

New Year Address to the Nation by President Lee Myung-bak



My fellow Koreans,

The Year of the Tiger, 2010, has dawned. I wish you all abundant blessings in a happy New Year. I hope the energy of the tiger will flow all around the country throughout the year.

On September 25 last year in Pittsburg, the Republic of Korea was chosen as the host of the G-20 Summit to be held this year. It was a truly emotional and inspiring moment for all of us. When the deal to export Korean-made nuclear power plants was signed on December 27 last year, it was a proud moment for all of us because we all felt the Republic's fortune rising. We all worked hard and it was well worth it.

What we gained in 2009 was a sense of self-confidence. Many people predicted that the Korean economy, an economy heavily dependent on foreign markets, would be most vulnerable to the global economic crisis. However, Korea is now recognized as the country that has fared much better than others in overcoming the crisis. Korean businesses are even increasing their global market shares during this time of crisis. Thanks to all this, Korea has now become the 9th largest exporter in the world. Korea has concluded free trade agreements with the world's largest markets, including India and the EU. This makes us the only country in the world to have access to two-thirds of the world's markets which represents about half the global population. The flag of Korea is flying high in every corner of the world.

When the global crisis struck, we all vowed to turn this crisis into an opportunity and we did our best to make this true. We were able to write new chapters in our history, making miracles going far beyond what we saw during the past 60 years. Labor and management made concerted efforts to preserve jobs through “job sharing,” a phrase that is now widely recognized in the international community. The Korean people have demonstrated their perseverance by willingly taking part in the government’s effort which called for sharing the burden together. Civil servants did their share despite a salary freeze imposed for two consecutive years. Koreans have stretched their potential to the full once again. I am deeply grateful to you all. I am immensely proud to be your President, representing a people who continue to pull off miracles to create a legacy of success that will endure for ages to come.

Fellow Koreans,

In 2010, we are in the midst of a great transformation. The world is witnessing the dissolution of the old order and the emergence of a new order. The global economic crisis triggered by the financial meltdown and environmental degradation caused by climate change are prompting the advent of this new order.

Weathering the financial crisis has taught countries around the world for the need to pursue sustainable development for all that will not destroy each other but allow us to live side by side. It has reminded all of us of the need to establish a market economy that is not driven by greed but by ethics and principles. This new order is one that is not dominated by a handful of advanced countries, but one that encourages industrialized nations and emerging economies to put their heads together to solve global problems. In this context, the G-20 is the ideal embodiment that reflects such needs. This is why it is now recognized as the premier international forum.

The risks posed by climate change tend to be gradual, making it difficult for people to feel the seriousness of the issue in their everyday lives. For this reason, we are apt to become complacent in coping with this grave threat. However, being complacent will bring about terrible consequences since the risks that face us will hit us like a storm the moment they exceed the critical point. Thus, it is necessary to take preemptive actions to address climate change. We must take measures that fundamentally resolve this issue. We need to change our economic fundamentals and our lifestyle at the core. “Low-carbon” must be given top priority. Now is the time for us to take action and jointly respond to the crisis that faces the planet. Enough words have been spoken. It is time to act.

As I said in Copenhagen, we all need to take action by taking a “Me First” attitude. We must act first. Our development strategy aims to make Korea a leader in green growth by implementing proactive and preemptive policies that will tackle climate change. Exporting nuclear power plants is one good example of such a strategy.

The great transformation in the international order requires us to adopt a new way of thinking and a commitment to translate this into action. Holding onto our old way of thinking will not be enough. This will definitely not prepare us to navigate the new currents. We must be able to discern the great tide of history. We must be ready to ride into the future.

The new order is bound to reshape international relations. How we respond to it will determine whether Korea will become a leader or just another passive follower in the newly emerging order.

We know that the fate of the Republic is inextricably linked to that of the world. The domestic and international affairs of a country are not separate things. Economy and diplomacy cannot be considered separately. The Republic has learned an invaluable lesson over the past two years. Successful diplomatic engagements in the international arena have a decisive significance in ensuring a brighter future for Korea. During the past two years, Korea has been able to forge closer ties with almost all countries across the globe. And it is in our collective interest to establish friendly and cooperative relations with each other. Korea is no exception.

