

# ASAN KOREA PERSPECTIVE

## Inter-Korean Relations

On Apr 3, the South Korean government announced its plan to open up parts of the DMZ for public use by the end of April. The so-called “DMZ Peace Trail” spreads over 42 km along the regions of Goseong, Cheorwon, and Paju. The arrangement is part of the Sept 19 confidence-building agreement. The two sides have already demolished numerous guard posts in the area; however, the peace trail has yet to be approved by the UN Command.<sup>1</sup> Security problems and lack of adequate safety assessment have also been called into question.

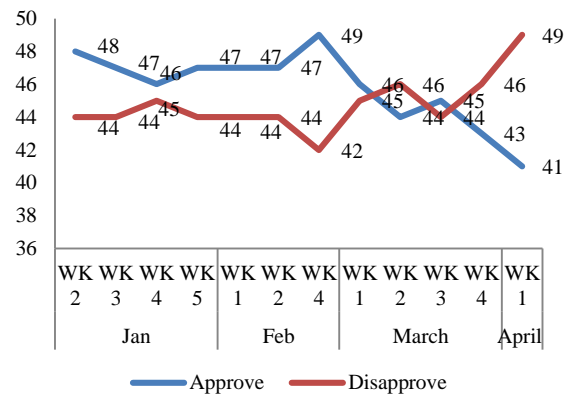
On Apr 4, local media outlets reported that a South Korean vessel named *Pioneer* delivered 4,320 tonnes of diesel fuel to North Korea in 2017.<sup>2</sup> An unspecified US intelligence agency relayed the information to South Korea and the authorities detained the ship after confirming this information. The case was later handed over to the prosecutor’s office. Another South Korean vessel named *Lunis* is alleged to have carried 165,400 tonnes of refined petroleum products to North Korea. *Lunis* entered the port of Yeosu on Mar 3, but no action was taken by the South Korean authorities. Observers expressed concern about continuing sanctions evasion by South Korean ships which would not only undermine the pressure campaign against North Korea but also the raise questions about the role of current South Korean administration.<sup>3</sup>

## Domestic Politics

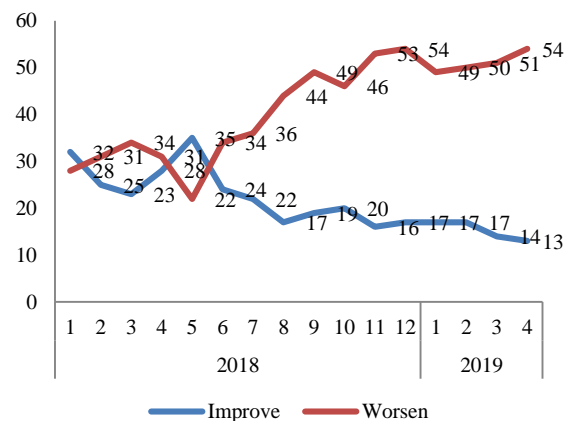
During Mar 25-27, the National Assembly held hearings on the nominees for seven ministerial positions. A large majority of the National Assembly opposed a number of current nominees. Nominations for Cho Dong-ho (Ministry of Science and ICT) and Choi Jeong-ho (Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, and Transport) were withdrawn amid intense pressure.<sup>4</sup> The Blue House has stated that it will move ahead with the appointment of five remaining nominees. But the government’s failure to properly vet these nominees came under severe criticism. The opposition parties also called for the resignation of Cho Guk (Senior Presidential Secretary for Civil Affairs) and Cho Hyun-ok (Secretary for Personnel Affairs). Blue House spokesperson Kim Eui-kyeom was also embroiled in a real estate scandal only to resign amid growing public outcry.<sup>5</sup>

On Apr 3, electorates in Gyeongsang and South Jeolla Provinces held several local by-elections for two parliamentary seats and three local councilor posts. In particular, there was a considerable amount of attention on the two parliamentary seats in Changwon-Seongsan and Tongyeong-Goseong of the South Gyeongsang Province because many observers saw this election as a precursor to next year’s general election. Both the conservative Liberty Korea Party and Justice Party split Tongyeong and Changwon, respectively.<sup>6</sup> Some analysts interpreted this result as an indication of dwindling support for the ruling party. Incidentally, President Moon’s approval rating dropped to the lowest point of his presidency.

