korea Industrial Technology Foundation (KOTEF) was concluded. In addition, S&T cooperation received much attention during the visit of Indian President Abdul Kalam to Korea in 2006. During the visit, India-Korea revised the framework agreement for S&T cooperation signed between the two countries in 1976.

Cooperation in S&T has been an important agenda of discussion during the visit of President Lee Myung-bak to India in January 2010. Recognising the significance of S&T cooperation the joint statement endorsed the decision of the Joint Committee on Science & Technology to consider creating a dedicated fund of $ 10 million (with a contribution of $ 5 million by each side) to promote joint research. During the Summit meeting, the two sides also signed three agreements to promote cooperation in S&T; an MoU on Cooperation in Information Technology and Services, an agreement on Programme of Cooperation in the Fields of Science and Technology for the Period 2010-2012 and an MoU for Cooperation in the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space. During the meeting, it was also proposed to upgrade the Joint Committee on S&T to the Ministerial level.[98] The first Joint Ministerial S&T was held in 2011. So far, four joint Ministerial S&T committees have been convened, the last one being in 2018.

During PM Manmohan Singh's visit to Seoul in 2012, an MoU on cooperation between the Indian Space Research Organisation

(ISRO) and the KARI was inked. Among other things, the MoU had a provision to explore launching Korean satellites from India.[99] In 2011, India and Korea established the Korea-India Joint S&T Research Fund and had utilised it for joint research projects, human resources exchanges, workshops, and other science and technology cooperation programs. It also helped initiate the Global Knowledge Platform (GKP) project, a bilateral S&T technology cooperation framework proposed by President Abdul Kalam during his visit to Korea in 2006. The GKP initiative envisaged linking the two countries' representative universities, research institutes and businesses via broadband internet to develop the remote usage of expensive equipment, online lectures, joint research, collaborative design, co-manufacturing of products, etc. After the successful utilisation of the Joint R&D Fund, in 2014, during the Summit between PM Manmohan Singh and President Park Guen-hye in 2014, the two sides agreed to create an additional joint fund of $10 million (with a contribution of 5 million USD by each side) to promote mega projects, which will be conducted jointly by the industries, academia and institutes.[100]

During the Summit between PM Singh and President Park, the two governments also agreed to establish the India-ROK ICT Policy Forum. Out of the nine agreements signed during President Park's visit, five have been on S&T cooperation.[101] The agreements signed included a Joint Declaration on cooperation in the ICT field as well as bilateral collaboration for the development of the software industry, an MoU between the Ministry of Science and Technology

of the Republic Of India and the Ministry of Science, ICT and Future Planning of the Republic of Korea on a Joint Applied Research and Development Programme in Science and Technology and Implementing Agreement between the Indian Space Research Organisation and the Korea Aerospace Research Institute for Cooperation in the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space. The collaboration in space research received a further boost during PM Modi's visit to Korea in 2015. During the Summit, the two sides also agreed to hold working-level talks regularly between ISRO and KARI to strengthen the substantive way of cooperation in the areas of Deep space cross tracking and communication, sharing of data collected by Chandrayan–1, GAGAN-KASS interoperability and Technological cooperation in the field of space science and its application.[102]

During the Fourth Joint Committee Meeting in 2018, India and Korea agreed to establish two mechanisms to promote S&T Cooperation further. These initiatives were announced during the Summit between PM Modi and President Moon in 2018, the Future Strategic Group and the Indo-Korean Center for Research and Innovation (IKCRI) in India. IKCRI is envisaged acting as the hub for routine operation and management of all cooperative programmes in research and innovation between the two countries, including innovation and entrepreneurship and technology transfer. In March 2021, IKCRI was opened in New Delhi.

