

Roh's Trips to ASEAN and Europe Cap Series of Sales Summit Diplomacy

- Korea to commence FTA talks with ASEAN for closer ties

South Korea and the 10 ASEAN members have agreed to launch negotiations for a bilateral free trade agreement (FTA) beginning early 2005 with the goal of wrapping up a deal in two years.

President Roh Moo-hyun had summit talks with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) leaders in Vientiane, Laos on Nov. 30 and adopted the "Joint Declaration on Comprehensive Cooperation Partnership between South Korea and ASEAN". The joint communique', issued on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the nation's establishment of dialogue relations with ASEAN calls for a closer economic cooperation between South Korea and ASEAN.

The joint communique', based on the nation's proposal for the adoption of a joint declaration at the Bali summit in October last year, indicates the government's determination to stress close ties with ASEAN. Via working-level consultations, Korea and ASEAN plan to draw up detailed action plans for the implementation of the joint declaration them to the ASEAN summit meeting next year.

According to the joint communique', South Korea and ASEAN agreed to expand cooperation in various fields, including politics, security and the economy. The two agreed boost contacts between high-level government officials and exchange working - level officials to promote cooperation in the sectors of politics and securities. They also agreed to promote close cooperation in the ARF, ASEAN+3, APEC and other groups in the international arena.

South Korea and ASEAN agreed to commence negotiations for an FTA from early next year for boosting economic cooperation between the two sides. By 2009, tariffs on at least 80 percent of all items will be abolished.

On the sidelines of two-day ASEAN Plus 3 summit, South Korea inked its second FTA with Singapore during bilateral summit talks following in Chile's footsteps. Korea ratified its first FTA with Chile last April. China and ASEAN set the stage for establishing the world's largest free trading area by inking an FTA with ASEAN earlier this year.

Besides, Korea and ASEAN agreed to conduct a joint survey for creation of an East Asian Community (EAC), the Asian version of EU's single market.

Both sides agreed to soon carry out steps recommended by the East Asia Study Group (EASG) adopted at the ASEAN Plus 3 summit and conduct a joint survey for the possibility of creating an EAC through the East Asia Forum (EAF) and East Asia Summit (EAS).

South Korea and ASEAN have maintained closer relations in the past 15 years. Both sides, which established "Sectoral Dialogue" ties in 1989, upgraded the status of bilateral relations to Full Dialogue Partnership in 1991. The two has had regular summit talks since 1997 when they held their first summit meeting. The 10 ASEAN member countries are Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam, Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia and Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Meanwhile, President Roh Moo-hyun and his Chinese and Japanese counterparts agreed on Nov. 29 to cooperate for the peaceful resolution of the North Korean nuclear standoff. Roh met with Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao and Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi during a tripartite meeting on the sidelines of the ASEAN+3 Summit.

President Roh's visit to Britain, Poland and France

President Roh held summit talks with international leaders, including British Prime Minister Tony Blair and French President Jacques Chirac, and solicited support for the peaceful resolution of the North Korean nuclear standoff. Roh made an active effort to explain his firm belief regarding the peaceful resolution to the diplomatic impasse. The President hardly passed a day without commenting on the issue during his successive visits to Britain, Poland and France.

His tours to Britain, Poland and France as well as Laos were also dedicated to "sales diplomacy," through which he actively sought foreign investment for Korea and bilateral economic cooperation with European nations.

With the 11-day trip, Roh has virtually finished this year's tight overseas schedule, though he was scheduled to hold a casual two-day summit with Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi .

APEC Forum

President Roh on Nov. 23 wrapped up his 12-day summit diplomacy in South America designed to promote the peaceful resolution of North Korea's nuclear standoff and strengthen economic ties, particular securing energy resources.

Roh mustered support for solving the North Korean issue when he met leaders participating in the annual Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Forum in Santiago on Nov. 20-21, and established a bridgehead in South America by agreeing to promoting economic relations during his summit talks in Argentina, Brazil and Chile.

Roh agreed on the early opening of the six-party talks on the North Korean nuclear standoff during his meeting with U.S. President Gorge W. Bush and Chinese President Hu Jintao.

On the economic diplomacy, President Roh agreed with the leaders of Argentina, Brazil and Chile, rich in natural resources, to promote exchanges and cooperation to an upgraded level of enabling comprehensive cooperation in the 21st century.

South Korea, a resource-scare country, is turning to BRIC - short for Brazil, Russia, India and China - for closer economic relations. BRIC countries, which are rich in natural resources and are making fast economic strides, have looked to South Korea as a development model, said Minister of Commerce, Industry and Energy Lee Hee-beom, who accompanied President Roh during the APEC forum in Chile. The APEC Forum 2005 will be held in Busan.

President Roh reached agreement with talks with the leaders of Argentina, Brazil and Chile, calling for the launch of a joint study on the feasibility of a trade agreement between Korea and the South American common market grouping, Mercosur, aimed at helping Korean companies enter the regional markets.

During President Roh's trip there, Korea was assured of its participating in the Inter-American Development Bank as a full extra-regional member, paving the way for Korean companies to make a foray into the procurement market in South America.

President's visit to South America was the last leg of his economic summit diplomacy to the BRIC countries. Following his trip to China last year, Roh made an official trip to Russia last September and India last October. nw