
HWANG VOICES HOPES FOR DEEPER STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP WITH UZBEKISTAN

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South Korea's Acting President and Prime Minister on Thursday voiced hopes for close cooperation with Uzbekistan to cement the two countries' strategic partnership during his telephone talks with the Central Asian state's leader.

Hwang and Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev also agreed to continuously develop bilateral exchanges and consultations among high-level officials to expand economic cooperation, Hwang's office said in a press release.

It was Hwang's first telephone conversation with a foreign head of state since he took over as the acting president on Dec. 9 after President Park Geun-hye was impeached over a corruption scandal involving her and her longtime confidante.

Mirziyoyev was sworn in as president on Dec. 14 following his election victory on Dec. 4.

During the phone talks, Hwang also called for Uzbekistan's cooperation in exploring new bilateral business projects, such as the joint development project called "Surgil."

Under the US\$3.9 billion project signed in 2006, the two countries will build a 110-kilometer pipeline to deliver natural gas from a jointly developed mine in Surgil to a chemical plant in Ustyurt. A South Korean consortium, led by the state-run Korea Gas, has a 50 percent stake in the joint project, with the other half owned by Uzbekistan's national gas firm UNG.

The acting president also asked for Mirziyoyev's support for a project to construct a cultural facility for some 180,000 ethnic Koreans living in Uzbekistan. The construction is scheduled to be complete by 2018.

Mirziyoyev pledged to "stably" develop the two countries' cooperative ties based on bilateral trust, Hwang's office said.

"As a partner for Uzbekistan's development, South Korea has been closely cooperating (with Uzbekistan), and we will continue to cooperate on large-scale (joint economic) projects," he was quoted by Hwang's office as saying.

The two countries established diplomatic ties in 1992. In 2015, two-way trade volume reached US\$1.3 billion.