To take the R&D cooperation forward, India's Global Innovation and Technology Alliance (GITA) had teamed up with the Korea

Institute for Advancement of Technology (KIAT). Since the signing of an MoU in 2018, KIAT and GITA have been exploring the promotion of joint R&D. In this regard, they have identified four projects involving Indian and Korean universities, companies, and research institutions in advanced manufacturing, energy, ICT, and healthcare.[103]

While the thrust of India-Korea S&T cooperation has been on state-led initiatives to promote joint research, exchange of scholars and capacity building, it is also important to consider the role of research institutions and private companies, particularly Korean conglomerates operating in India. For instance, Samsung established its first R&D centre in Bengaluru in 1996. Currently, Samsung has five R&D Centres in India, employing thousands of Indian researchers and engineers. Similarly, LG and Hyundai also have their research units in India.[104]

The collaboration between Indian and Korean Universities has also increased over the years. While it is hard to track the development of collaboration at the university and research at the institutional level, the establishment of the Indo-Korea Science and Technology Centre (IKST) illustrates growing science and technology cooperation between the two countries' research institutions.[105] The Korea Institute of Science and Technology (KIST) established Indo-Korea Science and Technology Centre (IKST) in the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, in 2010 mainly to promote technology and business partnerships in collaboration with various universities/

institutions across India and Korea. IKST envisaged becoming the key base for bilateral S&T collaboration, including joint research and researcher mobility. The main focuses of joint collaborative research between two countries under the aegis IKST are energy, environment, water, materials, robotics and computational science.

Culture and People to People Exchange

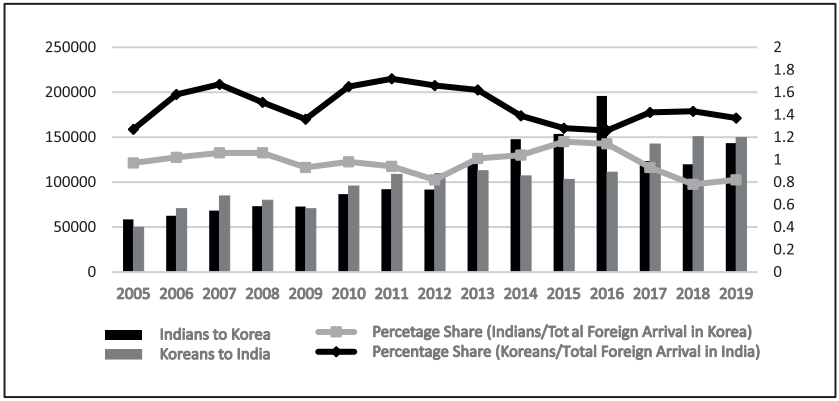
As discussed earlier, along with other dimensions of bilateral relations, cultural and people to people ties have also received greater attention under the strategic partnership paradigm. While there is a larger context to the cultural interaction between the two countries facilitated by the phenomenon of cultural globalisation manifested through the Korean Wave[106] and the growing popularity of Indian cultural products, the Indian and Korean states too have taken initiatives to enhance the visibility and understanding about each other's history and culture and to create opportunities for more people-to-people interaction. During the signing of the strategic partnership agreement in 2010, New Delhi and Seoul announced 2011 as the 'Year of India in Korea' and the 'Year of Korea in India, and a wide range of activities have been organised in both countries. Furthermore, the two countries established cultural centres in each other's capital. Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre (SVCC), under the Indian Council for Cultural Relations of India, was established in Seoul in 2011. Another cultural centre in Busan was established in 2013 through a public-private partnership framework. At the same time, the Korean Cultural Centre in New Delhi was founded

in 2013. The cultural centres have become the focal point of cultural exchanges between the two countries through various activities, including regular cultural performances, exhibitions, lectures, cultural and language education and outreach activities.

During Korean President Park Guen-hye's visit to India in 2014, the two countries signed an agreement, the ROK-India Cultural Exchange Program (2014-2017) to promote cultural interaction further. During President Park's visit, the Indian government also announced the facility of visa-on-arrival for Korean citizens. To enhance connectivity between the two countries, the bilateral civil aviation agreement of 1994 was revised in November 2015, increasing weekly flights between the two countries to 19; this resulted in new operations by Korean Airlines, which started direct flights between New Delhi and Seoul. Increasing the number of flights between India and Korea and the relaxed visa mechanisms helped improve people's connectivity. The total number of people who travelled to Korea from India and Koreans to India in 2005 was around 100,000; in 2019, it reached 300,000. While there has been an increase in the number of people travelling between the two countries, it as a share of the total foreigners visiting Korea and India reduced or remained the same (see Fig. 3).