Economic might and military power are still important. But, these alone will not make a country a global leader. What we need now is a vision that can be accepted and shared by the world. In this regard, Korea’s “Low Carbon Green Growth” vision, which pursues sustainable development while responding to climate change, is widely recognized by the international community as a common vision for the future.

At the same time, Korea is called upon to assume more responsibilities. Last year for the first time in history, Korea became a donor country from that of a beneficiary. We all know that giving help is more difficult than receiving help. We remember what it was like receiving help and so we will make sure that when we provide help, we will do so with sincerity and respect. As a gesture of respect, we must provide help by extending both our hands. When other countries receive our help, they must also receive hope that, they too, can become a country that one day provides help to others in need.

My fellow Koreans,

This year, I will have a wider vision while firmly implementing policies. Top priority will be placed on laying a firm foundation for the advancement of the nation and ensuring that positive changes will be felt by individual citizens. In 2010, my Administration and I will do our utmost to lay a firm, substantive base necessary for Korea to establish itself as an advanced nation.

To this end, the platform of the Administration will be set as follows:

First, global diplomacy will be further enhanced;

Second, reforms for the advancement of the nation will be further accelerated; and

Third, policies in line with centrist pragmatism will be continuously implemented.

Guided by this platform, the Government will focus its efforts in the following five core tasks.

First, in 2010, the Lee Myung-bak Administration will remain committed to reviving the economy. And the best way to achieve this goal is to create more jobs. In the first half of this year, the Government will work to end the emergency economic rescue mode. No matter what the circumstances, the Government will resuscitate the economy, thereby making sure that warm breezes of an economic turnaround will be felt in the everyday lives of ordinary citizens in the second half of this year.

The way to achieve this goal is to create new and better job opportunities. For this, my administration will devote its resources and will to creating jobs.

If we are to overcome “growth without jobs,” the government and private sector as well as the people must all work together. As part of such efforts, we will promote the service industry, a treasure house of jobs, and nurture small and medium-sized businesses equipped with innovative capabilities. We must also address the discrepancy between labor supply and demand. The Government will establish an integrated information network and bring about innovations in the job training system.

Our perceptions about employment have to change as well. We must do away with holding onto the idea of having one job for life. The salary peak system has to be further expanded. New types of work such as work at home and one-man businesses must be

increased. Socially responsible corporations must become the norm. A new model of combining paid work with volunteering will have to be developed. More job opportunities for homemakers and senior citizens have to be created, which will help raise the overall employment rate. We have to make sure that jobs constitute not only a means to make money but also the leverage necessary to achieve self-realization.

My Administration and I will do our utmost to create a positive cycle of economic recovery leading to creation of new jobs. Every month, I will convene a strategic meeting for job creation aimed at identifying and examining policies.

Second, we will strive to accomplish educational reforms. Educational competitiveness is the nation's competitiveness. The Lee Myung-bak Administration is consistently implementing various policies for reform in the educational sector with an eye to the goals of educating students with creative ideas, strengthening public education and reducing spending on private education. The Government is exerting efforts to ensure that the college entrance exams are administered at the discretion of each college and that students are no longer dependent on private education to prepare for the entrance examination. To improve the quality of public education, the Government introduced various programs that help encourage competition among schools and teachers. Various plans for the operation of boarding high schools and Meister high schools are being implemented according to plan. By introducing the new tuition loan program that allows students to repay their school loans after they get a job, the Government is making efforts to make sure that poverty does not prevent a student from obtaining an education.

In spite of these changes, many educators and parents are still not feeling the changes. They also have much concern. In the New Year, the Government will see to it that the educational reforms are implemented successfully so that the people can believe in these changes. The Government is determined to bring about an educational environment where students will be able to enter the college they want without receiving expensive private lessons. As President, I will be involved in this endeavor personally.

