



KOREA DIGEST

Korea Digest is a monthly publication of the Korea Centre, School of International Relations and Politics, Mahatma Gandhi University, that compiles major political, security, economic and diplomatic developments in the Korean Peninsula. Korea Digest aims to track, highlight and provide brief analysis of important developments in the Korean Peninsula.

Korea Digest No. 22, April, 2025

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1. Yoon Suk Yeol Removed from Office Following Constitutional Court Verdict

In a historic decision on April 4, South Korea's Constitutional Court unanimously [upheld the National Assembly's impeachment](#) of President Yoon Suk-yeol, officially removing him from office. Acting Chief Justice Moon Hyung-bae announced the 8-0 decision, making Yoon the second president in Korean history to be ousted through impeachment. The decision came 111 days after the Liberal Democratic Party (DP)-controlled Assembly voted to impeach Yoon over his declaration of martial law on December 3.



Constitutional Court Acting Chief Justice Moon Hyung-bae reads the verdict on President Yoon Suk Yeol's impeachment on Apr. 4.

The court [found Yoon guilty on five charges](#), including illegally declaring martial law, attempting to suspend political activities, deploying special forces to block parliamentary actions, sending military forces to the National Election Commission, and ordering the arrest of senior politicians and judges. The Court emphasised that Yoon's actions constituted serious violations of the constitution and human rights, with no justification under his claims of election fraud or political unrest. A snap presidential election is scheduled for June 3.

Following the ruling, mass protests both supporting and opposing the impeachment erupted in central Seoul. Liberal Democratic Party (DP) leader Lee Jae-myung praised the [decision as a triumph for "K-democracy,"](#) pledging to lead Korea toward greater growth, stability, and peace. Lee, now a frontrunner for the presidency, expressed gratitude to the military for refusing illegal orders and called Yoon's downfall a tragic but important chapter in constitutional history. Meanwhile, Kwon Young-se, interim leader of the conservative People Power Party (PPP), welcomed the Court's ruling and apologised to the public.



Ralliers cheer upon hearing the Constitutional Court's ruling that upheld the impeachment of now-former President Yoon Suk Yeol near Anguk Station in central Seoul, on Apr. 4. Source: Korea Joongang Daily

[North Korea also reported on Yoon](#)'s impeachment through its state-run Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) on April 5, relaying international coverage of the event without issuing its own commentary.

2. Japan's 'one theatre' plan with the US raises concern in Korea over shifting military focus

On March 30, U.S. Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth met with Japanese Defence Minister General Nakatani in Tokyo, where [Nakatani outlined Japan's "one theatre" strategy](#). This concept proposes integrating the Korean Peninsula, the East China Sea, and the South China Sea into a unified operational and combat zone. Under this approach, conflict zones such as Taiwan, the Korean Peninsula, and the East China Sea would be treated as a single operational unit due to their interconnected nature. Japan presented this plan to the U.S. as a means to address potential threats from China, potentially broadening the area in which Japan's Self-Defence Forces can operate.

However, the unconfirmed [proposal has raised concerns in South Korea](#), fearing that the U.S. focus on the peninsula may shift from North Korea to China. Seoul is apprehensive that if the U.S. adopts the "one theatre" strategy, the mission of U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) could transition from deterring North Korean aggression to countering China. The concept would merge the Korean Peninsula with surrounding regions like the East China and South China Seas into a single operational zone.

Japan's vision for deepening defence cooperation with the US includes viewing Japan, the U.S., Australia, the Philippines, and South Korea as a unified theatre. [South Korea is wary of this shift](#), as it may lead to the redeployment of USFK from the Korean Peninsula, potentially weakening regional security. With a fragile armistice in place and ongoing nuclear

developments and military provocations from North Korea, such a move could undermine South Korea's defence posture.

South Korea, a key US ally and a mature democracy, views its role in the U.S.-led security framework as vital and should not be relegated to a secondary position in another country's strategic plan. Additionally, there are [concerns](#) that Japan's proposed military strategy could revive historical issues and provoke a strong domestic backlash in South Korea. Furthermore, this approach could heighten tensions with China and escalate instability across Northeast Asia and the Korean Peninsula.

3. North Korean Soldiers Briefly Cross Inter-Korean Border

On April 8, ten [North Korean soldiers crossed the Military Demarcation Line](#) (MDL) on the eastern front of the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) around 5 p.m., according to South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS). The North Korean troops quickly withdrew after South Korean forces issued warnings and fired warning shots. The JCS stated that it continues to monitor the situation closely and is taking necessary measures, though it did not disclose additional details. South Korean Media reports suggest the incursion may have been accidental, linked to ongoing North Korean construction activities near the border, including the erection of walls and barbed wire as part of North-South separation measures. Notably, this marks the fourth MDL violation by North Korean forces in recent months, with three incidents already reported in June 2024.

