The Korea Chair team takes a biweekly look back at events of interest in Washington, Seoul, and the region.

TRADE AND ECONOMICS

Deputy Prime Minister Announces ROK’s Interest in TPP
On November 29, Deputy Prime Minister Hyun Oh-seok, in a statement from the Ministry of Strategy and Finance, announced that South Korea would take part in preliminary bilateral talks with the current negotiating members of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) to explore joining the trade pact.

Eighth Round of ROK-China FTA Negotiations
The eighth round of ROK-China Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations took place in Incheon, South Korea from November 25 to 29. In a press release the ROK Ministry of Trade said discussions began on a rough draft of the agreement, as well as the level of liberalization for products. This is the first round of talks held in the “second phase” of negotiations which is expected to cover more detailed agreements over each sector. The next round will be held in China.

Third Round of China-Japan-Korea FTA Negotiations
The third round of CJK FTA negotiations took place in Tokyo from November 26 to 29. The talks were last held in Shanghai four months ago. In this round, the three sides made progress over the modality for negotiations in the area of products and the scope of negotiations.

ROK Inflation and Consumer Sentiment Steady in November
On December 2 the Bank of Korea reported the consumer price index in November declined 0.1% month-on-month. The price index for agricultural products, however, increased by 0.3% month-on-month. The Composite Consumer Sentiment Index increased by one point from 106 to 107, as the South Korean public’s view on current living standards, future outlook, and domestic economic conditions became more positive relative to October.

REGIONAL RELATIONS

ROK Response to China’s ADIZ
The Chinese government announced a new air defense identification zone (ADIZ) on November 22. The ROK Foreign Ministry responded on November 25 saying the ROK cannot accept the zone because it encroaches on airspace over Jeju Island and the Ieodo Ocean Research Center. On November 28, ROK vice minister of national defense Baek Seung-joo met with PRC deputy chief of the general staff of the People’s Liberation Army Wang Guanzhong in annual defense strategy talks, where his demand for China to redraw its ADIZ was rejected. On December 2, the Defense Ministry announced that it is close to drawing a new Korea ADIZ (KADIZ), which will include Ieodo, and the southern islands of Marado and Hongdo.

Preliminary Bilateral Talks for TPP Negotiations
ROK trade minister Yoon Sang-jick will attend the World Trade Organization cabinet committee meeting from December 3 to 6 in Bali, Indonesia. Minister Yoon will engage in preliminary talks preparing for the possibility of the ROK’s participation in future negotiations of the TPP. Minister Yoon is expected to meet with representatives from the United States and Japan on December 7. The results of that meeting could be key to determining if the ROK will officially become a TPP member before the end of 2013.

Photo credit: Wikimedia Commons.

ROK and China Agree to Antarctica Joint Research
The ROK and China agreed after the 12th round of bilateral talks on maritime cooperation in Beijing on November 28 to cooperate on joint research in Antarctica, and to boost cooperation in deep-sea mining and development of manned and unmanned deep submergence research and rescue vehicles.

Photo credit: Antarctica Bound’s flickr photostream.
INTER-KOREAN RELATIONS

Two Koreas Hold Talks and Start Work on the Kaesong RFID

The two Koreas met in a subpanel meeting of the Kaesong Industrial Complex (KIC) management committee on November 29, the first set of talks in 77 days. They agreed to begin construction of a radio frequency identification (RFID) tag system in early December to improve movement in and out of the KIC. According to the ROK Ministry of Unification, the system is expected to be finished by the end of this year.

NORTH KOREA

U.S. Senior Citizen Detained in Pyongyang

On November 30, North Korean authorities released a video of Merrill Newman, an 85-year-old American citizen and Korean War veteran visiting North Korea on a tourist visa, who was detained without cause for six weeks in North Korea.

Davies Holds Nuclear Talks in Beijing, Seoul, and Tokyo

U.S. special representative for North Korea policy Glyn Davies was back in Asia in late November for another round of meetings. On November 21, he concluded three days of meetings with Chinese counterpart Wu Dawei and Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Beijing and moved on to Seoul for two days of consultation with South Korean special representative for Korean Peninsula peace and security affairs Cho Tae-yong. Davies concluded his trip with a two-day visit to Tokyo, where he met with Japanese director general for Asian and Oceanic affairs Junichi Ihara.

DOMESTIC POLITICS

Rival Parties End National Assembly Stalemate

On December 4, after December 2 and 3 meetings between the parties’ leadership, the National Assembly resumed deliberations on the 2014 government budget. The standoff resulted in the National Assembly missing the constitutionally-mandated deadline to approve the budget for the eleventh straight year.

President Park Confirms Senior Officials Appointments

On December 2, President Park Geun-hye confirmed Hwang Chan-hyun as chief of the Board of Audit and Inspection, Moon Hyung-pyo as minister of health and welfare, and Kim Jin-tae as prosecutor general in spite of the opposition parties’ refusal to submit reports following the National Assembly hearings.

Looking Ahead

Our Friday morning preview of events to watch in the weeks ahead.

- December 5 | Vice President Joe Biden of the United States arrives in Seoul for a two-day visit.
- December 6 | The first joint strategic dialogue between sixteen Chinese and South Korean public think tanks will be held in Seoul, a forum sponsored by both countries’ foreign ministries.
- Early December | The eighth round of Special Measures Agreement (SMA) negotiations will take place in Washington, D.C.
- December | The ROK is planning to hold strategic talks with the United States, China, and Japan to discuss security issues in Northeast Asia. Plans for a “two-plus-two meeting” with these countries are also being made.
- December | The ROK and China will hold their first maritime talks over demarcations on the economic exclusive zone since November 2008.
KOREA CHAIR MONITOR

CSIS Office of the Korea Chair contributors:

Victor Cha, Senior Adviser and Chair
Marie DuMond, Research Associate
Dana D’Amelio, Research Intern
Andy Lim, Research Intern
Shinji Ryu, Research Intern

For more details on our programs and real-time updates from CSIS, follow the CSIS Office of the Korea Chair on:

Twitter at @CSISKoreaChair.
iTunesU using your iPad or iPhone at http://itunes.com/csis.

KoreaChair Monitor is a biweekly publication of the CSIS Office of the Korea Chair, available online. CSIS is a private, nonprofit institution headquartered in Washington, D.C., focusing on international public policy issues. Its research is nonpartisan and nonproprietary. CSIS does not take specific policy positions; accordingly, all views expressed in this publication should be understood to be solely those of the author(s).

© 2013 by the Center for Strategic and International Studies. All rights reserved.