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COVER PHOTO : North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, along with his wife, Ri Sol-ju, inspects an honor guard upon arrival at an operational airfield in the North's unidentified western region by using his exclusive plane to attend a combat flight contest. It's the first time North Korea has unveiled an image showing its leader using a plane. The (North) Korean Central News Agency released the photo on May 10. (KCNA-Yonhap)

Final Stage of Kim Jong-un's Power Structure

Hwang Pyong-so's appointment could mean that North Korea is putting more emphasis on the ruling Workers' Party than the military.

■ By Lee Kwang-ho

One of the most frequently raised questions on North Korea is how stable the isolated regime is. Some say that Kim Jong-un's one-man rule is very unstable and could collapse at any time. Others say the reclusive country would survive after all as the young leader has now consolidated his own monolithic system by effectively repositioning his inner circle elite around him.

Despite the conflicting speculations, Kim Jong-un appears to have almost finished the reshuffle of his power hierarchy after the brutal purge of his once powerful uncle Jang Song-thaek in December last year. The biggest political upheaval under Kim Jong-un rule has signaled the end of his father Kim Jong-il's era and the opening of his own leadership.

Under his more than two-year rule since late December in 2011, the country has undergone power structures with significant personnel changes in the ruling Workers' Party, the military and the Cabinet. The young leader carried out a generational shift across the board, replacing many older figures with those of a relatively young generation. Specifically, the military has gone through a bigger reshuffle than any other organization, with old guards having been sidelined, while a young generation of officers loyal to leader Kim Jong-un has emerged.

Hwang Pyong-so as New Power Elite

Pyongyang's latest reshuffle of the second most powerful figure has made light of the shift in military leadership after Kim Jong-un's ascent to power. Shortly after the reshuffle of important posts at the parliamentary meeting in April, the North reshuffled the military's de facto No. 2 person after Kim

This photo, carried in the April 30 edition of North Korea's state-run daily Rodong Sinmun, shows Hwang Pyong-so (R in the circle), the new director of the powerful General Political Bureau of the (North) Korean People's Army (KPA). He accompanies North Korean leader Kim Jong-un (front) during a visit to Kim Jong-suk Pyongyang Textile Mill in the North Korean capital. It's the first time that North Korean media has shown him with a vice marshal's insignia. (Yonhap)



Jong-un. Hwang Pyong-so, first vice director of the ruling Workers' Party's Organizational Guidance Department, replaced top military officer Choe Ryong-hae as the new director of the powerful General Political Bureau of the (North) Korean People's Army (KPA).

Hwang's appointment to the KPA post was confirmed in a speech that Kim Jong-un delivered at a banquet in Pyongyang marking May Day. Hwang was also given the rank of vice marshal, the second-highest functioning military rank, a few days before. Hwang was fast-tracked to the senior post only 11 days after it emerged that he had been promoted to a four-star general at a military event in Pyongyang.

Cheong Seong-chang, a senior researcher at the Sejong Institute in South Korea, said, "The process by which Hwang has been promoted is reminiscent of Choe Ryong-hae's promotion to military Politburo chief in April 2012. At the time, North Korean media read out Choe's name ahead of then Army chief Ri Yong-ho's and confirmed his appointment alongside pictures showing him with a vice marshal's insignia."

Leadership of the Army's general political

bureau is regarded as the military's most coveted position as the organization oversees core military personnel affairs, including promotion, position assignment and disciplinary action. Hwang's meteoric rise to the new post came at a time when his predecessor, Choe, had been making fewer public appearances.

North Korea's media outlets did not give any reason for Choe's abrupt removal from the post of the military's top political officer. The latest reshuffle came six days after the North's official news agency KCNA reported that Kim "severely criticized" a military unit for failing to make good combat preparations during his inspection of a shelling drill.

Kim, the supreme commander of the 1.19-million-strong military, said the ruling Workers' Party committee of the military unit is responsible for the unit's poor combat preparations in what could be a thinly veiled attack on Choe. On April 24, Choe did not show up at a key meeting on the eve of the 82nd anniversary of the founding of North Korea's military, fueling speculation on his political fate.