In a separate incident, a South Korean soldier [unintentionally discharged a machine gun](#) at a front-line guard post in the central Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) on the morning of April 23, according to military officials. The incident took place at a guard post managed by a unit stationed in Cheorwon County, Gangwon Province. This marks the first accidental discharge by South Korean forces since North Korean soldiers crossed the DMZ in a recent breach.

4. South Korea Conducts First Live-Fire Artillery Drills Near Inter-Korean Border in 7 Years and Joint Air Drills Featuring B-1B Bomber

On April 21, South Korean artillery units [conducted live-fire exercises near the inter-Korean border](#) for the first time in seven years, the military announced on April 22. The drills, held around the Imjin River in Paju, approximately 30 kilometers northwest of Seoul, involved 12 K9A1 and six K55A1 self-propelled howitzers, firing around 60 rounds at the Story Live Fire Complex. This marks the first exercise at the Paju since South Korea fully suspended the 2018 Inter-Korean Comprehensive Military Agreement last June, following North Korea's military provocations across the border. The 2018 agreement had prohibited artillery drills and large-scale military exercises along the border. The resumption follows a recent memorandum of understanding between South Korea and the United States, allowing South Korean forces to use the training range. The military stated that the renewed drills aim to bolster South Korea's

firepower capabilities and enhance rapid response readiness against potential North Korean artillery threats.

South Korea and the United States [conducted joint air drills](#) over the Korean Peninsula on April 15, featuring at least one U.S. B-1B bomber, according to South Korea's Defence Ministry. The exercise, which included South Korean F-35A and F-16 fighter jets alongside U.S. F-16s, aimed to showcase the allies' readiness to counter North Korea's advancing nuclear and missile capabilities. Timed to coincide with the 113th anniversary of North Korea's founder Kim Il-sung's birth, the "Day of the Sun," the drills underscore the commitment to enhancing bilateral defence cooperation. The ministry did not disclose the number of B-1Bs deployed or the exact location of the exercise. This marks the second joint air exercise involving U.S. heavy bombers this year, following similar drills on February 20. The operation comes in the wake of the Constitutional Court's recent decision to uphold the impeachment of former President Yoon Suk-yeol over his imposition of short-term martial law in December.

5. South Korea Successfully Launched its Fourth Military Surveillance Satellite

On April 21, [South Korea successfully launched](#) its fourth military surveillance satellite, enhancing its ability to independently monitor North Korean activities. The launch, part of the country's Project 425, took place at 8:48 p.m. on April 21 from Cape Canaveral Space Force Station in Florida. [According to the Ministry of National Defence](#) and the Defence Acquisition Program Administration (DAPA), the satellite separated from its Falcon 9 rocket about 15 minutes after launch, and communication with the ground station was established approximately 56 minutes later.

This satellite, equipped with a high-resolution synthetic aperture radar (SAR), is [designed to provide ultra-high-resolution imagery](#), regardless of weather conditions. It will become a key component of South Korea's Kill Chain system, which is focused on pre-emptively countering North Korean threats. The satellite, developed by the Agency for Defence Development (ADD) and a domestic company, will undergo initial testing over the next two weeks, with full operational deployment expected within six months.



The rocket carrying the Korean military's fourth reconnaissance satellite was launched on April 21 from Cape Canaveral Space Force Station in Cape Canaveral, Florida. Source: Korea Net

Project 425, initiated in 2017, aims to deploy a total of five surveillance satellites to enhance South Korea's ability to track North Korea's nuclear and missile activities. The project includes five satellites: one electro-optical infrared (EO/IR) satellite and four SAR satellites. The first satellite was launched in December 2023, followed by subsequent launches in April and December of the following year. With the fourth satellite's successful deployment, South Korea plans to complete the launch of all five reconnaissance satellites by the end of 2025, marking a significant step towards developing autonomous space capabilities and bolstering its national defence.

6. North Korea acknowledged sending troops to Russia for the first time

On April 28, [North Korea officially confirmed the deployment](#) of its military forces to Russia, describing the move as a demonstration of its strategic partnership with Moscow. The Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported that the deployment was conducted in accordance with the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Treaty signed between the two countries, emphasising it as a faithful and practical implementation of the agreement. According to the North Korean statement, its troops took part in operations to liberate Russia's Kursk region, framing the action as a defence against Ukraine's adventurous invasion. The deployment, reportedly ordered by North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, was justified under Article 4 of the bilateral treaty.

