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Lee Touts Vision of Green Growth

President Lee Myung-bak yesterday put forward a "low carbon, green growth" strategy as a new vision to guide the nation's long-term development.

Lee also proposed resuming dialogue with North Korea despite recent tension stemming from the shooting death of a South Korean tourist in North Korea.

The president unveiled a comprehensive agenda during an address to celebrate 60 years of growth and democracy since the establishment of the republic in 1948.

It coincided with the 63rd anniversary of Korea's liberation from the Japanese colonial rule.

"Low carbon, green growth ... is a new national development paradigm that creates new growth engines and jobs with green technology and clean energy," he told an estimated 27,000 people in central Seoul.

"This year will be the first year for the country to move toward a low-carbon society in earnest," he said.

Lee pledged to raise government investment in promoting alternative energy sources and developing technologies that help reduce pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

The government aims to increase the proportion of energy supplied by renewable sources such as solar, wind and water from the current 2 percent to more than 11 percent by 2030, and to more than 20 percent by 2050.

"R&D investment in green technology will be increased more than two-fold, making Korea a leading powerhouse in the green technology market, which is expected to amount to 3 quadrillion won (\$3 trillion) by 2020," he said.

The government plans to have 1 million homes use new and renewable energy in the future.



Celebrations for the 63rd Liberation Day and the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the Republic of Korea get underway in Gwanghwamun, central Seoul, yesterday. [Joint Press Corps]

The nation will also promote the development of eco-friendly vehicles with the aim of becoming one of top four nations in the production of low-emission cars, he said.

To secure stable energy supply, the government will redouble exploration efforts overseas, he said.

Skyrocketing oil prices have damaged the economy of the nation, which fully relies on imports for its oil supply.

He added the nation's energy self-sufficiency would increase from the current 5 percent to more than 50 percent by 2050.

The president did not offer concrete plans to achieve those goals. His aides said the government will unveil specific energy policies later this month. A set of measures to tackle climate change and reduce carbon will be announced early next month, they said.

The president repeated his call for resumption of government-level talks with Pyongyang and pledged to proceed with economic cooperation depending on progress in the North's denuclearization.

The ties between two Koreas have soured since the inauguration of the conservative president. Tension has mounted after a South Korean tourist was shot dead by a North Korean soldier at Mount Geumgang resort on July 11.

"Despite that, I have expectations that Pyongyang will come forward for comprehensive dialogue and economic cooperation because now is the most opportune time for the North to make change," he said.

Lee also expressed hope of eventual reunification with communist North Korea.

"When the two Koreas become unified, the Korean Peninsula, which is now partially closed, will become a wide-open space. It promises to be the main gateway for prosperity linking the Eurasian continent to the Pacific Ocean by land, air and sea," he said.

During a recent meeting with U.S. President Bush, he expressed hopes to help bring North Korea into the international society so that Seoul and Washington can provide economic assistance through international financial organization, he added.

The anniversary of independence was overshadowed by Japan`s latest claim to sovereignty over Dokdo islets in its school textbook.

The president, however, toned down his rhetoric in comparison with his predecessors. He urged Tokyo to "face up to history and refrain from making the foolish mistake of repeating the unfortunate past."

On the domestic front, he stressed the importance of national unity, the rule of law, and of building trust among differing interests, regions and political forces.

The president used the address to appeal to the nation to help his embattled government start anew.

The president has been plagued by massive public protests against U.S. beef imports, which triggered a sharp slide in approval ratings.

Partisan bickering has been also escalated over a range of issues, including two bribery scandals involving the ruling Grand National Party and Lee`s firing of the head of the state-run broadcaster KBS.

Liberal and progressive opposition parties boycotted yesterday`s ceremony. Left-wing activists staged a large-scale candlelight vigil to protest the beef imports and Lee`s policies to privatize and restructure some public firms.

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