One source said Kim Jong-un has become

nervous since the purge of Jang Song-thaek and demoted Choe for fear of his rising influence and power. The source surmised that Choe's ouster seemed to be punitive, not just part of an ordinary shake up, given Kim's abrupt change in attitude toward the once-powerful military official. Observers also said that Choe might have stepped down from the top military post due to his worsening diabetes, or he might have been demoted.

Choe Ryong-hae's Position

Yet, Choe appeared in a photo of a session of the Central Military Commission released by the KCNA on April 27, an indication that Choe was still in power. It was confirmed later that Choe had been named secretary of North Korea's ruling Workers' Party. The KCNA said on May 3, "Choe Ryong-hae, secretary of the Workers' Party's Central Committee, delivered unveiling and inaugural speeches" as it reported leader Kim Jong-un's attendance at the inaugural ceremony of the Songdowon International Boy Scout Campground in Wonsan, Kangwon Province, on May 2.

Seoul's unification ministry spokesman, Kim Eui-do, said there is little possibility that Choe was purged, citing the lack of North Korea's official announcement on key political meetings on purges. He also cited Choe's recent promotion to new vice chairman of the North's powerful National Defense Commission (NDC) as a reason that lowered the possibility of a purge.

Cheong Seong-chang said, "Considering Choe's replacement as demotion constitutes downplaying the stature and importance of party secretary. On the contrary, it illustrates Kim Jong-un's confidence in Choe whose

health deteriorated." Another source in Seoul said, "It has become clear that Choe has not been politically purged." In fact, in photos carried in the Rodong Sinmun, the organ of the Workers' Party, Choe was seen clapping while sitting on Kim Jong-un's right side to watch a soccer match, and smiling brightly at the inaugural ceremony.

Choe rose up the political pecking order on the back of his father's close ties with the Kim family. An official from the unification ministry in Seoul said that despite all possible reasons, Choe had been saved and not indefinitely purged, most likely thanks to his familial ties with the Kim dynasty. His father, Choe Hyon, was a close aide to North Korea's founder Kim Il-sung, the grandfather of Kim Jong-un, and a respected anti-Japanese Communist guerrilla in the regime.

In a massive rally held just days after the bloody purge of Jang, Choe vowed to track down and kill those who do not follow Kim's leadership by citing his father's legendary case of loyalty. Choe Hyon, who served as a vice defense minister, pulled a pistol during a key party meeting in 1956 on the opposition in a factional strife against Kim Il-sung. The senior Choe's move dampened the spirits of those who opposed Kim, who later purged his political opponents.

Relatively unknown Hwang Pyong-so rose from the obscurity. Aged 65, Hwang is believed to have earned the confidence of Kim's late mother, Ko Yong-hui, for his efforts in the power succession from Kim's father Kim Jong-il. On April 27, the North's official Rodong Sinmun daily mentioned Hwang's name ahead of the North Korean Army chief Ri Yong-gil.

He also became more prominent after the



A ceremony to mark the 82nd anniversary of the founding of the North's Korean People's Army is under way at the People's Palace of Culture in Pyongyang on April 24. (KCNA-Yonhap)

execution of Jang in December. He was promoted to three-star general in April 2011, less than seven months after he was given a two-star rank. Early this year, Hwang was appointed as the first vice director of the ruling party's organizational guidance department and promoted to the four-star rank.

Hwang's appointment as a vice marshal could mean that North Korea is putting more emphasis on the ruling party than the military, whereby a party official is promoted as the second-highest military official. A graduate of prestigious Kim Il-sung University in Pyongyang, Hwang was a classmate of Kim Kyong-hui, who is the sister to Kim Jong-il and aunt to Kim Jong-un.

It remains to be seen whether Hwang will be able to fulfill his prodigious mission as the army's general political bureau chief, a posi-

tion that requires strong leadership and charisma to maintain the military. But analysts said that the appointment of Hwang is expected to help further solidify Kim's grip on power.