Third, the Government will strive to make the New Year a turning point for developing all regions of the country. Under the principles of specialized development, division of power and mutual assistance among different regions, the Lee Myung-bak Administration has pursued what is called a 5+2 regional development model. This year, strategies specifically tailored to bring about regional development will begin to bear fruit. The economic recovery must also be felt in the regions.

Regions must be able to develop their industries and competitiveness. They must educate and foster talent, expand infrastructures and improve living standards. Our initial plans to invest 100 trillion won over the next five years will proceed according to plan.

The restoration of the Four Major Riverways will involve 72 regional, provincial and local governments. This project will create jobs and increase revenues. We will be mindful of the various needs of different regions and reflect them as we proceed.

We will revise policies and provide financial assistance so that plans to establish innovative cities, industrial hubs and economic free zones can be implemented as soon as possible. This year, we will finally put in place regional consumption tax and income tax which has been discussed for the last fifteen years. We all waited too long for this to materialize. I hope that these measures will help in raising valuable revenues for the regional governments.

Fourth, the Government will pursue reform measures aimed at advancing politics. If we wish to truly become an advanced nation, all areas must be first-rate. Our mindset, the way we live, our laws and institutions must all be world-class. Rule of law must be adhered to and upheld if we wish to protect our personal freedom and liberty. The revision of our labor law must be an occasion to upgrade our labor-management relations.

The public certainly expects to see productive politics, politics based on reason and dialogue, and politics conducive to national integration. The country cannot afford to delay reforms for political advancement. The nation needs to have new political roots through systemic reform and achieve a blossoming of politics through reform of the political culture.

It is a good thing that the reform of the administrative districts is already on the political agenda. The autonomous local governments that are willing to make voluntary integration with other local entities will be supported actively by the Central Government. Election system reform is also a task that must be completed this year as it is essential for taming extreme regionalism and overcoming the politics of confrontation.

Fifth, the Government will engage in all-directional diplomacy with every country in the six continents and five oceans while trying to bring about a change for better inter-Korea relations.

This year, the Republic will host the G-20 Summit and other large and small conferences in tandem with it. These will be a chance to highlight our commitment to become a Greater Korea. These meetings will help us take part in the recovery of the global economy and provide help to developing countries. It will be a chance to put in place the systematic mechanisms that will ensure sustainable growth for emerging economies. We will also utilize these opportunities to implement reform of the international financial institutions such as the IMF and World Bank. We will contribute in laying the foundations for a new global financial order which will allow us to achieve sustainable and balanced growth. All countries will share the burden and these meetings will be a chance for us to remind ourselves of this important principle.

Our relation with the United States is stronger than ever. In the New Year, the country will work to make relations between Korea, China and Japan become even closer, while carrying out the Government's New Asia Initiative. Diplomacy toward African nations will be given special emphasis as well. As part of our international responsibilities, we will increase our ODA and our participation in peacekeeping operations. We will also take part in maintaining peace in Afghanistan.

The Government will endeavor to improve relations with North Korea. We urge North Korea to return to the Six Party Talks as soon as possible. This will ensure the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and open up real cooperation between the two Koreas. For this, there is a need to establish a body that will allow inter-Korean dialogue to take place at all times. I hope that North Korea will engage in genuine dialogue, opening up the road to cooperation.

This year marks the 60th anniversary of the Korean War. This year, we will hold talks with North Korea so that we can bring back the remains of the soldiers who died during the Korean War and who are buried in North Korea.

Korea will never forget those who came to a distant land and who sacrificed their lives to defend our freedom.

Fellow citizens,

With my term passing the midpoint during the year, I have adopted as a motto *Illo yeongil*, meaning "Hard work now guarantees happiness for eternity." However difficult the task at hand may be, I will not evade it. However hard the task may be, I will not give up. However demeaning a task may be, I will not avoid it.

I will do all I can do to make sure that before the year comes to the end, ordinary citizens will be able to feel warmth in their life, the country will enjoy enhanced prestige and the confidence of the nation will rise high.

The Republic of Korea has already embarked on a great transformation. We will certainly lead a great change to great success. We cannot let up for a minute our march toward emerging as a leading advanced nation. Let us all join forces together in this movement.

Thank you very much.