

《中日韩研讨会日期确定》

Premier Li Keqiang to attend meeting of leaders from China, ROK and Japan in Seoul

A summit between government leaders from China, the Republic of Korea and Japan will be held in Seoul on Sunday—the latest sign of thawing ties between Beijing and Tokyo.

Discussions on a long-awaited free trade agreement and strategies for deeper economic integration will be on the agenda.

The summit will be the first of its kind between leaders from the three countries for three years after such meetings were halted due to disputes over wartime history and territorial issues.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry confirmed on Monday that Premier Li Keqiang will make an official three-day visit to the ROK from Saturday and will attend the summit.

But it did not say if Li is scheduled to meet with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on the summit sidelines.

Liu Zhenmin, deputy minister of foreign affairs, said Beijing and Tokyo are still in contact at "working-level" on this issue.

The trilateral meeting is aimed at boosting exchanges among the three nations and maintaining stability in the region, Liu said.

South Korean President Park Geun-hye's office told Reuters that Park will meet with Li in Seoul on Saturday.

Tong Daochi, assistant minister of commerce, said China will push for "substantive progress" in the free trade talks with Japan and the ROK, now in the eighth round of negotiations after being started in 2012.

Premier Li will try to "synergize" Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative with the ROK's ambition for closer ties among Asian and European countries during his visit, Tong said.

Other issues expected to be discussed at the summit include the stability and denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

Zhang Tuosheng, director of the Research Department at the China Foundation for International and Strategic Studies, said the summit will be a breakthrough, as trilateral relations have suffered a great deal from tension between China and Japan since 2012.

"The trilateral meeting should have been held in 2012, in a manner to facilitate free trade talks among the three

parties," he said.

"Now the three countries have set up separate free trade agreements with other nations, but not a single treaty in terms of free trade has been completed among the trio."

Kazuo Ogoura, an adviser for think tank the Japan Foundation and a former Japanese ambassador to the ROK, said on the sidelines of a forum in Beijing on Sunday that platforms for communication among the three countries are important.

"We have to build up a series of meetings, not only at the level of president or premier, but at various levels," Ogoura said.

Ties between Beijing and Tokyo have shown signs of improving since late last year. Senior officials from the two countries have held working-level meetings since then, and Chinese State Councilor Yang Jiechi, the country's top diplomat, visited Japan this month.

According to an annual survey released on Thursday, hostility and pessimism among the Chinese and Japanese public is easing, although historical and territorial issues continue to have a negative impact.

The relationship will worsen, according to 41.1 percent of the Chinese respondents polled, down from 49.8 percent who held this view last year.

In Japan, the proportion dropped from 36.8 percent to 24.7 percent, according to the poll conducted by the China Foreign Languages Publishing Administration and Japan's nonprofit think tank Genron NPO.