The period also witnessed the expansion of institutionalised cooperation between research institutions, thinks tanks, and universities to bring academic and policy communities of the two countries closer. Such initiatives include MoUs between the Indian Council of World Affairs and the Institute of Foreign and National

Fig 3 People to People Exchange
(Korean Tourism Organisation/Indian Ministry of Tourism Annual Report)



Security of Korea in 2010, India's Foreign Services Institute (FSI) and the Korea National Diplomatic Academy (KNDA) signed in March 2012. Regular defence and security dialogue between India's Manohar Parrikar Institute of Defense and Strategic and Analysis (MP-IDSA) and Korea's Institute for Defense Analysis (KIDA) have also been held alternating between New Delhi and Seoul. In 2020, the Indian Council of World Affairs and Research and Information System for Developing Countries of India teamed up to establish a 2+2 Dialogue of economic and foreign policy think tanks with the Korean National Diplomatic Academy and Korean Institute of International Economic Policy in 2020. In addition, many Indian Universities have also signed MoUs with many Korean Universities to promote academic collaboration through joint research and student and faculty exchange. Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, and the University of Delhi has taken the lead on this front.

Since PM Modi's visit to Korea in 2015, there has been a greater emphasis on the historical and civilisational link between India and Korea. The move reflected the Modi government's overall push to make historical and cultural linkages an important agenda of Indian foreign policy. In this regard, emphasis was given to the Korean myth of a nuptial connection between the two countries dating back two millennia and Buddhist linkages between the two countries. In Korea, it is believed that an Indian princess Suriratna from Ayodhya (known in Korea as Heo Hwang-ok) travelled to Korea and married a Korean king. However, the story of the Princess and the cultural connections associated with it was hitherto not well known in India. During PM Modi's visit, it was announced that India and Korea would strengthen their historical connection by enhancing the linkages of the Korean people with Ayodhya. It was also decided to upgrade the monument for Queen Suriratna in Ayodhya as a bilateral project. In addition to promoting academic engagement on the historical linkage, the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) organised a major international conference in 2015 conference focusing on the legend of the Queen. Emphasis on the historical linkages by political leadership helped to improve the visibility of India-Korea relations. For instance, the visit of first lady Madam Moon to Ayodhya in 2018, on the occasion of Deepotsva celebrations, appealed to many Indians, who are otherwise not familiar with either Koreaor India-Korea relations. Her visit popularised the Korean myth and helped to attain the status of nothing less than a historical fact. During her visit, Madam Moon laid the foundation stone for a Memorial of Princess Suriratna in Ayodhya, built jointly by the two countries.

6. Indo-Pacific and the Future of India-Korea Relations

As discussed above, a benign international environment during the two decades after the Cold War featuring globalisation, regional integration, and the absence of geopolitical tension was an important factor in the development India-Korea relations. However, the return of geopolitics in global politics driven mainly in the context of China's Rise, US-China strategic competition, and realignment of relations between countries are complicating the regional environment in Asia. Rising nationalism and growing tendencies of deglobalisation are further disrupting the post-Cold War international order. While this process has been going on for some time, its pace has accelerated in recent years by former President Donald Trump in the US and, in particular, during the COVID 19 pandemic. The emergence of the Indo-Pacific reflects the changing strategic environment in Asia. The idea of Indo-Pacific and the reimagining of the regional order, though it was not initiated nor solely driven by the US, is being primarily narrated as a US-led process to contain China.[107] The growing relations between other promoters of the Indo-Pacific idea, including India, Japan and Australia with the US, among themselves and the evolution of the Quadrilateral Dialogue (QUAD), which according to Beijing, is acquiring the form of 'Asian NATO' provided further substance to the dominant narrative of Indo-Pacific as a US-led the geopolitical project. The intensification of the US-China rivalry in the post-COVID 19 periods led many observers to announce the arrival of a 'New Cold War'.[108]

