



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.

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Contents

1. Seoul announces a three-stage plan for denuclearization and a clear stance on Pyongyang.
2. Pyongyang Confirms Troop Deployment to Russia's Kursk Front
3. Yellow Envelope Act: A New Chapter in Korea's Labor Rights
4. Seek the Arrest of Former Prime Minister Han Duk-soo
5. Lee-Trump Summit in Washington: A Key Focus on Strengthening US-ROK Ties.
6. North Korea Silent on Dialogue Despite Seoul-Washington Push

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1. Seoul announces a three-stage plan for denuclearization and a clear stance on Pyongyang.

On August 21, President Lee Jae Myung laid out his administration's first comprehensive three-stage denuclearization roadmap for North Korea, marking a significant shift in Seoul's approach to the Korean Peninsula. Speaking with Japan's Yomiuri Shimbun ahead of his summit with Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba, [Lee outlined a phased strategy](#): an initial freeze on Pyongyang's nuclear and missile programs, followed by reduction and eventual dismantlement of its arsenal. He emphasized that this plan would be pursued in close coordination with Washington while keeping inter-Korean dialogue at the forefront. During subsequent talks in Washington on August 25 with U.S. President Donald Trump, Lee reiterated his vision, underlining Seoul's commitment to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) framework and stressing that sanctions alone cannot resolve the North Korean nuclear issue. He also floated new areas of regional cooperation, including an Arctic shipping route that could involve both Koreas, the U.S., Japan, and Russia.

However, Pyongyang swiftly denounced Lee's initiative, branding him "[seized by a denuclearization paranoia](#)." In a statement carried by the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), North Korea dismissed Seoul's overtures as "daydreams," vowing never to abandon its nuclear weapons, which it described as an "inevitable choice" for survival in an evolving global security environment. KCNA further ridiculed Lee as a "confrontation maniac" and asserted that South Korea, under his leadership, had revealed its true hostile intent. The contrast between Lee's pragmatic diplomatic outreach and Pyongyang's uncompromising rhetoric underscores the enduring volatility on the peninsula. While Lee's proposal positions Seoul as a bridge-builder committed to dialogue, the North's rejection highlights the deep mistrust that continues to obstruct meaningful progress toward denuclearization.



President Lee Jae Myung(The Korean Herald)

2. Pyongyang Confirms Troop Deployment to Russia's Kursk Front

North Korea has confirmed the deployment of combat troops to Russia to support its war against Ukraine. In an August 22 broadcast, state media showcased a propaganda video titled "Remember," featuring North Korean soldiers in the Kursk region. The video revealed that Kim Jong-un authorized the dispatch of special operations troops following Ukraine's surprise offensive in Kursk.

Kim, flanked by military officials, declared that Russian territory was considered North Korean and urged soldiers to demonstrate a "heroic fighting spirit" to "liberate" Kursk from Ukrainian forces. The broadcast mentioned an initial deployment of 11,000 troops in October 2024, with an additional 3,000 sent between January and February 2025, amid reports of heavy losses due to the "poor performance" of Russian forces.

This announcement follows a strategic partnership treaty signed by Kim and Russian President Vladimir Putin in June 2024, promising mutual military assistance. The video's release appears timed to strengthen Pyongyang's position with Moscow ahead of a significant military parade in Beijing commemorating World War II's end, with expectations of further cooperation between the two nations.



This image, captured on Saturday from the music video of the song titled "Remember," aired by the Korean Central Television, showed North Korean leader Kim Jong-un (center, in white suit) presiding over a meeting with military officials. (The Korean Herald)

3. Yellow Envelope Act: A New Chapter in Korea's Labor Rights

South Korea's labor landscape shifted significantly with the National Assembly's passage of the "Yellow Envelope Act" on Aug. 24, 2025. This legislation amends the Trade Union and Labor Relations Adjustment Act, enhancing the rights to organize, bargain, and strike while limiting firms' ability to claim large compensation for losses during strikes.

The term "Yellow Envelope Act" originated from late 2000s donations in yellow envelopes to Ssangyong Motor workers facing financial ruin after strikes. The bill, backed by 183 lawmakers and set to take effect in March 2026, broadens definitions of legitimate strikes and mandates employers to negotiate with subcontracted workers, addressing the issue of "outsourcing danger."

