

Past, present and future

By H.E. SUNGNAM LIM

AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA TO THE UNITED KINGDOM



SUNGNAM LIM

received a BA and an MA from Seoul National University and an MA from the Department of Government, GSAS, at Harvard. In a diplomatic career spanning over three decades, he has held senior positions in South Korea's Embassies in Beijing and Washington, and served as Seoul's point man for the North Korean nuclear issue in the capacity of Special Representative for Korean Peninsula Peace and Security Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He was appointed Ambassador to the Court of St James's by President Park Geun-hye in June 2013.

The forthcoming State Visit of President of the Republic of Korea Park Geun-hye to the United Kingdom, by invitation of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, will be a satisfying high point to a year which has seen both countries, in myriad ways, renew and strengthen their longstanding ties in celebration of the common interests of our present; in expectation of a bright future of increased co-operation; and in commemoration of the sacrifices of the past that forged our bonds of friendship.

The 130 years of diplomatic relations between the Republic of Korea and the United Kingdom have seen unprecedented change within each country as well as in the world at large, and this historic State Visit brings together Her Majesty The Queen, who has reigned as Head of State of the United Kingdom for over sixty years, and President Park Geun-hye, the first female Head of State of Korea and in North-East Asia in the modern era.

Her Majesty The Queen has reigned through a great series of domestic and international evolutions which have reoriented the position of the United Kingdom in the world but not lessened its global impact and influence. Similarly, President Park was elected to preside over a country that, over the past forty years, has become a full-fledged democracy, an advanced economy and with a highly skilled and outward looking citizenry seeking to engage with the world with ever greater frequency and depth. Both leaders represent the best values of duty, service to one's country and the willingness to embrace and adapt to change.

There is no greater epitome of Korea's internal and external evolutions hitherto than our relations with the United Kingdom. Following the end of the Korean War, the emphasis of the ROK-UK relationship has been on trade and economic activities; initially on the basis of the rebuilding and development of Korea but, in recent times, in collaborative efforts in the areas of climate change, energy and overseas development.

In the sixty years of our post-war development Korea's GDP per capita has risen from US\$70 to US\$20,000. Korea has transitioned from aid-recipient to aid-donor as we have become the world's eighth largest trading nation with cutting edge industries in electronics, shipbuilding, telecoms and automobiles.

More widely, following the implementation of the Korea-EU Free Trade Agreement, Korea is now the third-largest importer of British goods in Asia, totalling almost £5 billion, and some 150 major UK firms have already invested in Korea.

On the other side of the coin, the UK was the second largest EU country in terms of trade volume and cumulative inward investment from Korea in 2012, reaching US\$11.3bn and US\$12.0bn respectively.

During this State Visit we expect the scope of investment and commercial co-operation between the UK and Korea to increase and improve, with President Park and Prime Minister Cameron due to discuss joint ROK-UK efforts in several sectors, most notably in the creative economy.

As our countries pursue growth through innovation and creativity, we expect the increasing frequency of people-to-people exchanges in the fields of art, culture, sport and education which will help strengthen and enhance our relations in the commercial and trade sectors.

In reflecting upon the successes of the modern Korea, we should also pay our respects to the past. As we celebrate 130 years of diplomatic relations between Korea and the United Kingdom, this year we also commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Korean War armistice.

Our achievements as a nation simply would not have been possible without the courage and sacrifice made by those who came to our aid during the Korean War, not least the 56,000 British armed forces personnel that fought under the Charters of the United Nations.

So it is with great honour and pride that during her visit to the UK President Park will break ground at a site which will eventually become the permanent and prominent Memorial to the British veterans of the Korean War and their families; a goal that has been long pursued but which, with the concerted effort of the Korean and British governments, the British Korea Veterans Association, and The Lady R Foundation, is finally within our sight.

It is a fitting tribute to the relations between the ROK and the UK that, during this State Visit, President Park, Korea's new leader, is able to pay homage to the past, celebrate our present and begin a bright new phase of our shared future.

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