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# Korean President Lee Jae Myung's State Visit to India (April 19–21, 2026)

19 April 2026 · IR · GS2

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# Korean President Lee Jae Myung's State Visit to India (April 19–21, 2026)

19 April 2026 · 3 min read

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## WHY IN NEWS

South Korean President H.E. Lee Jae Myung arrived in India today (April 19, 2026) for a three-day state visit — the highest-level bilateral diplomatic engagement between India and South Korea in recent years. The visit is expected to significantly advance the India–South Korea “Special Strategic Partnership” established in 2015.

## INDIA–SOUTH KOREA RELATIONS: BACKGROUND

India and South Korea established diplomatic relations in 1973. Over the following decades, the relationship has grown from a primarily economic partnership into a multidimensional strategic one. Key milestones:

- **1996:** India–South Korea bilateral trade agreement
- **2010:** Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) signed — India’s first FTA with an East Asian country
- **2015:** Upgraded to “Special Strategic Partnership” — the highest level of bilateral designation between the two countries
- **2023:** CEPA review initiated to address trade imbalance and expand services access

South Korea is currently India’s 5th largest trading partner in Asia. Bilateral trade stands at approximately USD 22–25 billion annually.

## WHY LEE JAE MYUNG’S VISIT MATTERS

### 1. Political Context

President Lee Jae Myung came to power after South Korea’s 2025 presidential election, following the impeachment and removal of President Yoon Suk Yeol over the short-lived martial law declaration of December 2024. Lee, of the progressive Democratic Party, represents a shift in South Korea’s domestic politics. His visit to India signals continuity in the strategic relationship irrespective of political change in Seoul.

## 2. Defence and Security Cooperation

AREA	DETAILS
K-defence exports	South Korea's K2 Black Panther tanks, K9 Thunder howitzers, FA-50 aircraft are under evaluation by India
Joint production	Discussions on co-developing defence platforms under India's "Make in India" defence framework
Intelligence sharing	Expanding cooperation in cybersecurity and maritime domain awareness
Regional security	Shared interest in a free and open Indo-Pacific; both are Quad-adjacent partners

## 3. Technology and Semiconductor Supply Chains

South Korea — home to Samsung and SK Hynix — is a global semiconductor powerhouse. India's semiconductor mission (approved 2023, with ₹76,000 crore outlay) positions India as a potential partner for diversifying chip production away from Taiwan. Discussions are expected on:

- South Korean investment in India's semiconductor ecosystem
- Technology partnerships in display manufacturing (Samsung already has a plant in Noida)
- Collaboration in EV battery technology (South Korea leads in battery chemistry)

## 4. CEPA Upgrade

The 2010 CEPA has been criticised for India's persistently high trade deficit with South Korea (India imports much more than it exports). The upgrade under discussion aims to:

- Expand market access for Indian IT, pharmaceuticals, and services
- Add provisions on digital trade and e-commerce
- Strengthen rules-of-origin norms to prevent trade deflection via South Korea

## 5. Act East Policy and Korean Diaspora

South Korea is a pillar of India's **Act East Policy** — the framework for deepening ties with East and Southeast Asia. The Korean community in India (concentrated in Delhi NCR's "Korea Town" in Gurugram) numbers around 10,000. South Korean companies — Samsung, Hyundai, Kia, LG — are major investors in India's manufacturing sector with cumulative FDI exceeding USD 5 billion.

## UPSC RELEVANCE

*India's bilateral relationships with East Asian nations; Act East Policy; strategic partnerships; CEPA and trade agreements; Quad and Indo-Pacific frameworks.*

### Key Concepts to Link:

- **Special Strategic Partnership (2015):** India–South Korea's highest diplomatic designation
- **CEPA (2010):** India's FTA with South Korea — first such agreement with an East Asian country; review ongoing
- **Act East Policy:** India's strategy for deeper economic and strategic integration with ASEAN, East Asia, and Pacific — South Korea is a key partner
- **India's Semiconductor Mission:** USD ~10 billion programme to build domestic chip capacity — South Korean technology partnership is critical

## FACTS CORNER

South Korea's President: Lee Jae Myung (Democratic Party) — took office 2025 after Yoon Suk Yeol's impeachment

India–South Korea diplomatic relations established: 1973

CEPA signed: 2010 — India's first FTA with an East Asian country

Upgraded to Special Strategic Partnership: 2015

South Korean companies in India: Samsung (electronics/displays), Hyundai + Kia (automobiles), LG (appliances), POSCO (steel)

Bilateral trade: ~USD 22–25 billion annually; India runs a trade deficit

Korean community in India: ~10,000 persons; concentrated in Gurugram (called "Mini Korea")

Defence interest: K9 Thunder howitzers (already inducted by India for Army), K2 tanks and FA-50 jets under evaluation

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