

KOREA NEWSLETTER

Vol 3 | Issue 6
June 2026

Contents

- A South Korean Cargo Ship Damaged in West Asia
- Japanese Prime Minister Visits South Korea
- North Korean Troops Participate in Russian Victory Day
- North Korean Sports Team in South Korea



MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR
DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES

मनोहर पर्रिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

A South Korean Cargo Ship Damaged in West Asia

In May, it was reported that a South Korean vessel [suffered](#) damages in an alleged attack by the Iranian forces in Strait of Hormuz. The South Korean government confirmed the damages faced by the ship. Notably, due to the ongoing war in West Asian region, several countries which are not participants in this conflict have suffered collateral damages. The President of the United States Donald Trump called upon South Korea to send its forces to join the efforts to keep the shipping lanes open in the Strait of Hormuz under the “Project Freedom”. However, according to the South Korean media [report](#), a Panama-flagged cargo vessel HMM Namu which is operated by a shipping company from South Korea caught fire due to some explosion in Strait of Hormuz on 4th May, but the exact cause of explosion was not known. Also, none of the twenty four crew members on board the ship were harmed in the accident. The South Korean authorities were reported to be investigating the cause of explosion which could have been either from an attack or by a sea mine in the area. Earlier, the United States had criticised South Korea for not supporting the American war efforts against Iran and had even regarded Seoul as “[not helpful](#)”. According to Trump, the military support provided by the United States plays a crucial role in protecting South Korea against North Korea.

Japanese Prime Minister Visits South Korea

The South Korean media reported about the [visit](#) by Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi to South Korea during 19~20 May 2026. Reportedly, it was part of the “shuttle diplomacy” between the leaders of Japan and South Korea amidst the deepening ties between the two countries. Prime Minister Takaichi’s visit to Andong in South Korea which is the hometown of the South Korean President Lee Jae Myung was a reciprocal gesture. Earlier, President Lee had visited Nara in Japan in January 2026 which is the hometown of Prime Minister Takaichi. Both countries have been facing energy crisis due to the ongoing conflict in the West Asian region and was a matter of discussion during the summit. Notably, this summit between Seoul and Tokyo also happened in the backdrop of the recent relaxation in the Japanese policy regarding export of lethal weapons to the like-minded partner countries. During the summit, both leaders agreed to [deepen](#) the bilateral ties and collaborate on the supply chains. Earlier in May, the first vice-ministerial-level “two-plus-two” [talks](#) of the foreign and defence affairs between South Korea and Japan were held in Seoul to deepen the strategic dialogue between the two countries. Reportedly, this dialogue was to broaden the trilateral partnership between the United States, Japan and South Korea, and meet the challenges posed by the conflict in West Asia, expanding North Korean threats and military assertiveness of China.

North Korean Troops Participate in Russian Victory Day

In May, the North Korean troops [participated](#) in the Russian Victory Day event. The Victory Day celebrates the triumph of Soviet Union/Russia against the Nazi forces during the Second World War and this was the first time that North Korean soldiers marched in the parade organised for this event in Moscow. Also, the Russian President Vladimir Putin thanked North Korean troops for taking part in military parade for the 81st anniversary of Russia's Victory Day. Reportedly, thousands of North Korean soldiers have fought in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war amidst the deepening military relations between Pyongyang and Moscow after both countries signed a mutual defence treaty in June 2024. The North Korean state media [reported](#) about the congratulatory message which was sent by its leader Kim Jong-un to Vladimir Putin on the anniversary of Russia's Victory Day on 9 May 2026. In his message Kim wrote to Putin that, "Pyongyang is always with you and the fraternal Russian people". It was also [described](#) in the North Korean media that "a mixed column of the three fighting forces of the [North] Korean People's Army" which was commanded by Colonel of the Army Choe Yong Hun participated in the Russian Victory Day event at Red Square in Moscow. Notably, the Kim Jong-un regime has also [constructed](#) a memorial museum for the North Korean soldiers who sacrificed their lives in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict.

North Korean Sports Team in South Korea

A team of the North Korean women football players [visited](#) Suwon, South Korea in May 2026. The South Korean media [reported](#) that this was the first time since 2018 that the sports persons from North Korea visited South Korea. The (South) Korea Football Association (KFA) announced about participation of the women's team from North Korea for a competition with the South Korean team in the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) league match. The match and the visit of the North Korean sports team to Suwon drew significant attention in South Korea. Notably, the North Korean leader Kim Jong-un had declared the relations between the two Korean states as "two hostile countries in a state of war" since late 2023. However, this match could possibly contribute in easing the strained relations between Seoul and Pyongyang. Remarkably, the North Korean women football team finally [won](#) the AFC Women's Champions League at Suwon Stadium in South Korea on 23 May. According to a separate report, the Chinese Ambassador to North Korea Wang Yajun [expressed](#) his desire to deepen the exchanges in sports, such as taekwondo between the two countries during his visit to Taekwondo Hall in Pyongyang. Taekwondo is a traditional Korean martial art and is popular in several Asian countries, including China. It was also reported that a South Korean demonstration team had earlier visited this North Korean taekwondo sports facility in 2018.