Reshuffle of Top Military Posts

Kim has now reshuffled all three top military positions with Hwang's appointment. The young commander also tapped Ri Yong-gil as chief of the General Staff of the Army in August and the relatively unknown Gen. Jang Jong-nam as minister of the People's Armed Forces in May last year. In North Korea, five other officials are currently known as vice marshals, including Choe Ryong-hae. The other four vice marshals are aging senior members in the party: Kim Yong-chun, the former minister of the People's Armed Forces;

Kim Jong-gak, president of Kim Il-sung Military University; Ri Yong-mu, a vice chairman of the National Defense Commission; and Hyon Chol-hae, the former first vice chief of the Ministry of the People's Armed Forces.

The four are assumed to have been edged out of Kim's innermost circle, as they were neither listed as newly elected delegates in North Korea's rubber-stamp parliamentary elections in March this year, nor were they present at the commemoration marking the second anniversary of the death of Kim Jong-il in December last year.

North Korea's new power hierarchy can be also seen through the first session of the newly launched Supreme People's Assembly (SPA) held on April 9. Although there was not any sweeping shakeup in the regime's power structure, one can get glimpses into the transformation of power base under Kim's leadership.

The SPA reshuffled some of the cabinet members. Foreign Minister Pak Ui-chun was replaced by Ri Su-yong, former ambassador to Switzerland. Ri reportedly took care of Kim and his sister Kim Yo-jong when they were at boarding school in Switzerland, and although he was close to Jang, he apparently survived due to this relationship with the young leader.

The 79-year-old is also believed to have managed slush funds of former leader Kim Jong-il through an alias, Ri Chol, in Switzerland. He served as a diplomat for more than 20 years in Switzerland and the Netherlands, and his appointment as foreign minister has prompted experts to speculate that North Korea may seek to strengthen ties with European countries.

Meanwhile, the octogenarian ceremonial head of state, Kim Yong-nam, kept his job at the head of the Presidium of the Supreme

People's Assembly, and Premier Pak Pong-ju also retained his position. That suggests Kim Jong-un is trying to maintain stability amid tensions with Seoul and Washington.

Kim Jong-un's powerful aunt, Kim Kyong-hui, was not elected to any important position in the SPA, according to the list of Assembly members revealed by the North's official KCNA. Since the death of her husband, Jang, she has been rumored to have stepped down from political life in North Korea.

Kim Kyong-hui's Political Fate

Another notable figure is cabinet vice premier Kang Sok-ju, who has long been a veteran diplomat and longtime confidant to late leader Kim Jong-il on foreign affairs and the North's nuclear negotiations. He was removed from the Cabinet post, but later he was confirmed to have become a secretary of the Workers' Party Central Committee.

One newly elected official to watch is Jo Chun-ryong, who had not been a prominent figure before.

The new face joined North Korea's powerful National Defense Commission and appears to have replaced Paek Se-bong, the ousted chief of the Second Economic Commission in charge of the munitions industry. According to a government official in Seoul, Jo has been involved in rocket and missile affairs, and the authorities seek not to reveal his identity for security reasons.

Ri Yong-mu and O Kuk-ryol, two other vice chairmen of the National Defense Commission (NDC), retained their posts, but former armed forces minister Kim Yong-chun was not included in the list of re-elected officials. Confidants of former leader Kim Jong-il like

former army chief Kim Kyok-sik, who supervised the sinking of South Korea's navy corvette Cheonan and shelling of Yeonpyeong Island in 2010, Ju Kyu-chang, who took care of military supplies, and Paek Se-bong, who managed economic matters, were not re-elected.

But a source said that old guard member O Kuk-ryol, the NDC vice chairman, is gaining control of the financial operations of the Commission that was once managed by Jang Song-thaek as well as other business interests. O has crucially gained control of agencies in charge of bringing in foreign currency such as a body created by Jang to develop an economic zone in Sinuiju near the border with China. He has thus regained rights to the development of Rajin-Sonbong port, exports of seafood and gold mining that Jang stripped him of in 2010.

Other newly elected members to the SPA are People's Armed Forces Minister Jang Jong-nam, Pak To-chun, who oversees nuclear arms development, Minister for State Security Kim Won-hong, and Choe Pu-il, minister of people's security. The outcome of North Korea's latest parliamentary meeting indicates that the communist country has chosen stability over change to minimize the fallout from the execution of Jang Song-thaek, Seoul's unification ministry said.

