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South Korea's Conflict with Japan on Colonial History

The issue of history relating to the alleged exploitation of Korean labour during the Japanese colonial period in the Korean Peninsula (1910-1945) has again resurfaced. The issue began with the Japanese government's efforts to get historical Sado mines of the Edo period (1603-1867) enlisted as the UNESCO world heritage site. However, for South Koreans, the gold and silver mining activities at the Japanese Sado mines is also remembered for employing about 1,500 Koreans as "forced labour" during the colonial period. As a result, the South Korean foreign ministry had urged Tokyo to [withdraw its application](#) for Sado mines from the UNESCO. The National Assembly of South Korea also [passed a resolution](#) against Japanese efforts for Sado mines enlistment. At the same time, Seoul demanded that the consideration of UNESCO enlistment of the Sado mines by the World Heritage Committee in its [meeting scheduled at New Delhi](#), India during July 21-31, 2024 should also look into the issue of Korean forced labour. However, South Korean government denied allegations that Seoul had asked Tokyo to [build a memorial](#) for Korean forced labour at the Sado mines. Later, it was reported that South Korea would [accept Sado mines listing](#) as the world heritage site because Japan has agreed to mention about the atrocities committed on the Korean miners. Finally, with Japanese compromise on this issue, [Sado mines got UNESCO status](#). However, the opposition Democratic Party in South Korea [criticised](#)

[the government](#) for its failure to prevent the enlistment of Sado mines in the world heritage list.

North Korea Ramps up Manufacturing of Weapons

North Korea has increased its production of weapons. There have been allegations that North Korea has been exporting vast [quantities of weapons](#) to support Russia's war in Ukraine. On July 2, 2024 North Korean leader Kim Jong-un visited [munitions factories](#) and called for the need to increase production. He also stressed on [modernisation and self-reliance](#) in defence production. A day before Kim's visit to the weapons production facilities, North Korea tested Hwasongpho-11Da-4.5 tactical ballistic missile which it claimed to carry "[super-large warhead](#)". However, according to some experts, the recent North Korean ballistic missile tests could possibly be for those weapons which are [intended for export](#) to Russia. In the month of May this year Kim Jong-un was reported to have [visited](#) defence production sites several times. In June, both Moscow and Pyongyang raised their bilateral relationship to that of a "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership" which also has the provision for [mutual assistance](#) during an invasion on either of the two parties. The North Korean push for increased production of weapons could also be a [response](#) to the heightened tensions due to the recently concluded multi-domain trilateral military exercise "Freedom Edge" by the United States, Japan and South Korea. A delegation from North Korea's [military training school](#) was

also reported to have left for Russia in the month of July.

South Korean President's Visit to the United States

The South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol [visited](#) the United States in the second week of July. In the US, his first visit was to the [Indo-Pacific Command](#) of the United States which is located in Hawaii. In Washington he attended the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) summit (July 9-11, 2024). During this trip, President Yoon had several [bilateral meetings](#) with the representatives from the NATO member countries and the Indo-Pacific Partners 4 (IP4) countries – which include South Korea, Australia, Japan and New Zealand and are cooperating with the NATO. Yoon's trip happened in the backdrop of deepening military alliance between Russia and North Korea and American efforts to strengthen "[Indo-Pacific defence posture](#)". On the other hand, NATO is also seeking to develop "[practical cooperation](#)" with Seoul on the issue of ongoing war in Ukraine and regarding the defense industries including cyber technology. The [focus](#) of Yoon's trip to the US was to discuss the issue of North Korea-Russia defense partnership with the NATO and IP4 countries. The NATO leaders [criticised](#) the export of weapons from North Korea to Russia. On the sidelines of the NATO summit, the United States and South Korea also [signed an agreement](#) on "Guidelines for Nuclear Deterrence and Nuclear Operations on the Korean Peninsula" for the integration of their nuclear and conventional forces. However, North Korean Ministry of

National Defence [condemned](#) this US-South Korea agreement on nuclear guidelines.

South Korea Expanding its Economic Ties with India

The South Korean family-controlled companies called *chaebol*, such as Hyundai and Samsung have been targeting the vast Indian market as South Korea is striving to diversify its export market. In July 2024, it was reported that South Korea's international trade still remains [heavily dependent](#) on few countries, namely China and the United States and they account for a major chunk of Seoul's exports. In the month of June 2024, the Hyundai Motors India got [listed](#) in the Indian stock market. Later in July, during the visit of the Samsung Electronics Executive Chairman Lee Jae-yong in Mumbai to attend the marriage ceremony of the son of Mukesh Ambani of Reliance Industries, the [commitment](#) towards the Indian market was reiterated by this South Korean *chaebol*. Being a lucrative market for the electronic products related to the Information Technology, Samsung has been expanding its presence in India and [fiercely competing](#) with the Chinese companies. Also, to overcome dependence on the few suppliers for medicinal raw materials, South Korea has pledged to cooperate with the United States, European Union, Japan and India, and establish a [Biopharmaceutical Association](#). The officials from India and South Korea also met in Seoul during July 17-19 to [review](#) the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between the two countries.