While there are differences in India's conception of the Indo-Pacific vis-à-vis Washington and others, New Delhi has been at the forefront in promoting the Indo-Pacific regional construct. It has emerged to become New Delhi's framework to understand the developments in maritime Asia and locating its place in it. On the other hand, Korea has shown reservation on Indo-Pacific and has been ambiguous in its approach.[109].

The puzzle on Indo-Pacific emerged for the first time in the India-Korea bilateral context during the visit of President Moon Jae-in to India in 2018. The two sides adopted a shared vision for regional order and commitment to "a peaceful, stable, secure, free, open, inclusive and rules-based region" in the joint statement".[110] It further highlighted the significance of "freedom of navigation, overflight and unimpeded lawful commerce…peaceful resolution of conflicts through dialogue, underlying the centrality of sovereignty and territorial integrity, in accordance with the universally-recognised principles of international law".[111] While the shared vision of regional order strikes a similar chord to India's vision for Indo-Pacific in its substance, it failed to endorse the 'Indo-Pacific concept. The joint statement further stated that Korea "took note of India's inclusive and cooperative vision for the Indo-Pacific region".[112] Even though Korea appears to be sharing a similar vision of regional order like the countries that promote the idea of Indo-Pacific, including India, its approach to Indo-Pacific remains ambiguous.

Though the concept of Indo-Pacific has been around for over a decade, it received very little attention in Korea until Washington

endorsed the concept in 2017 with the announcement of the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" (FOIPS).[113] Korea dismissed President Trump's proposal to join the Indo-Pacific strategy arguing that it sees little benefit from the proposal.[114] Korea's approach to Indo-Pacific, however, has evolved in the last three years. Korea announced 'New Southern Policy' as its regional initiative and shown interest in working with regional initiatives of other countries, including those who promote the Indo-Pacific concept on issues that are of common interest. In this regard, Seoul had taken steps to find common ground between New Southern Policy and the Indo-Pacific initiatives of the US and Australia.[115] Korea also openly endorsed the 'ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific' (AOIP) and proposed to find synergy between New Southern Policy, China's Belt and Road Initiative and Japan's Free and Indo-Pacific through the China-Japan-Korea Trilateral Cooperation framework.[116]

Notwithstanding this evolution, Seoul continues to maintain ambiguity on the Indo-Pacific concept. This ambiguity can be seen as the absence of articulation of its position or an endorsement of the concept. Seoul continues to define the region as Asia-Pacific. Korea's attempt to maintain distance from the Indo-Pacific concept is equally reflected in its cautious approach towards US-led minilateral dialogue formats in the region, including QUAD or QUAD Plus and initiatives like Economic Prosperity Network, Clean Network Initiative, among others.[117] Though it appears superficial and semantic at first glance, the matter is fraught with severe geopolitical implications from a Korean perspective. Korea's

approach of strategic ambiguity toward the Indo-Pacific reflects its sensitivity toward geopolitical development in the region. Though Korea values the US-ROK alliance as the centrepiece of its security, Seoul's dilemma stems from the perception that the Indo-Pacific is a US-led geopolitical vision designed to contain China.[118] Seoul's ambiguity in Indo-Pacific attempts to maintain a delicate balance between its relations with the US and China and avoid getting entangled in the strategic competition between the two. In the context of intensifying Sino-US regional rivalry, the promotion of 'New Southern Policy (NSP)', as Korea's regional policy, is an attempt to maintain autonomy and promote its image as an independent regional actor.[119] In doing so, Seoul attempts to find a middle ground between the US and China to take advantage of the regional opportunities while reducing the impact of great power geopolitical rivalry. It also provides a certain amount of flexibility to Korea in maintaining its approach of 'strategic ambiguity' of selective engagement without endorsing the Indo-Pacific concept.