Stability over Change

It has been known that the organizational guidance department of the Workers' Party has emerged as a key power elite group supporting leader Kim Jong-un following the execution of Jang. On April 8, a day before the first session of the 13th SPA, the North held a meeting of the party's Politburo and discussed the issue of

reinforcing the organization for increasing the leadership role and function of the Party. North Korea experts speculate that the meeting was a sign that the North is desperately strengthening the monolithic leadership of Kim Jong-un through the party.

According to a recent analysis by South Korea's unification ministry, the young leader has replaced 44 percent of his senior party, military and Cabinet officials over the past two years. Those senior party secretaries and military officials in their 70s -- who exerted their influence in the era of Kim Jong-il -- appear to have lost actual power now.

In the two years under Kim Jong-un's rule, a total of 31 high-ranking officials in the ruling party, the Cabinet and the military were purged or demoted or have retired, and 52 new figures arose, a South Korean government report said recently.

The report said the young leader carried out a generational shift across the board, replacing many older figures with relatively youthful ones, lowering the average age of the inner circle from 76 to 62.

The report picked four vice-ministerial-level officials of the ruling Workers' Party as the most notable figures: Kim Pyong-ho, a vice director of the Information and Instruction Department; Pak Tae-song, a vice director of the Organizational Guidance Department; Hong Yong-chil, a vice director of the Machine Industry Department; and Ma Won-chun, a vice director of the Financial Planning Department. Of them, Ma Won-chun is considered a rising star under the young leader's rule and frequently accompanies him at construction sites, amusement parks and sports-related facilities. (Yonhap)

Seoul's Move to Host U.N.'s Field Office

“The U.N. is seeking to install a field office in South Korea,” a government source said, adding the government has expressed its intention to host the office.

■ By Kim Tae-shik

South Korea is likely to host a field office the United Nations is seeking to open as part of its increasing efforts to bring the North Korean leadership to justice for human rights violations, a government source said in late April.

After a year of investigation, the U.N.'s commission of inquiry (COI) on North Korean human rights published a report earlier this year, accusing North Korea of systemic, widespread and gross human rights violations including torture, forced starvation and imprisonment for political reasons.

The commission submitted the report to the U.N. Council for Human Rights in March, which adopted a resolution calling for measures to bring the North Korean leadership to justice.

The U.N. also called for the opening of the field office as part of follow-up measures included in the resolution, and South Korea has reportedly been considered as a host country.

Seoul's Stance

A government source said on condition of anonymity that the Seoul government is currently in discussion with the U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) about the plan to set up the office in Seoul.

“The U.N. is seeking to install it in South Korea, and the (discussions) may be concluded soon,” the source said, adding that the government has expressed its intention to host the field office.

According to the resolution adopted on March 28, the field office will be put in charge of helping to implement recommendations by the three-member COI, and monitoring and logging North Korea's human rights conditions



A group of South Korean civic activists calls for the government to actively seek the introduction of a U.N. field office on North Korean human rights during a news conference in front of the Foreign Ministry in Seoul on April 17. (Yonhap)

mainly through interviews with North Korean defectors.

The office could be staffed with around five field workers when it opens in the second half of this year, the source said.

Earlier, the South Korean foreign ministry said the government will positively consider the establishment of the proposed field office in the country if the U.S. and the U.N. council formally request it.

“Currently, discussions are under way over the location of the field office,” Foreign Ministry spokesman Cho Tai-young said in a briefing on April 8. “The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights of the U.N. is looking for a location agreeable to member countries of the human rights council.

“Seoul’s stance is that it will positively review a request if it is made by the U.N. and the human rights council,” the spokesman said. “The South Korean government has coherently supported the U.N.’s resolutions on North Korea under the principle that human rights should be respected as a universal value for mankind.”

Separately Marzuki Darusman, a member of the U.N. COI, said in an unofficial meeting of the U.N. Security Council (UNSC) on April 17 that the field office on North Korean human rights should be set up in South Korea. He revealed that he delivered his view to the South Korean government.

