

# State Banquet for the President of the Republic of Korea

Great Hall, Guildhall  
Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2023  
The Rt Hon The Lord Mayor of London  
Alderman Professor Michael Mainelli

Mr President, Your Royal Highnesses, Your Excellencies, My Lords, Aldermen,  
Sheriffs, Chief Commoner, Honoured Guests...

*An-nyong-ha-shim-ni-ka.*

As the 695<sup>th</sup> Lord Mayor of London, it is an immense honour to welcome you, Mr President, and Mrs Kim Keon Hee, to the City of London and to present to you the Address read out by Mr Recorder, as a token of our endless esteem for your country.

To all our Korean guests, may I also wish you happy National Kimchi Day.

I gather that His Majesty the King is now also a fan of kimchi, having been presented with some at an event in London's Koreatown last week.

Although, he was a little cautious.

Before taking his first bite last week, he timidly asked "Will it blow my head off?"

My wife Elisabeth and I have fond memories of visiting the Kimchi Museum at Lotte World in Seoul – as Elisabeth is from Germany, we thought kimchi would be a bit like sauerkraut – but it wasn't!

It was better!

Which reminds me - Mr President, I know you are a fan of Sir Winston Churchill, whose statue is over there.

Reflecting on his own speeches, Churchill once said: "In the course of my life I have often had to eat my words, and I must confess that I have always found it a wholesome diet."

Or maybe he was also talking about kimchi.

This Guildhall is the historic headquarters of the City of London Corporation - the governing body for the Square Mile, the world's oldest democratic workers' and residents' cooperative.

The Lady Mayoress and I were immensely grateful to be able to represent the City of London at the state banquet hosted last night by Their Majesties the King and Queen at Buckingham Palace.

Today, we are delighted to welcome Their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester to Great Hall.

Twelve Lord Mayors of London have visited the Republic of Korea in the last thirty years – including, here with us tonight: Alderman Sir Andrew Parmley, Alderman Sir Charles Bowman, and Alderman Sir Peter Estlin.

My predecessor, Alderman Nicholas Lyons, and I also met Mayor Oh Se-hoon of Seoul when he came to London earlier this year.

And the City of London has had the honour of hosting two previous banquets for the Republic of Korea, in 2004 and 2013.

But today's banquet takes place in a new era – an era where Korean culture and creativity is at the forefront, all around the globe – with the K-Pop group Blackpink, who were at Buckingham Palace yesterday, being the most followed music act on YouTube.

We increasingly live in a K-world.

Today a typical Londoner can watch their favourite Korean show, get food from a Korean restaurant, then listen to some K-pop and go to watch Korea's greatest ever footballer scoring goals in the English Premier League.

I count our family as examples of those typical Londoners – our favourite TV shows are *Hotel del Luna*, *The Glory*, *Crash Landing on You* and *Extraordinary Attorney Woo*.

This just underlines how far the UK-Korea relationship has come, and how naturally it now shapes the lives of our people, and those around the world.

This year, our two countries celebrate 140 years of diplomatic relations, and the 70 years since the Korean War Armistice.

As someone who spent time at the Ministry Of Defence, I remember the days when the West used to sell old military vehicles to Korea.

But from the days of the Turtle Ships of Admiral Yi-Sun-Sin to now, Korea has always been a pioneer in defence, with Korean companies today winning contracts all over the world.

We are closer allies than ever before – as shown by the Downing Street Accord and this morning's trade communique at Mansion House.

Just twelve days into living there, and a trade deal worth £21billion is being signed in my own living room.

The Cambridge economist Ha-Joon Chang argues persuasively that Korea boldly set out on its own path to development, and you succeeded by being different.

Like a K-pop single, Korea is climbing up the charts.

Seoul and Busan are at 11 and 33 in the Global Financial Centres Index, and at 19 and 28 in the Smart Centres Index.

Now, that Londoner I mentioned earlier who listens to K-pop and watches Korean films at the weekends, may spend their working weeks at one of the many Korean firms based in the UK.

From the established global giants, to the smaller startups and tech companies choosing London – and indeed the wider UK – as their launchpad in Europe.

Firms like Monnit Korea, Deeping Source and Nota AI, trialling their tech in the UK Testbed Initiative at Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park.

This goes to the heart of my vision for the City of London as Lord Mayor, *Connect to Prosper: Celebrating the Knowledge Miles of the Square Mile, the World's Coffee House*.

London can play this role due to our strengths in science and technology...

Which is another reason why the UK and the Republic of Korea are so well-aligned, with the Republic of Korea ranking second in the OECD for research and development intensity, and having one of the most digitally connected societies in the entire world.

British and Korean institutions are running a Joint Research, Development, and Innovation Programme for business-led collaborative R&D projects, across digital health, clean energy, advanced manufacturing and materials, future mobility, energy storage and smart cities.

In 2016, a computer beat a human world champion at the game of Go, so it is no wonder Korea is investing so heavily in Artificial Intelligence.

This year, we held the first AI Safety Summit here in the UK.

And I am delighted that the second AI Safety summit will be held in the Republic of Korea – another example of both our nations leading the global agenda.

Mr President, we applaud the way you are making the Republic of Korea an ever more proactive player in world affairs, especially as we share so many values.

We can achieve so much together, as long as we continue to connect to prosper.

Back when we visited Korea, Elisabeth and I were struck by the beauty of its temples, especially Bulguksa, built during the Silla kingdom – it is no wonder Korea is known as the Land of the Morning Calm.

So I would like to finish with some words by the great Silla poet Master Kyunyo:

*“Disperse the blight of affliction,  
Rooted deep in the soil of ignorance,  
And wet the mind's field of living beings,  
Where good grasses struggle to grow.  
Ah, how happy is a moonlit autumn field,  
Ripe with the fruit of knowledge.”*

May I now invite everyone to rise for the National Anthem of the Republic of Korea, after which I shall propose the toast to The President.

*[National Anthem]*

The toast is:

**“THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA”**