

REPUBLIC OF KOREA

Introduction

The Republic of Korea occupies some 98,913 square kilometres between 38°N latitude on the north and 34°N latitude on the south. With a population of 40.09 million (1980) growing at an annual rate of 1.6%, it is one of the world's most densely populated areas. It is also one of the least endowed with natural resources. The major economic activities are agriculture, mining and manufacturing, and commerce and services.

The Korean Peninsula was divided at the 38th parallel after the surrender of Japanese troops and the subsequent failure of unification negotiations. Two radically different and opposing forms of government evolved. The Republic of Korea came into being in 1948 as a result of free elections held under the supervision of a UN commission in which Canada participated. In June 1950, North Korea (the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea) initiated hostilities which ended in 1953 with the creation of a Demilitarized Zone along a modified boundary.

Domestic Political Situation

The assassination of President Park in October 1979 ended a long period of national stability and created a serious power vacuum within Korea. Initial moves by post-Park civilian leaders towards the opening of the political system were gradually suspended as the military under the leadership of General Chun Doo Hwan exercised greater authority in the face of growing domestic unrest. Student demonstrations and the major civil uprising in Kwangju in May 1980 led to the imposition of martial law, widespread arrests and ultimately to the inauguration of General Chun as interim President on September 2, 1980.

Since assuming the Presidency, Chun has focussed on the maintenance of security, political stability and the restoration of economic growth.

The return to more regular political activity was initiated with the adoption, by referendum, of a new Constitution in October 1980 limiting, inter alia, the Presidential term to a single seven-year occupancy and incorporating several checks and balances against abuse of office. Martial law was ended in January 1981 and new political parties were formed. On February 11, President Chun's Democratic Justice Party won an overwhelming