Darusman said Seoul should be host to the office because there are about 26,000 North Korean defectors in South Korea and many defector organizations are in Seoul.

The UNSC advised that the North Korean human rights issue be referred to the International

Criminal Court and at least nine of the 15 UNSC members supported this view, Michael Kirby, the head of the COI, said.

In a related move, 55 lawmakers of South Korea's ruling Saenuri Party urged the government to accept the U.N.'s call to open the field office in South Korea.

The lawmakers, including Ha Tae-keung, chairman of the party's North Korean Human Rights Committee, said in a statement that the U.N. field office on North Korean human rights should not be set up in any other country than South Korea.

The statement further urged the government to clarify its intention to host the U.N. office to the OHCHR and member countries of the U.N. Human Rights Council and make every effort to have the proposed office set up in the country.

The opening of the office is also expected to spark a fierce backlash from Pyongyang, which has strongly dismissed the COI's human rights accusations and labeled the move part of U.S.-led efforts to topple the North Korean regime.

Lawmakers' Appeal

North Korea has been responsible for a near daily barrage of condemnation over the COI report and it now threatens "catastrophic consequences" if Seoul persists in its moves to set up the office despite warnings from North Korea.

Since the COI released its final report on North Korea's human rights violations in February, the international community has been putting pressure on the North. Recently the moves to refer the North Korean human rights case to the International Criminal Court (ICC) have been gaining impetus. There are also demands that the North's leader Kim Jong-un be referred to the international court.

North Korea mobilized not only official agencies such as the foreign ministry and the Committee for Peaceful Reunification of Korea (CPRK) but also all its propaganda media to slam the report and Michael Kirby, the head of the three-member commission.

Following a bitterly-worded statement by a foreign ministry spokesman on April 18, the North's Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) denounced in a commentary on April 22 the COI report as a fabrication, calling it a U.S.-led attempt to undermine its political system.

The KCNA commentary came days after Kirby once again called on the UNSC to refer the case to the ICC on April 17. The UNSC discussed the issue for the first time.

Saying the COI report is "peppered with fabrication," the KCNA said that "Lurking behind (the report) is a dishonest and political purpose of the U.S. and its followers seeking to undermine the ideology and social system of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)." The DPRK is the North's official name.

"His (Kirby's) rash act is a last-ditch effort intended to lend credence to the 'report' peppered with fabrications and create an atmosphere of international pressure on the DPRK in this regard," the north's key mouthpiece said.

The commentary also criticized the COI report as being founded upon testimonies of North

Female North Korean defector Kim Young-soon (L) testifies about a miserable life in the North Korean prison camp in Yodok, South Hamgyong Province, during a news conference on the North's human rights violations at the National Assembly in Seoul on April 29. (Yonhap)



Korean defectors, “who are runaways or terrorists as they betrayed their country and nation after committing indelible crimes.”

“The army and people of the DPRK reject the fabricated documents as a foul crime unprecedented in the world history of human rights and will surely force them to pay dearly for it,” it also noted.

Following the reports that Seoul is being considered as the venue for the U.N.’s field office, North Korean media began almost daily condemnations of the move.

The Rodong Sinmun newspaper on April 23 said in a commentary that the South Korean authorities’ move to set up the office is an unpardonable challenge to the dignity and sovereignty of the DPRK and a politically-motivated provocative act.

Pyongyang’s Warning

“What the puppet authorities seek is to kick off a frantic racket for confrontation of social systems, trumpeting about ‘human rights’ in a bid to hurt the dignified socialist system in the DPRK and the single-minded unity of all its service personnel and people.

“It is a scenario of the puppet group to set up the office in South Korea in a bid to build up world public opinion about the non-existent ‘human rights issue in the north,’ zealously incite hostility toward the DPRK and boost cooperation with foreign forces in the ‘human rights’ campaign against fellow countrymen,” it added.

North Korea experts say the way the North is countering international moves concerning its human rights abuses is changing, which reflects the concerns of the North Korean leadership.

If the country’s human rights violations are referred to the ICC and the UNSC takes punitive measures, North Korea’s isolation will be further deepened, they said.

