



## King Charles deploys K-pop at South Korea state banquet

### Description

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**King Charles used the grandeur of a Buckingham Palace state banquet to throw in some unexpected references to Korean popular culture.**

K-pop stars Blackpink and BTS were name-checked by the King as he welcomed South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol on the first day of his state visit.

The King's banquet speech praised South Korean culture's "remarkable ability to captivate imaginations".

Although he admitted he hadn't much of "what might be called Gangnam Style".

But there was no repeat of President Yoon's karaoke-style skills when he visited US President Joe Biden, when the South Korean leader had sung "American Pie".

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Instead the president said that in his youth he and his friends "were all fans of the Beatles, Queen and Elton John". With the assumption that this was a reference to the pop group rather than the monarchy.

State visits are a "soft power" mix of pageantry and practical politics and the red-carpet welcome rolled out for South Korea was a sign of respect to an increasingly important ally and trade partner, in a region with growing tensions with China.

There was a full turn-out at the state banquet in the Buckingham Palace ballroom, with the South Korean guests greeted by the King, Queen, Prince and Princess of Wales and Prime Minister Rishi Sunak.

South Korea's most famous son, Son Heung-min, the Spurs footballer, wasn't there, but K-pop girl band Blackpink were among the guests.

Lord Cameron, returning to front-line politics as foreign secretary, was sitting a couple of places from Princess Anne.

Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer and Lib Dem leader Sir Ed Davey were among the guests, facing elaborate table settings with six different wine glasses and a line-up of silver-gilt cutlery.

The menu, written in French, included poached eggs, pheasant and a mango ice cream bombe.

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Wines included a 1989 Château Mouton-Rothschild and Camel Valley from Cornwall.

These are opulent occasions, with diplomacy fuelled by fine dining, using a 19th-Century dinner service with more than 4,000 pieces.

The table settings are as precise and symmetrical as the military parade that greeted the president – each guest getting a place setting of 46cm.

Each guest had a nameplate on their place, which probably got smuggled out in a few pockets later as souvenirs, even with the Archbishop of Canterbury in the room.

But for some there were just their titles, like for the prime minister and foreign secretary.

As the King is a big fan of recycling, at least if the people keep changing the cardboard nameplates can stay the same.

Earlier in the day the South Korean delegation had been given a ceremonial welcome at Horse Guards Parade, before the president and his wife took part in a carriage procession along the Mall.

More than 1,000 soldiers were on parade, with gun salutes in the autumn leaves in Green Park.

The Princess of Wales had been wearing a dramatic shade of front-page red.



But alongside the ceremonial events, such state visits have a serious diplomatic and economic purpose.

The King's banquet speech spoke of South Korea's strategic role as a "bastion of democracy, human rights and freedom", but warned that "these values are challenged, sadly, as rarely before in our lifetimes".

The jingle of the cavalry harnesses on the Mall is also inextricably linked to the jingle of cash tills, with trade deals to be negotiated.

A "Downing Street Accord" is to be signed at a meeting between the South Korean president and Rishi Sunak on Wednesday, which is intended to boost trade and support "global stability".

High technology and green energy will be among the areas of business co-operation.

There are plans for a stronger approach to enforcing sanctions against North Korea, and preventing its "illegal weapons programme", with joint sea patrols between the South Korean navy and the Royal Navy.

"Long term, global partnerships are vital to our prosperity and security," said Mr Sunak, who added that "close ties have already propelled £21bn of investment between our countries".



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### Date Created

November 22, 2023

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