The regional geopolitical developments pose a significant challenge for India-Korea relations going forward, as the two countries are coming from two different geopolitical locations and appear to be on different tangents in the regional order discourse. While both countries are facing the growing compulsions of geopolitics in making their foreign policy choices, India appears to be driven by security considerations in its approach to regional order. On the other hand, Korea is keeping a low profile on regional security issues and prioritises economic and developmental issues in its regional

approach. This feature of Indian foreign policy has become more evident in the India-China border clash in 2020. Korean perception of India's Indo-Pacific approach, which has been viewed as more conciliatory, emphasising stakeholdership and inclusion, appears to be changing after seeing the Rise of anti-Chinese sentiments in India and New Delhi's strengthening of relations with the US. Korean observers have interpreted the ongoing India-China clash is as part of an emerging US-India-China strategic triangle and driving New Delhi more towards Washington.[120]

As illustrated, geopolitics will be a major factor in framing the narrative of India-Korea relations going forward. Considering the speed at which the regional developments are evolving, possibilities are high for misperception. The real challenge is managing the perception and expectation gap to limit through an accurate understanding of each other's perspectives and sentiments. The situation calls to strengthen the strategic communication between the two countries. In this regard, the platform of 2+2 Dialogue at the level of Secretary/Vice Minister established in 2015 but yet to convene is of vital importance.

The narrative framing of each other's regional approaches might appear to be diverging; however, in substance, India and Korea share a great deal in their respective visions of the regional order and face similar challenges. The joint vision document of 2018 clearly articulates the shared goal of an open, rule-based and inclusive region to achieve peace and prosperity goals. In a context where

India and Korea share the pressures of the growing intensity of the US-China great power rivalry, it is in their shared interests to invest in strengthening the rule-based order. In this regard, a regional order based on ASEAN centrality is a point of convergence between India and Korea and has been a meeting ground for AEP and NSP. New Delhi and Seoul have been actively engaged in regional institutions centred on ASEAN and have a shared interest in strengthening ASEAN unity and centrality to withstand the pressure of great power geopolitical pressure. Both countries have scaled up their engagement in capacity building and connectivity projects in ASEAN. Given the complementarities in their experience, expertise and capabilities, the India-Korea partnership will add value to their shared goal of ASEAN centric regional integration process.[121] The scope of the India-Korea regional partnership can also be extended to other sub-regions, including Indian Ocean Region. Korea has shown a keen interest in the Indian Ocean region, as indicated by its membership in the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) as a Sectoral Partner in 2018. India-Korea third country partnership in the Pacific Island countries is also an idea worth exploring.

As the narrative of regional order is becoming more centred on the US and China, particularly strategic rivalry between the two, manoeuvring space for middle-power countries like India and Korea are getting constrained. It is also true with the emergence of G2, where Beijing and Washington agreed to find common ground to manage affairs of world affairs between the two. However, such a state of affairs is quite unlikely but not impossible. Both extremes are not

acceptable conditions for India and Korea, and other middle powers in the region. There is an increasing call for middle-power countries to step up their efforts individually and collectively towards building the rules-based regional order.[122] Such initiatives could potentially constrain the behaviour of great powers by influencing the structural context. It can also take off some of the burden of order-making from great powers. In this regard, as the third and fourth-largest economies in Asia, Korea and India are well placed to work to build a network of middle-power countries. In this regard, it is suggested to explore possibilities for setting up trilateral/minilateral dialogues with potential partners in Southeast Asia, and Oceania on regional and global issues.

Cooperation in multilateral organisations is another potential area of cooperation. It is suggested to focus on cooperation in ASEAN led institutions like East Asia Summit EAS etc. There is also the potential for cooperation in the reformed multilateralism focusing on UN institutions. It is also suggested to have Korea's participation in Indian initiated international initiatives like International Solar Alliance, Lead IT, Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure and Information Fusion Centre for Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR). Issues addressed by the new Indian multilateral initiatives are also agendas identified under the NSPP framework, particularly under its sustainable peace and security pillar.