Chang Yong-suk, a researcher at the Institute for Peace and Unification Studies at Seoul National University, said the pressure of the international community has grown hugely and that North Korea appears more responsive to the pressure for fear of being labeled a human rights violator. (Yonhap)

N. Korea's Drone Incursions

The drones departed from North Korea and flew southward to prearranged coordinates to take photos of key facilities and military installations.

■ By Kim Tae-shik

All three small drones found near the inter-Korean border in March and April were sent from North Korea, according to a joint investigation into the origin of the unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) based on an analysis of geographical data retrieved from the spy aircraft, South Korea's defense ministry announced on May 8.

One UAV was discovered in Paju, north of Seoul, on March 24, while another was found on a western border island a week later. The third was found in a mountain near the east coast on April 6.

The ministry said a team of South Korean and American experts confirmed the origin of the drones after restoring the coordinates of the geographical positioning system (GPS) stored in their systems.

The announcement came about a month after an interim investigation pointed the finger at Pyongyang for sending the small drones to South Korea based on circumstantial evidence.

"All three UAVs originated from North Korea and were programmed to return to the same regions," Kim Jong-seong, the director

of the UAV development program at the state-run Agency for Defense Development (ADD), said in a briefing at the defense ministry.

The drones, equipped with a camera and a parachute, departed from North Korea and flew southward to prearranged coordinates to take photos of key facilities and military installations. Although the devices were programmed to return to their departure point, they failed to complete their mission. One crashed due to an engine problem, while the other two failed due to fuel shortages, Kim said.

Origin of Drones

The Paju UAV departed from a region five kilometers northwest of the North Korean border city of Kaesong.

The second drone found on March 31 on the northwestern border island of Baengnyeong was sent from 27 km southeast of Haeju, South Hwanghae Province. Tensions were high on that day as North Korea conducted a live-fire drill near the tensely guarded maritime border.

The third drone found on April 6 near

Samcheok on South Korea's east coast, departed from a location 17 km east of Pyongyang in North Korea's Kangwon Province. It is located just north of the heavily fortified DMZ.

"All three UAVs were ordered to fly over South Korea's military facilities according to the prearranged data," Kim said. "Photos of UAVs crashed on Baengnyeong Island and in Paju revealed their flight routes, which match the GPS data."

The Paju drone took photos of key installations in the Seoul metropolitan area, including the presidential office in the capital city, while the Baengnyeong Island drone took photos of troops on two western border islands.

North Korea is believed to have made the drones based on Chinese UAVs it had acquired via Hong Kong.

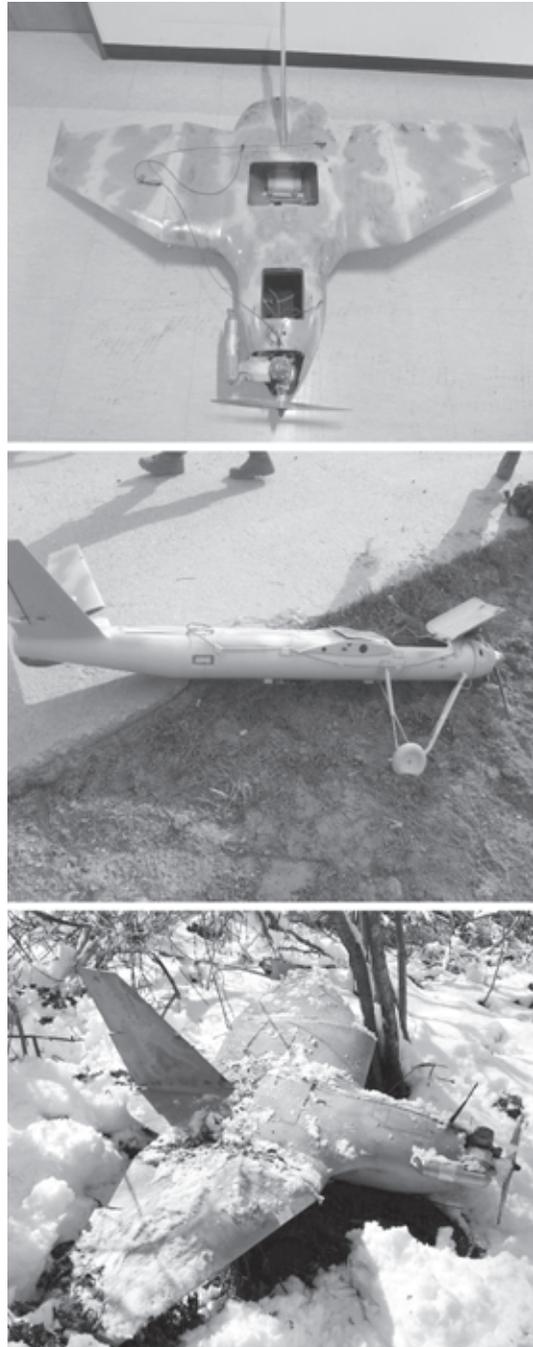
The South Korean military has asked the Chinese Embassy to figure out the link between the Chinese UAV manufacturer with North Korea, Moon Sang-kyun, a senior ministry official, said.

