

REPUBLIC OF KOREA

Introduction

The Republic of Korea (ROK) occupies some 98,913 square kilometres between 37°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 ROK came into being in 1948 as a result of free elections held under the supervision of a UN commission. 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.

Since assuming the Presidency, Chun has focussed on the maintenance of security, political stability and the restoration of economic growth. He has taken a number of steps to bolster - both internally and abroad - confidence in Korea's economic future and political viability. His twenty-man cabinet has a heavy preponderance of new, young and able technocrats, many with solid economic reputations.

A new Constitution was adopted by referendum on October 22, 1980 limiting, inter alia, the Presidential term to a single seven-year occupancy and incorporating several checks and balances against abuse of office. New political parties have been formed and on February 11, President Chun's Democratic Justice Party (DJP) won an overwhelming majority of seats in the electoral college, thereby ensuring Chun's election on February 25 to a full Presidential term. The DJP won an absolute majority in the March 25 elections for the National Assembly.