

President Lee Jae Myung: 'We will not forget our compatriots in Japan and will repay their support'

'South Korea-Japan relations back on track after return of democratic Republic of Korea' South Korea and Japan issue first joint statement in 17 years; Ishiba refers to inheritance of 'Kim Dae-jung-Obuchi Declaration'



President Lee Jae Myung speaks at a luncheon meeting with Korean residents in Japan held at a hotel in Tokyo on Aug. 23.

President Lee Jae Myung met with Korean residents in Japan on Aug. 23 as his first scheduled activity during his visit to Japan, promising support and stating, "The government will not forget your patriotism; we will remember it well and repay it."

Lee made these remarks during a luncheon meeting with Korean residents in Japan held at a downtown hotel after arriving in Tokyo that day, saying, "At every turning point in the history of the Republic of Korea, marked by repeated pain and struggle, there was the dedication and sacrifice of our compatriots." Approximately 200 Korean residents in Japan attended the meeting, including Kim Yi-jung, chair of the Central Headquarters of the Korean Residents Union in Japan (Mindan).

"The YMCA auditorium, where the February 8 Independence Declaration was announced, and Hibiya Park, where the independence movement erupted, are both nearby to this place,"

he said. "It feels deeply moving that the traces of our compatriots' intense lives are so vividly embedded throughout the heart of Tokyo."

He particularly emphasized, "From the pain of colonial rule to the pain of division, the homeland's split into two opposing halves must have intensified the sorrow of life in a foreign land. Yet you always remained steadfast supporters and pillars of strength for your motherland."

"There is also a shameful and painful history we must confront," he said. "During the great journey toward democratization, a very large number of Korean Japanese compatriots suffered unjustly as victims of fabricated espionage cases."

He then bowed his head, saying, "As president of the Republic of Korea, I offer my sincere condolences to the victims of state violence and their families, and I formally apologize once again."



President Lee Jae Myung (2nd from L) toasts with attendees of a luncheon meeting with Korean residents in Japan, including Kim Yi-jung (L), chair of the Central Headquarters of the Korean Residents Union in Japan (Mindan), at a hotel in Tokyo on Aug. 23.

"I will never forget the horrific history that unfolded 100 years ago along the Arakawa River, nor the souls scattered across Japan who still cannot return to their homeland," Lee said. "I will do my utmost to build a worthy nation, where anti-human rights state violence never occurs again, and build a prosperous nation that safeguards the daily lives of its people."

The "history that unfolded along the Arakawa River" mentioned by Lee appears to refer to the Kanto Massacre.

"Beyond the twists and turns of many years, Korea-Japan relations are moving forward anew toward a new future," he said. "We will listen closely to the compatriot community and spare no effort in expanding necessary support so that your brilliant achievements may continue into the next generation."

While in Japan, Lee and Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba held a summit meeting Aug. 23, jointly emphasizing the importance of Korea-Japan cooperation. The two leaders shared the recognition that the international situation is rapidly changing across economic and security domains, including the restructuring of the U.S.-led trade order and the growing North Korea-Russia alliance. They agreed to jointly respond through a virtuous cycle where the development of Korea-Japan relations drives trilateral cooperation among Korea, the U.S. and Japan.

"The international order is in flux," Lee said in his opening remarks at the expanded summit meeting. "Now more than ever, South Korea and Japan, which share similar positions on values, order, systems and ideology, must strengthen their cooperative relationship. This is a time when we truly have much to gain through cooperation. Dialogue and cooperation will take place between Prime Minister Ishiba and myself, as well as between officials of both countries."

Ishiba responded warmly to Lee's choice of Japan as his first bilateral diplomatic visit since taking office, stating: "I am deeply reassured. The development of stable Korea-Japan relations benefits not only both countries but the entire region."

Following the talks, the two leaders adopted a joint press statement outlining specific directions for cooperation across various fields. This marks the first time in 17 years that the South Korean and Japanese leaders have produced a joint document summarizing the results of their summit. The two leaders also appeared together before live cameras to deliver a joint press statement introducing the outcomes of their talks.

"We reaffirmed our firm commitment to the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and the establishment of lasting peace, and agreed to continue cooperation between our two countries on North Korea policy," the two leaders stated about security cooperation, which drew particular attention. "We emphasized the importance of a peaceful resolution to the North Korean nuclear and missile issues through dialogue and diplomacy."

Additionally, they stated: "We confirmed the need to continue cooperating with the international community to ensure the faithful implementation of UN Security Council sanctions resolutions against North Korea, based on trilateral coordination among South Korea, the U.S. and Japan in response to the North Korean nuclear threat. We also agreed on the necessity to jointly address the deepening military cooperation between Russia and North Korea."

In the economic sphere, they agreed to expand cooperation in future industries, such as hydrogen and artificial intelligence (AI).

"We shared the need to jointly address common challenges both nations face, including low birth rates and aging populations, population concentration in the capital region, agriculture and disaster safety," Lee said. "We decided to launch an interagency consultative body to jointly seek solutions."

The two leaders agreed to cooperate for the successful hosting of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Gyeongju this October and the Japan-Korea-China summit, currently chaired by Japan. 🇯🇵



President Lee Jae Myung (L) holds a joint press conference with Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba at the prime minister's official residence in Tokyo on Aug. 23.