Seoul condemned Pyongyang for border incursions by the spy aircraft.

"North Korea's drone incursions are in violation of the Armistice Agreement and South-North Non-Aggression Agreement, which is an apparent military provocation," defense ministry spokesman Kim Min-seok said in a briefing.

"The South Korean military will sternly respond to North Korea's provocation and deliver the warning through the United Nations Command (UNC) based on the Armistice Agreement."

The two Koreas are technically at war as the 1950-53 Korean War ended in a ceasefire, without a peace treaty being signed. The Armistice Agreement has been overseen by the UNC for the last 60 years.



This composite photo shows North Korean drones, which were found in Paju, north of Seoul, on Baengnyeong Island, and in Samcheok, Gangwon Province, respectively, between March and April (from top to bottom). (Yonhap)

In light of the border incursions by North Korea's spy aircraft, the South Korean military vowed to step up air security by acquiring low-altitude surveillance radars and strike weapons.

South Korea is pushing to buy about 10 low-altitude radars from Israel to better detect small UAVs and thereby counter threats posed by North Korean drones.

"The military is currently reviewing Israeli equipment to establish the detection and strike system that fits South Korean terrain and military operation," spokesman Kim said. "We will first deploy detection and strike system in major areas, and complement the existing system in other areas."

Rudimentary drones have existed for almost as long as aircraft themselves for reconnaissance and surveillance missions, but the drone incursions have raised concerns over more sophisticated, armed UAVs that can launch attacks on military assets and major facilities.

However, the South Korean military remained skeptical of the effectiveness of the North Korean UAVs, saying the drones could carry about 3-4 kilograms of ammunition, a payload that some say is too little to cause substantial damage compared with other conventional weapons.

The North is estimated to have about 300 spy drones, less than 10 attack UAVs and about 10 Russian-made Shmel UAVs, while currently developing a multipurpose UAV, according to the ministry.

North Korea, however, has not admitted its responsibility, slamming Seoul's announcement as fabrication.

North Korea has categorically denied its involvement in the drone incursions from the early stages of the South Korea-led probe. On

April 14, the North's powerful National Defense Commission (NDC) demanded a joint probe, accusing Seoul of fabricating the drone case. South Korea, however, rejected the demand.

North Korea's Denial

Pyongyang again denied its involvement in the drone incursions on May 11, three days after the ministry's announcement, and called for a joint probe into the drone case.

"They force us to believe in the faked drones," an unnamed spokesman for the inspection group of the NDC said in a statement carried by the North's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA). "It is better to believe in invisible ghost," read the English-language statement.

The North accused the Park Geun-hye administration of using what it called the fabricated drones to find a way out of the crisis caused by a deadly ferry sinking in April.

Seoul also aims to "please its U.S. master by kicking up a fresh racket of confrontation" with Pyongyang, the statement said.

"The South Korean authorities should accept without any complaint the proposal made by the DPRK to carry out a joint investigation into the 'drone case' before spreading false rumors about Pyongyang," it said, referring to North Korea by its official name of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

North Korea on May 13 threatened a retaliatory war against South Korea after a Seoul defense ministry official issued a scathing criticism against Pyongyang for denying its role in the drone incursions. Criticizing Pyongyang's denial of its responsibility for sending UAVs across the border, Seoul's

defense ministry spokesman Kim told a press briefing on May 12 that “the North is an abnormal state and should vanish as soon as possible.”

