

'I expect India, Korea will manage regional challenges together ... hope bilateral trade, investments will be further promoted'

South Korean President Moon Jae-in is in India for a three day visit. He explains the agenda of the bilateral engagement and expectations from it to Indrani Bagchi:

■ What significance does India have in Korea's New Southern Policy?

I want to say India is a very special country to me. I visited India about 20 years ago for the first time in my life, and I have been looking forward to visiting again. I attach immense importance to cooperation with India and other South Asian countries. For this reason, I sent special envoys to India and Asean immediately after I took office last year – the first time in Korean history – demonstrating my strong expectations and aspiration. The vision of the New Southern Policy is all about establishing a future partnership with South Asian countries for the sake of people, mutual prosperity and peace. Among them, India is a key partner for Korea.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has highlighted the importance of cooperation with Korea in the process of implementing India's Act East Policy. As PM Modi and I are actively working towards regional peace and prosperity, even greater achievements are forecast in the foreseeable future.

■ India is playing a greater role in the Indo-Pacific region. How can Korea work together with India?

The geographical importance of the Indo-Pacific region, covering both Korea and India, is increasing day by day, and opportunities and challenges are rising at the same time. Many countries, including

the United States, Japan and Australia, have shown keen interest in the region and continue to discuss ways to promote regional peace, stability and prosperity.

India and Korea are expanding the horizon of cooperation with countries in the region through the Act East Policy and the New Southern Policy, respectively. I hope that our two countries will pursue harmonious and mutually beneficial

Q&A

cooperation with nations in the region with openness and inclusiveness going forward. I expect India and Korea will effectively manage regional crises and challenges together and take advantage of opportunities that arise. Stronger bilateral cooperation will greatly contribute to peaceful coexistence and mutual prosperity in the region.

■ What is your roadmap for peace in the Korean peninsula, following the two inter-Korean summits and the North Korea-US summit?

Mahatma Gandhi once said, "There is no way to peace; peace is the way." The Korean people and I have a firm stance that there must not be another war on the Korean Peninsula. Building upon the peaceful resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue, peace regime and mutual prosperity on the Korean Peninsula, I intend to establish a permanent peace.

Heads of state from South and North Korea and the US confirmed their common determination

for complete denuclearisation and the establishment of permanent peace. Now the task given to us is to fully implement the agreements made at the inter-Korean summits and the North Korea-US summit as soon as possible.

■ How do Korean businesses view India as a consumer market and production base?

Korean businesses started investing in India in the 1990s. As of now, about 500 Korean businesses are operating in the country and Samsung mobile phones, LG home appliances and Hyundai automobiles have become familiar to the people of India. During this visit, I am planning to attend the completion ceremony for

Samsung Electronics' manufacturing plant in Noida. Many Korean businesses have high expectations and interest in the Indian market of 1.25 billion people.

Korean startups and small and medium-sized enterprises are paying

attention to the country's advanced IT and abundant high-calibre talent. I hope bilateral trade and investments will be further promoted by upgrading the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA).

■ K-pop and Korean beauty industry are gaining ground here. How do you see the future in this sphere, including the creation of the memorial park for the Korean Queen Heo Hwang-ok?

Deepening mutual understanding between the two peoples is a cornerstone for the sustainable progress of bilateral relations. Though Korea and India are far apart geographically, the two peoples have already become like close neighbours through culture. The recently released Bollywood film Dangal has been received well in Korea. Last month, many Koreans gathered in a plaza in Seoul to practice yoga together in commemoration of the International Day of Yoga. In India, the Korean drama Jewel in the Palace was aired, and K-pop is also popular.

The history of bilateral exchanges dates back 2,000 years. The two countries' relationship formed after King Kim Suro of Korea's ancient Gaya kingdom married a princess from the Indian kingdom of Ayuta, who later became Queen Heo. Such relations continued and paved way for the Indian medical corps' participation in the Korean War. Buddhist culture, which was spread to us from India, has had deep and enduring influence on traditional Korean culture. I hope that more systematic cultural exchanges will take place through the cultural exchange plan to be signed during my visit.

