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South Korean President's Visit to Southeast Asia

In March 2026, the South Korean President Lee Jae Myung made state [visits](#) to the two Southeast Asian countries, namely Singapore and the Philippines during 1~4 March. Reportedly, this was his second visit to Southeast Asia after he took office in June 2025. Earlier, he had visited this region for participating in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit in Malaysia, in October 2025. President Lee had also previously met with the leaders of Singapore and Philippines during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in late October last year in South Korea. During his three-day trip to Singapore, President Lee aimed to deepen the bilateral cooperation between the two countries in the fields of trade, infrastructure development, investment, artificial intelligence (AI) and nuclear energy. Describing the current geopolitical situation as that of “[hyper-uncertainty](#)”, President Lee called for further strengthening ties between South Korea and Singapore. During his meeting with the Singaporean Prime Minister Lawrence Wong, President Lee reaffirmed the close economic and strategic partnership between the two countries. The two leaders also discussed regional and global security concerns. On 3rd March, President Lee reached Manila for a summit with the Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. During his two-day visit to the Philippines, President Lee Jae Myung [aimed](#) to deepen bilateral cooperation with Manila on issues such as trade, nuclear

energy, shipbuilding, defence industry, AI, infrastructure development and critical minerals.

North Korea Condemns Attacks on Iran

In March 2026, the North Korean state media *KCNA* reported about the [condemnation](#) by Pyongyang against the launch of military attacks on Iran by the United States and Israel. The Foreign Ministry of North Korea regarded the military strikes against Tehran as “an illegal act of aggression” which violated the sovereignty of Iran. In particular, the North Korean administration vehemently criticised the actions of the United States for maintaining its hegemony in the global affairs which is detrimental to the international peace and stability. Pyongyang also [called](#) the military pressures against Iran as the “hegemonic and gangster-like nature” of the United States, and which must not be accepted under any conditions. Earlier this year, North Korea had also [criticised](#) American military strikes against Venezuela and the arrest of the Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro by the United States. The South Korean media reported that the prospects of North Korea’s dialogue with the Donald Trump administration have [diminished](#) after the American military attacks on Iran in March. Earlier, there were speculations by some analysts that the United States may have a summit with the North Korean leader Kim Jong-un during President Trump’s upcoming visit to China. Reportedly, the recent attacks on Venezuela and Iran would further justify North Korea’s acquisition of the nuclear

weapons and ballistic missiles technology. Also, Pyongyang [welcomed](#) the election of the new supreme leader by Iran's "Assembly of Experts".

South Korea and War in West Asia

The beginning of war against Iran with the joint military attacks by the United States and Israel in March 2026 had its [impact](#) on the economy of South Korea. The South Korean President Lee Jae Myung pledged to support the country's economy against the detrimental effects of the war by rolling out a 100 trillion won (US\$ 68 billion) package to "[stabilise](#)" the financial markets. The South Korean economy was reported to be facing energy crisis due to the disruption in the supply of gas and oil from West Asia (Middle East) amidst the military conflict in the region. President Lee also called on to diversify the sources of energy supply to South Korea as the dependence on the Middle Eastern energy was detrimental to the South Korean economy. He warned against stockpiling of the energy resources in the country in the milieu of the energy crisis. President Lee instructed the officials in South Korea to evacuate the South Korean citizens from the Middle Eastern countries and ensure their safety by utilising the all available means. The South Korean government also made plans to [support](#) the South Korean companies which were facing difficulties to export commodities to the Middle East due to the crisis in the region. According to another report, the United States' President Donald Trump [urged](#) South Korea to send its warship to keep the Strait of Hormuz free for navigation.

Strain in South Korea-United States Alliance

South Korea's alliance with the United States has come under strain in the recent times after the second Trump administration came to power in January 2025. According to a [report](#), titled "The Price of Retreat 2.0: Undermining America's Economic Edge and Alliance Advantage", by the American Senate Democrats in March 2026, it was argued that the Trump administration's foreign, immigration, security and trade policies have strained ties with South Korea. The pressures by the United States on South Korea to ratify a trade deal between the two countries, speculations about the reduction in American security commitments to Seoul, and the detention of about 300 South Korean workers at a battery plant by the American authorities in 2025, have deeply impacted the bilateral alliance. According to the South Korean media, the United States was apparently [relocating](#) some air defence systems, such as Patriot and Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) from South Korea to the Middle East, which could be detrimental to Seoul's security against the North Korean threats. It was also argued that the transfer of the American strategic assets from South Korea to other locations has highlighted the need for a greater "structured coordination" between the two countries. The South Korean President Lee Jae Myung [opposed](#) the redeployment of missile defence systems from South Korea to Middle East, but he stressed that it would not undermine Seoul's defence against Pyongyang.