While business groups warn of potential disruptions to industrial order, advocates emphasize its importance in normalizing labor relations and protecting marginalized workers in South Korea's segmented labor market. The law's success will depend on effective implementation and clear guidelines, potentially leading to a fairer labor environment and improved industrial democracy.

4. Seek the Arrest of Former Prime Minister Han Duk-soo

On August 24, Special Counsel Cho Eun-seok's office requested an arrest warrant for former Prime Minister Han Duk-soo over his alleged role in the Dec. 3, 2023, martial law declaration under ex-President Yoon Suk Yeol. Prosecutors accuse Han, once the nation's second-highest official and later acting president, of abandoning his constitutional duty and instead enabling Yoon's emergency rule.

Han is charged with aiding insurrection, falsifying and destroying state documents, violating the Presidential Records Act, and perjury. Investigators say Han not only failed to stop Yoon's plan but actively facilitated it, recommending a Cabinet meeting to give the decree a veneer of legality, drafting and signing a "post-facto" proclamation, and later ordering its destruction. They argue his long public service and experience during the 1980 coup made his actions especially grave.

Han's shifting testimony has also heightened scrutiny. In recent questioning, he admitted receiving the proclamation directly from Yoon, contradicting earlier statements and his testimony during Yoon's impeachment trial. Prosecutors contend detention is unavoidable due to the seriousness of the charges and risks of evidence tampering.

If the court approves the request, Han would be the first former prime minister in Korean history to face arrest, marking a watershed moment in the nation's constitutional and political history.

5.Lee-Trump Summit in Washington: A Key Focus on Strengthening US-ROK Ties.

President Lee Jae-myung held his first summit with the U.S. President Donald Trump at the White House on Aug. 25, 2025, during a three-day visit amidst the intensifying U.S.–China rivalry. The meeting aimed to advance the alliance in a "future-oriented, comprehensive, and strategic" manner, addressing denuclearization, regional peace, and economic partnerships.

A major outcome was the agreement to expand civil nuclear cooperation. [Korea Hydro & Nuclear Power \(KHNP\)](#) and Korea Electric Power Corp. (KEPCO) executives met with U.S. industry officials to discuss fuel supply and small modular reactor (SMR) technologies. The U.S., which has not completed a new nuclear plant since 2013, hopes to leverage South Korea's proven expertise as it seeks to quadruple nuclear energy capacity by 2050. For Seoul, the cooperation offers new export opportunities, though critics warn that a January deal with U.S.-based Westinghouse could restrict Korea's autonomy in future reactor bids.

The summit also finalized the [July 30 trade deal, capping tariffs on Korean autos at 15% in exchange](#) for major Korean investments and U.S. energy purchases. Trump pressed for higher South Korean defense contributions and an expanded role for U.S. Forces Korea, [while Lee pledged to boost defense spending in ways that also strengthen South Korea's self-reliance.](#)

Lee's outreach extended beyond Washington, with a special envoy sent to Beijing and a visit to Japan shortly before the summit — moves that underscore Seoul's delicate balancing act of reassuring the U.S. while preserving autonomy in ties with China and improving relations with Tokyo.



President Lee Jae Myung of South Korea speaks to President Donald Trump of the US in the Oval Office on Aug. 25, 2025(HANKYOREH)

6. North Korea Silent on Dialogue Despite Seoul–Washington Push

North Korea has remained unresponsive to recent peace overtures from both Seoul and Washington, according to South Korea’s National Security Adviser Wi Sung-lac said on August 29. Despite President Lee Jae Myung’s summit with U.S. President Donald Trump, highlighting a renewed willingness to resume talks, Pyongyang has issued no official statement. Instead, Kim Jong-un is reportedly preparing to attend a military parade in Beijing, underscoring closer alignment with China and Russia over engagement with South Korea or the U.S.

Seoul officials downplayed expectations of North Korea’s participation in the upcoming APEC Summit in South Korea, emphasizing the need for patience in monitoring Pyongyang’s next move. Meanwhile, debate emerged in Seoul after Foreign Minister Cho Hyun described China as “somewhat problematic” for its neighbors — remarks that Beijing reacted to cautiously but which Chinese state media warned against. The presidential office later clarified Cho’s comments as part of maintaining diplomatic balance amid U.S.–China rivalry.