On the same day, Russia's TASS news agency reported that President [Vladimir Putin expressed gratitude](#) to North Korea for its military support. Putin described the move as an act of solidarity and genuine friendship, and publicly thanked Kim Jong-un and the North Korean people for their role in helping Russia regain control of the Kursk border area. [North Korea further publicized](#) Putin's appreciation on April 29 by publishing his full statement in Rodong Sinmun, the country's main state-run newspaper. The statement highlighted North Korea's contribution to what Russia terms the "liberation" of the Kursk region and reaffirmed that the deployment aligned with both international law and the terms of the June 2024 treaty signed in Pyongyang.

In response, [South Korea condemned](#) the deployment, called it as a criminal act, denouncing it as a violation of international norms and a blatant provocation.

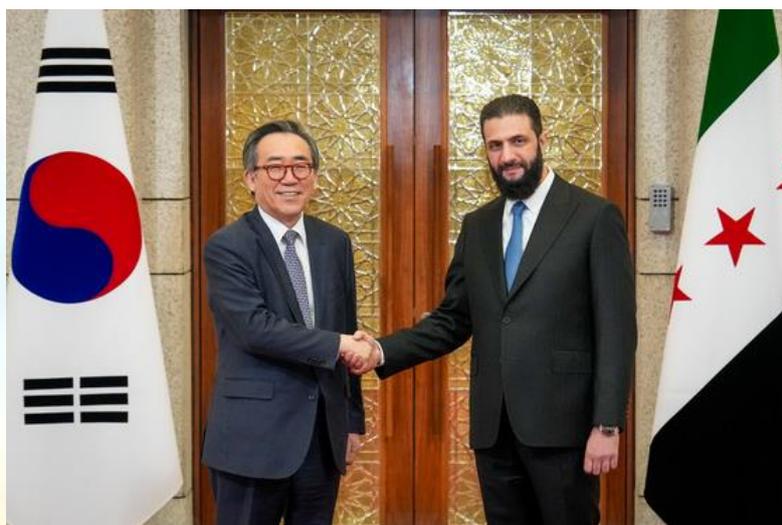
7. North Korea conducts 1st test-firing of new warship's weapons systems

North Korea has [conducted its first weapons systems test](#) on a newly launched destroyer, the Cho Hyon, according to a report by the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) on April 30. The "combat application test," held on April 28 and 29 under the supervision of leader Kim Jong-un, marks a significant step in Pyongyang's efforts to strengthen its naval power. The multipurpose warship, unveiled during a launching ceremony on April 25, is reportedly equipped with supersonic strategic cruise missiles, tactical ballistic missiles, anti-aircraft systems, and 127mm ship-based automatic guns. KCNA stated that the tests included a range of missile systems and naval guns aimed at enhancing operational effectiveness. Kim Jong-un emphasized the urgency of completing the destroyer's weapons systems to enable integrated

combat operations. He also underscored the importance of establishing a proactive and aggressive defense posture grounded in strong offensive capabilities.

8. South Korea established diplomatic ties with Syria

On April 10 in Damascus, South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul and Syrian Foreign Minister Asad al-Shaibani signed a joint communiqué [formally establishing diplomatic relations](#) between the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the Syrian Arab Republic. This historic move marks the ROK's completion of diplomatic relations with all 191 UN member states, following the establishment of ties with Cuba last year.



*Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul and Syrian President Ahmed Al-Sharaa shake hands during a meeting in Damascus on April 10.
Source: Korea Joongang Daily*

9. S. Korea, China hold maritime talks amid tensions over steel structures in Yellow Sea

South Korea and China convened working-level maritime talks in Seoul on April 23, [amid escalating tensions over steel structures](#) erected by Beijing in the overlapping waters of the Yellow Sea. The discussions followed a February standoff after Chinese authorities blocked a South Korean vessel from inspecting one of the Chinese installations in the so-called Provisional Measures Zone (PMZ), an area where the two nations' Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) overlap.

Established under a 2000 bilateral agreement, the PMZ permits joint fishing and marine resource management but prohibits activities beyond navigation and fishing. China, however, maintains that its installations in the area, two semi-submersible buoys deployed in 2018 and 2024, and a permanent steel structure with a helicopter pad added in 2022, are part of a commercial salmon fish farming operation. South Korea disputes this, raising concerns that the structures may violate the agreement.