The potential partnership between India and Korea in Indo-Pacific can be further explored through converging interests between

Korea's NSP Plus[123] and India's Indo-Pacific Ocean Initiative (IOPI). President Moon announced the NSP Plus at the ASEAN-ROK Summit in November 2020. NSP Plus reflected the changing needs of Seoul and the ASEAN in the context of the COVID pandemic. The NSP Plus' seven core pillars focused on building back better economic and health systems and addressing non-traditional and human security challenges. The NSP Plus also has a more pronounced focus on the people; it emphasises the pandemic's impact on health, education and human capital and places these concerns at the centre of proposed recovery efforts. IOPI, on the other hand, was announced in November 2019 to take India's Indo-Pacific vision forward. It is an open, inclusive, non-treaty-based global initiative for mitigating challenges, especially in the maritime domain, through practical cooperation in seven thematic areas: (a) Maritime Security; (b) Maritime Ecology; (c) Maritime Resources; (d) Capacity Building and Resource Sharing; (e) Disaster Risk Reduction and Management; (f) Science, Technology and Academic Cooperation; and (g) Trade, Connectivity and Maritime Transport. India has been committed to promoting its Indo-Pacific vision through unilateral initiatives and bilateral, multilateral and minilateral cooperation.

The COVID- 19 pandemic causing a health and economic crisis has brought about a new context for India-Korea relations. Notwithstanding the disruption, post-pandemic developments have created new bilateral cooperation opportunities as the two countries are reprioritising their national development policy, India, through

its AatmaNirbhar Bharat initiative and Korea's New Deal policy. In order to take advantage of the opportunities in new and emerging areas, it is suggested to establish sectoral dialogues. For instance, it is highly recommended to establish India-Korea dialogue mechanisms on digital technology, maritime security, green technology, reliable and resilient supply chains.

The defence partnership has emerged as an important pillar of the India-Korea Special Strategic partnership. While recognising the importance of defence industrial cooperation, it is important to bridge gaps in the expectations between the two countries. With India and Korea sharing the objective of seeking 'defence autonomy' in the long term, both countries have greater incentives to advance from the current phase of defence partnership focusing on joint production to design, development, and R&D of various weapon systems. A big-ticket joint defence project will invariably raise the profile of the India-Korea strategic partnership.

While the India-Korea economic relationship is on a sound footing, the trend of growing bilateral trade deficit and stagnating Indian exports to Korea has emergence become an increasing concern for the Indian side. Given that it is a structural issue difficult to solve easily, it is important to approach the issue with a different mindset so as not to make it an issue that could sabotage the overall narrative of the relationship. In this regard, it is suggested that India needs to recognise Korea as an important partner with the potential to enhance India's manufacturing and exports than a country with a

trade deficit. Korea should recognise that India will become a G3 country in 10 years. Undertaking such a perspective would make the India-Korea CEPA renegotiation more conducive and congenial.

Another major pillar that needs special attention in taking the relations forward is the people-to-people connectivity, which needs to be encouraged through building strong physical, cultural and institutional connectivity. It will not only help expand the social networking between the two countries but also enhances the awareness of India amongst the Koreans and vice versa.

Considering that the Indo-Pacific narrative and regional institutional framework is still evolving, it is important that New Delhi and Seoul should keep an open mind to regional cooperation. For instance, QUAD itself has evolved from a politico-security dialogue mechanism to a broad-based platform to discuss issues including cooperation on the COVID pandemic, health security, climate change, infrastructure and supply chain, among others. In this regard, New Delhi could take the initiative in facilitating Korea's participation in the evolving Indo-Pacific multi and minilateral platforms.

