

Interviewee

# Lee Sang-deok

Overseas Koreans Agency Commissioner



## A Home and Reliable Partner

## of Overseas Koreans

There are seven million overseas Koreans worldwide. They are becoming confident members of mainstream society, engaging in various fields in many countries. The Overseas Koreans Agency supports them in leading remarkable lives while preserving their Korean identity. In addition, the agency is committed to becoming a reliable partner for the Republic of Korea and the overseas Korean community to prosper in coexistence. We met with Lee Sang-deok, Overseas Koreans Agency Commissioner, to listen to the details.

**Q. What are the visions and values of the Overseas Koreans Agency you promote as its commissioner?**

Having served as a diplomat in various regions for a long time, I have closely observed the development of Korean communities. Overseas Koreans have grown into valuable assets and partners of South Korea by displaying their capabilities in their respective fields and entering mainstream society despite their difficulties. Our mission and vision are to ensure that the outstanding capabilities of overseas Korean communities lead to the development of the overall capabilities of all Korean people instead of being kept in their local communities.

As the Overseas Koreans Agency Commissioner, I will listen to the voices of Korean communities overseas and do my best so that overseas Koreans, confidently thriving in their respective countries, can feel that 'the homeland is firmly on their backs.'





I hope the overseas Korean communities and homeland put their heads together and gather wisdom to overcome the risks inside and outside Korea and seek a passage of a new leap this year.



1. 12. 19. Lee Sang-deok, Overseas Koreans Agency Commissioner, speaking at the 34th Overseas Koreans Policy Working Committee Meeting

2. 12. 20. Year-End Gift Delivery Ceremony held at Incheon Welfare Center for Sakhalin Korean

**Q. The year 2025 has begun. What are the key projects for this year?**

First, we will substantially prepare for the 2025 World Korean Business Convention to support our economy in recovering momentum. The 23<sup>rd</sup> World Korean Business Convention is one of the most significant events we organize, and it will be held in Atlanta, Georgia, from April 17 to 20. It will be held in America for the second time, following the one held in 2023. It will be a business forum that will provide domestic businesspeople a chance to enter the American and global market in the rapidly changing world economic environment alongside the launch of the second phase of the Trump administration.

In addition, we are further expanding the accessibility to civil services for the convenience of overseas Koreans living here. In December last year, we opened a branch of the 'Comprehensive Civil Service Center,' which provides civil services of ten or more government ministries and organizations at once, in Incheon International Airport Terminal 2. This year, we will start the 'Overseas Koreans Certification Center,' which allows overseas Koreans to use domestic private digital services without a mobile phone number by verifying electronic passport information.

**Q. What would you like to promote or finish during your term?**

I have set six key tasks after I became the commissioner. First, I will establish a plan to attract overseas Korean businesspeople's investment in Korea to promote domestic economic revitalization. Second, I will review improving the multiple nationality system to attract excellent overseas Korean talent. Third, I will improve the voting system for overseas Koreans to increase their participation in elections. Fourth, I will establish the 'One-stop Civil Service' platform for the convenience of overseas Koreans living in Korea. Fifth, I will promote comprehensive and specific policies to support overseas Koreans staying in Korea. Finally, I will support overseas Koreans in need inside and outside the country. I will do my best during my term to realize these tasks.



3. 01. 23. Overseas Koreans Agency Commissioner, looking at exhibits inside the Overseas Koreans Welcome Center

**Q. The Overseas Koreans Agency is cooperating with Incheon's local communities in various ways. What activities are related, and what type of cooperation can we expect?**

The Overseas Koreans Agency has continued cooperation in various ways with local communities in Incheon, where it is based.

In June 2024, we signed an MOU with the Incheon Veterans Hospital and have worked together to provide substantial medical services to overseas Koreans. In July, we held a training session in Incheon with 2,000 next-generation overseas Koreans, and we had a meaningful time fostering their identity and increasing their bond as Koreans.

After I took office, the agency supported Korean SMEs in finding overseas sales channels and paths to overseas markets, resulting in the signing of contracts worth KRW 4.5 billion by holding the 'K-Beauty Export Consultation Meeting' at Songdo Convensia in Incheon and KRW 18.4 billion worth of consultations.



In particular, the agency will promote the 'Overseas Koreans' Settlement in Korea Support Project' on a full scale starting this year. I know that Incheon also submitted the demand for 'local economy revitalization through overseas Koreans' participation in economic activities' during the survey of needs and opportunities related to this project. We can develop a platform for economic cooperation between overseas Koreans and domestic companies centered on IFEZ and work with international schools, universities, and global campuses in Incheon to operate exchange programs for the youth.

**Q. Lastly, please give a word to overseas Koreans visiting Incheon.**

This year marks the 122<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the official emigration history of Korea. With the maturing of overseas Korean societies, many overseas Koreans have become working members of society in countries where they live in various fields, including economics, politics, and culture. The Overseas Koreans Agency believes that the overseas Korean communities and Koreans here can expand the overall capabilities of Korean people if they can form a network of Koreans worldwide. I hope the overseas Korean communities and homeland put their heads together and gather wisdom to overcome the risks inside and outside Korea and seek a passage of a new leap this year.