Drawing parallels with China's assertive maritime activities in the South and East China Seas, [Seoul raised strong objections and concerns](#) during the talks and emphasized that Beijing's actions should not infringe upon its maritime rights. Maritime Affairs Minister Kang Do-hyung stated that government agencies were reviewing all possible options, including reciprocal measures, to resolve the issue. He also noted plans to allocate funding for South Korea's own aquaculture facility in the PMZ as a countermeasure.

10. South Korea and the United States held high-level 2+2 trade talks in Washington

On April 24, South Korea and the United States [convened high-level "two-plus-two" trade talks](#) in Washington, aiming to seek exemptions from recently imposed U.S. tariffs and to strengthen bilateral economic ties. South Korean Finance Minister Choi Sang-mok and Trade Minister Ahn Duk-geun met with U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Besant and U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer for the first such meeting in the U.S. capital.

South Korea requested exemptions from country-specific [reciprocal and sectoral tariffs](#), particularly on steel and automobiles, while proposing measures to bolster energy imports from the U.S. and assist in revitalizing the American shipbuilding industry. According to South Korea's Ministry of Economy and Finance, these proposals aim to promote sustainable and balanced trade relations.



Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Choi Sang-mok, shakes hands with U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Besant at the Department of Treasury in Washington. Source: Yonhap

The talks garnered significant attention given South Korea's previous agreement with the Trump administration to ease tariff tensions. The Trump administration had imposed a 25% tariff on South Korean goods, including automobiles and auto parts, with further duties set to take effect in early May. Finance Minister Choi emphasized the need for calm, structured negotiations, citing South Korea's ongoing political

instability following the impeachment of former President Yun Suk-yeol in December after martial law was declared.

During the meeting, both sides agreed to pursue a ["package" agreement](#) covering tariffs and broader economic cooperation by early July.

11. South Korea and the UAE have reached an agreement to collaborate on overseas nuclear power projects

South Korea and the United Arab Emirates have [agreed to strengthen their cooperation in the nuclear energy sector](#) by jointly pursuing overseas nuclear energy projects. The agreement was formalized during high-level consultations held in Abu Dhabi on April 22, led by South Korea's Second Vice Foreign Minister Kang In-sun and UAE Energy Minister Suhail Mohammed Al Mazrouei, according to Seoul's Foreign Ministry. The discussions marked a continuation of bilateral consultations that began in 2018, aimed at enhancing collaboration in nuclear energy. Both sides agreed to expand the scope of their cooperation beyond the current focus on reactor construction and operation to include nuclear fuel supply chains, reactor maintenance, and joint scientific research. Minister Al Mazrouei emphasized the importance of broadening the partnership to meet rising global demand for clean energy. The next round of consultations is scheduled to take place in South Korea next year. In a separate bilateral meeting, the two officials also agreed to deepen cooperation in crude oil storage and explore future energy solutions, including hydrogen and solar power.

12. Hanwha Aerospace Signs 371.4 billion-Won Deal to Export K9 Howitzers to India

On April 3, South Korean defence giant Hanwha Aerospace announced that it has [signed a 371.4 billion won contract](#) to export its indigenously developed K9 self-propelled howitzers to India. In collaboration with Mumbai-based Larsen & Toubro, the company will deliver the howitzers to the Indian Army by September 2030. This new contract is part of India's ongoing military modernisation efforts. It follows a previous agreement in 2017, under which Hanwha delivered K9 howitzers worth 372.7 billion won to India by 2020. Hanwha Aerospace emphasised that the K9's proven reliability in fulfilling the Indian Army's operational requirements contributed to the success of the initial contract, reinforcing its position as a trusted partner in India's defence sector. The company anticipates that this deal will help expand the K9's market beyond Europe, with countries like Romania and Poland already having adopted the system. Hanwha Aerospace CEO Son Jae-il expressed confidence that the company's successful track record will further strengthen cooperation with Asian nations, particularly India.



The chief executive officer (CEO) of Hanwha Aerospace Co. and the executive vice president of Larsen & Toubro poses for a photo during a signing ceremony held at the South Korean Embassy in New Delhi, India, on April 3. Source: Yonhap

13. South Korea Condemns Terrorist Attack in Kashmir

The South Korean government has strongly condemned the recent terrorist attack in Pahalgam, Kashmir, which occurred on April 22 and resulted in over 20 fatalities. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed deep concern over the incident in an [official statement](#). It extended heartfelt condolences to the victims, their families, and the people and government of India. Ministry spokesperson Lee Jae-woong reaffirmed South Korea's unwavering stance against terrorism, emphasising that such acts cannot be justified under any circumstances.