The political change from the progressives to the conservatives with the victory of Yoon Suk-yeol in the recently held Presidential election in March 2022, it is likely to see a significant shift in Korea's approach to Indo-Pacific in the future. Yoon has been critical of Moon's foreign policy for its over-emphasis on inter-Korean relations and balancing between the US and China, which according to him,

resulted in the appeasement of Beijing and weakened the US-Korea alliance. Under the banner of 'predictable diplomacy', Yoon has proposed enhancing Korea's status as a 'pivotal global power' by strengthening the US-Korea security alliance, a principled China policy based on mutual respect, a proactive approach to Indo-Pacific. If the President-elect Yoon, when he assumes office in May 2022, can bring about a change in Korean foreign policy as he laid it out during his election campaign, with Korea playing a proactive role in Indo-Pacific moving away from its current ambiguity will open up new vistas for enhancing India-Korea relations.

7. Conclusion

India-Korea relations under the strategic partnership paradigm have become comprehensive and multidimensional. Bilateral factors, including robust economic growth in India and Korea's emergence as a technological powerhouse, economic complementarities between the two economies, and a benign post-Cold War international order featuring globalisation and regional integration, helped forge the strategic partnership between the two countries.

Despite its popularity, the meaning of strategic partnership remains vague.[124] As a concept emerged in the post-Cold War period, the strategic partnership represents a new form of bilateralism in the 21st Century to distinguish it from the Cold War-era bilateral relations, which were predominately exclusive, threat driven and framed in the binary language of friends and enemies.[125] A strategic partnership can be understood as privileged bilateral relations centred

on 'partnership diplomacy' that countries prioritise to work on issues where they find mutual interest in a coherent and coordinated fashion. It also provides enough flexibility and manoeuvring space for states to pursue separate interests with other partners.[126] Unlike the Cold War period, during which the conception of 'strategic' was closely associated with military security, the strategic considerations have expanded to include economic, development, technology, and non-traditional security issues under the strategic partnership framework.

Drawing on the perspective of stratgeic partnership as a new form of bilateral relations, three important characteristics can be identified as to what it means for India-Korea relations. First, the strategic partnership framework provided a new narrative of India-Korea relations, highlighting its privileged status in each other's foreign policy. It was also indicative of the recognition of the enhanced status of India and Korea in the international community and the growing priority attributed to each other in their respective strategic outlook. Thus the elevation of the status of the relationship to 'strategic partnership' marked a new threshold in India-Korea bilateral relations.

The second feature associated with India-Korea relations under the strategic partnership paradigm has been the significant advancement in the institutionalisation of bilateral relations. The institutionalisation of ties has been reflected in establishing structured dialogue mechanisms at different levels in several

policy areas, including foreign and security policy, defence, energy, cyber security, trade, investment science and technology, among others. The structured dialogue mechanisms established between various government agencies not only provide avenues for regular communication to pursue interests in a particular area but also helps to maintain certain momentum in the relations even if differences occur in some areas.

The third feature is the multiple interpretations associated with constitutive aspects of the strategic partnership. In other words, there exist numerous explanations for what makes India-Korea relations strategic. First is the structural narrative that locates India-Korea relations in the evolving geopolitical context with a perspective that development in the relationship is part of each other's external balancing or hedging strategy. The economic dimension of the relationship takes centre stage in the second interpretation of the meaning of strategic partnership. Such a perspective attributes economic transformation as a strategic objective and highlights India-Korea relations as an essential factor in achieving that goal. Many observers in India view Korea as an important source of capital and technology that can contribute to its economic transformation. In contrast, Korea sees the strengthening of its economic partnership with India as a new source of economic growth and an opportunity to diversify its economic and diplomatic dependence on great powers, particularly China. Growing defence and security partnership, particularly defence industrial collaboration between New Delhi and Seoul, has acquired significant strategic value considering the

Indian and Korean goal of achieving strategic autonomy through diversification of defence suppliers and self-sufficiency.

Given the high degree of flexibility, a strategic partnership is highly responsive and adaptive to changes in the international environment, making it an ideal instrument for hedging against uncertainty vis-à-vis the international environment and partners. It also means that meaning associated with a strategic partnership is contingent on structural and bilateral conditions. India-Korea relation is no exception. Since the structural and bilateral context in which India-Korea relations have evolved is undergoing a significant transformation in the Indo-Pacific international order, so is the nature, scope, and meaning of strategic partnership between the two countries.

