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

U.S.-ROK RELATIONS
U.S. Representative Ed Royce Visits Seoul
On February 18, Representative Ed Royce (R-CA), chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee led a bipartisan delegation of House colleagues to South Korea. They met with President Park Geun-hye at the Blue House, where she commended Royce for his recent visit to a monument commemorating comfort women in Glendale, California, and his tribute to Hwang Geum-ja, one of the few surviving comfort women, who had recently passed away, saying his act touched the hearts of the Korean people. They also met with Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se later in the day to discuss the U.S.-ROK alliance and bilateral issues.

TRADE AND ECONOMICS
South Korea Continues Talks to Join TPP
The South Korean government has been holding a series of bilateral talks with countries participating in the regional free trade agreement, known as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which currently comprises of 12 member states. On February 12, Deputy Trade Minister Choi Kyong-lim said that, despite the complex negotiations, South Korea will try to complete its procedure to join as soon as possible. The government has already finished talks with 11 of the member countries, with talks with Japan scheduled in March.

REGIONAL RELATIONS
ROK and Japan Hold Talks in Seoul
Junichi Ihara, director-general of the Japanese Foreign Ministry’s Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau, met with his South Korean counterpart, Lee Sang-deok, the ROK Foreign Ministry’s deputy director-general for Northeast Asian affairs, on February 18 in Seoul. This is the first director-general level meeting since Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s visit to Yasukuni Shrine in December 2013.

China Diplomats Visit North Korea
The Chinese Foreign Ministry confirmed on February 12 that a group of Chinese diplomats, led by Xing Haiming, deputy director-general of Asian affairs, had visited North Korea a week earlier, making it the first reported visit since the death of Jang Song-thaek in December last year. On February 17, Vice Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin of China began a four-day trip to North Korea to discuss bilateral issues.

DOMESTIC POLITICS
UPP Lawmaker Lee Seok-ki Sentenced to 12 Years in Prison
Unified Progressive Party (UPP) lawmaker Lee Seok-ki was given the guilty verdict and sentenced to 12 years in prison on February 17 for
plotting and inciting an armed uprising against the South Korean government. In addition to the prison term, he also received a 10-year suspension of his civil rights after release. Lee's six fellow defendants were also convicted and sentenced to prison terms ranging from four to seven years. Lee's lawyer announced that they would appeal.

**INTER-KOREAN RELATIONS**

*High-level Inter-Korean Talks Held*

On February 13–14, North and South Korea held the first high-level inter-Korean meeting in seven years in the peace village of Panmunjom. The South Korean delegation was led by Kim Kyou-hyun, vice foreign minister, and the North Korean delegation was led by Won Tong-yon, deputy director of the United Front Department. On the second day of the meeting, the two agreed to hold the family reunions as scheduled from February 20–25 in the Mount Kumgang Resort in North Korea. The two sides also agreed to a “no-slander” agreement to promote “mutual understanding and trust.”

**NORTH KOREA**

*UN Commission of Inquiry Report Released*

On February 17, the UN Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea released its 400-page UN-mandated report on human rights violations in the country. This report was released after a year of investigation, in which the Commission obtained first-hand testimony from 80 witnesses in Seoul, Tokyo, London, and Washington, D.C., as well as information from more than 240 confidential interviews with victims and witnesses. The three-member Commission is composed of Michael Kirby, the chairman, Sonja Biserko, and Marzuki Darusman, and they will formally present their findings to the Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland, on March 17. The report documented numerous crimes and human rights abuses committed by the North Korean government. One of its recommendation for the international community was to render those accountable to be responsible for their crimes against humanity, which may mean bringing Kim Jong-un to the International Criminal Court for his actions.

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**Looking Ahead**

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

- **February 20–23** | A group of 42 ROK National Assembly lawmakers, led by Rep. Chung Mong-joon of the Saenuri Party will visit China and meet with senior Chinese government officials, including President Xi Jinping.
- **February 20–25** | Family reunions between South Korea and North Korea will be held in Mount Kumgang Hotel.
- **February 24–March 6** | South Korea and the United States will hold their annual Key Resolve military exercise.
- **February 24–April 18** | South Korea and the United States will hold their annual Foal Eagle military exercise.