## President Moon’s Approval<sup>7</sup>



## Economic Outlook



## Belgium King Philippe in South Korea

During Mar 26-28, Belgium King Philippe visited South Korea accompanied by business leaders and university heads.<sup>8</sup> He attended business forums, smart city seminars, and met with President Moon Jae-in. The two sides discussed improving bilateral ties, expanding cooperation, promoting people-to-people exchanges, and advancing peace and security on the Korean Peninsula.<sup>9</sup>

## Japan

On Mar 26, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) approved 10 elementary school textbooks in which Dokdo is described as a Japanese territory illegally occupied by South Korea. In response, South Korea's Vice Foreign Minister Lee Tae-ho summoned Japanese Ambassador Yasumasa Nagamine to lodge a complaint. According to the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson, ROK MOFA condemns the authorization of these textbooks and demands an immediate withdrawal.<sup>10</sup>

## Busan and the Korea-ASEAN Summit

On Mar 1, South Korea's presidential office announced that Busan will host the Korea-ASEAN special summit during Nov 24~26 of this year. The Blue House also stated that the government is mulling to invite North Korean leader Kim Jong-un to the summit.<sup>11</sup>

## National debt

South Korea's gross national debt reached a record KRW 1,682 trillion in 2018, KRW 126.9 trillion more than the previous year. Much of the increase in the country's national debt was largely due to rising pension payouts for civil servants and veterans (KRW 94.1 trillion) as well as KRW 21.7 trillion in bonds issued by the government.<sup>12</sup>

## 5G

South Korea rolled out the world's first commercial 5G mobile services. The country's three major mobile carriers (SK Telecom Co., KT Corporation, and LG U Plus Corp) commercialized 5G services at 11 pm local time on April 3. Being alarmed by U.S. carrier Verizon's sudden change of plan from April 11 to April 4, they changed the initial plan to start their 5G services from April 5 to April 3 in an attempt to win the title of the "world first."<sup>13</sup>

1 “‘신변안전 대책미흡’ 비판에 DMZ둘레길 고성지역만 우선운영(종합),” *연합뉴스*, 2019년 4월 3일.

2 “한국 유조선, 北에 유류 4300t 넘겼다,” *동아일보*, 2019년 4월 4일.

3 “[사설]北에 석유 넘긴 韓선박, 엄정 처리해 ‘제재 구멍’ 오명 벗어나야,” *동아일보*, 2019년 4월 4일.

4 “[속보]靑, 조동호 과기 지명철회...최정호 국토 자진사퇴,” *조선일보*, 2019년 3월 31일.

5 “‘건물 매입 논란’ 김의겸 청와대 대변인 전격 사퇴,” *한겨레*, 2019년 3월 29일.

6 “막판 504표차 역전 창원성산, 사전투표에 비밀 있었다,” *중앙일보*, 2019년 4월 4일.

7 Gallup Korea, Date: April 2-4; sample size: 1,003; margin of error: ±3.1 at the 95% confidence level.

8 “文, 오늘 필립 벨기에 국왕과 정상회담...한반도평화 지지 당부,” *매일경제*, 2019년 3월 26일.

9 The Blue House official website, [available at: <https://www1.president.go.kr/articles/5853>]

10 “日 초등 교과서 ‘독도는 일본 땅’ 더 노골화,” *조선일보*, 2019년 3월 27일.

11 “11월 한·국아세안 회의...정부, 김정은 초청 검토,” *조선일보*, 2019년 4월 2일.

12 “국가부채 1천700조 육박...공무·원군인연금 총당부채 눈덩이,” *매일경제*, 2019년 4월 2일.

13 “세계 첫 5G 타이틀 거머쥐려...한국 밤 11시에 기습 개통,” *중앙일보*, 2019년 4월 4일.

**The Asan Institute for Policy Studies** is an independent, non-partisan think tank with the mandate to undertake policy-relevant research to foster domestic, regional, and international environments conducive to peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula, as well as Korean reunification

**Published by** The Asan Institute for Policy Studies

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