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Appendix 1.

India-Korea Trade Basket (Figures are in Million USD)

Top Indian Exports to ROK						
HS Code	**Product group description**	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**	**2017**	**2018**
27	Mineral fuels, mineral oils and products of their distillation; bituminous substances; mineral waxes	1008.8	1655.8	546.2	779.4	992.8
76	Aluminium and articles thereof	395.4	505.2	516.6	754.7	514.7
72	Iron and steel	487.1	411.9	285.6	369.4	444.2
29	Organic chemicals	394.8	300.7	318	376.6	417.5
52	Cotton	247.3	219.9	212.8	184.8	255.7
78	Lead and articles thereof	92.9	71.4	48.9	81.6	166.8
84	Nuclear reactors, boilers, machinery and mechanical appliances; parts thereof	133.8	129.2	134.4	182	157.8
85	Electrical machinery and equipment and parts thereof; sound recorders and reproducers; television image and sound recorders and reproducers, parts and accessories of such articles	70.5	80.6	82.7	94.2	150.2
79	Zinc and articles thereof	62.2	53.5	116.5	141.2	149.1
23	Food industries, residues and wastes thereof; prepared animal fodder	301.1	220.8	164.4	87.2	144.9
74	Copper and articles thereof	12	2.7	7.6	156.7	138.4
26	Ores, slag and ash	75.7	68	15.4	105.2	119.1
32	Tanning or dyeing extracts; tannins and their derivatives; dyes, pigments and other colouring matter; paints, varnishes; putty, other mastics; inks	64.6	74.9	73	72.8	101.5
Top Indian Imports from ROK						
HS Code	Product group description	2013	2014	2015	2017	2018
85	Electrical machinery and equipment and parts thereof; sound recorders and reproducers; television image and sound recorders and reproducers, parts and accessories of such articles	1827.8	2381	2739.5	3256.2	2670.7

72	Iron and steel	1469.3	1691.9	1840.6	2076.3	2535
84	Nuclear reactors, boilers, machinery and mechanical appliances; parts thereof	1737.2	1629.4	1722.2	1576.2	2449.7
39	Plastics and articles thereof	1201.5	1365.3	1284.5	1417.3	1804.7
29	Organic chemicals	1249.2	1080.9	629.5	944.3	1140.4
27	Mineral fuels, mineral oils and products of their distillation; bituminous substances; mineral waxes	692.8	964.8	675.9	875.9	905.3
87	Vehicles; other than railway or tramway rolling stock, and parts and accessories thereof	697.9	643.5	628.6	725.5	711.2
79	Zinc and articles thereof	80.3	131.1	164.6	348.7	433.7
90	Optical, photographic, cinematographic, measuring, checking, medical or surgical instruments and apparatus; parts and accessories	287.4	309.4	350.3	351.8	422.6
89	Ships, boats and floating structures	520.1	265.3	199.3	614.1	380
40	Rubber and articles thereof	512.8	474.5	321.8	343.6	362.6
73	Iron or steel articles	254.2	268.1	288.9	292	339.7
48	Paper and paperboard; articles of paper pulp, of paper or paperboard	176.6	258	251.9	263.2	301.5
76	Aluminium and articles thereof	149.8	176.9	164.7	182	268.7
38	Chemical products, not elsewhere classified	113.3	135.3	143.3	162.3	219.4
82	Tools, implements, cutlery, spoons and forks, of base metal; parts thereof, of base metal	141	156.2	174	150.9	191
78	Lead and articles thereof	69	102.6	98.1	159.4	183.9
28	Inorganic chemicals; organic and inorganic compounds of precious metals; of rare earth metals, of radio-active elements and of isotopes	122.1	146.5	127.3	113.5	169.4

Source: UN COMTRADE Database

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ISBN 978-93-83445-62-2
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