“What Park group uttered this time cannot be construed as anything other than a total denial of compatriots in the North, an undisguised revelation of its wild ambition to achieve the ‘unification by absorption’ and a declaration of all-out confrontation of the social systems,” the NDC claimed in a “crucial report.” It was referring to President Park Geun-hye and her administration in Seoul.

“All the service personnel and people of (North Korea) ... are strongly calling for wiping the Park group out of this land,” the English-language report carried by the KCNA added. “The Park group will have to keenly feel what miserable consequences it will face for its vitriol.”

“It is a resolution already made by (the North) to force the enemies to pay a dear price whenever an opportunity presents itself,” the report added.

Seoul's Reaction

South Korea's defense ministry quickly dismissed the North's claim.

“We express serious regret over the North's behavior that continues to evade its responsibility while rejecting the outcome of our investigation that has clearly showed that North Korea is behind the recent incursions by small UAVs,” the ministry said in a released statement.

Spokesman Kim said that his harsh words against Pyongyang were meant to highlight the wayward behavior of the North Korean regime, hoping for an improvement in its

human rights conditions.

“I feel regretful that 20 million North Koreans have experienced difficulties. I hope the North gets better. What I said is not about the whole country, but how the North Korean regime behaves,” Kim said.

Dismissing criticism that he violated the inter-Korean agreement to refrain from slandering each other, the spokesman simply said he touched upon “a very basic principle” that the North should not repeat such a stance of denying its role in the drone incursions.

The ministry also rejected the North's call for a joint investigation, calling it absurd.

“The North's demand for a joint investigation with our side is just as absurd as a criminal demanding to investigate his or her own crime and does not even deserve any serious consideration,” it said.

Seoul's unification ministry also dismissed North Korea's claims as groundless and expressed deep regrets over Pyongyang's war threat.

Rebuking the North's claims, Park Soo-jin, a spokeswoman of the unification ministry, said on May 14 that “Before taking issue with anybody else's remarks, they should look back on what they have said so far and repent.”

“(South Korea) regards North Korea's military threats, including the nationwide retaliatory war, as very regretful.”

She added that the North has repeated rash slander against South Korea and its leader, and attempted to capitalize on a tragic ferry sinking accident for political gains.

“These behaviors will only aggravate our citizens' distrust and resentment,” she said. (Yonhap)

Trilateral Security Posture Against N. Korea

The United States stresses North Korea's nuclear and missile programs remain imminent threats to it as well as its key allies – South Korea and Japan.

■ By Lee Kwang-ho

In recent years, North Korea has harshly denounced the U.S. missile defense plan in the Asia-Pacific region to ward off North Korea's missile and nuclear threats. Moreover, it has been ratcheting up criticism on the move by South Korea, the United States and Japan to beef up their three-way security consultations.

Washington has underscored the need for expanding missile defense capabilities, asserting that North Korea tops the list of challenges to the U.S. troops in Asia and that North Korea's nuclear and missile programs and its continuous provocative actions remain imminent threats to the U.S. as well as its key allies -- South Korea and Japan.

In sharp contrast, however, North Korea has claimed that the U.S. has a sinister intention to keep military supremacy in the Asia-Pacific region by expanding and upgrading its missile defense (MD) system in the region under the pretext of the North's threat and thus containing its potential rivals.

On May 9, North Korea criticized a U.S.

plan to expand its missile defense radar system, rejecting Washington's claim that better radar capability is needed to ward off missile threats from Pyongyang. In a commentary carried by its state-run Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), North Korea claimed the radar expansion plan is only a pretext for Washington's broader strategy to become a military hegemony.

MD Budget Increase

According to a recent report from a subcommittee of the U.S. House of Representatives in early May, the U.S. Missile Defense Agency under the Defense Department has requested a budget of US\$75 million to deploy long-range radar in response to ballistic missile threats from North Korea.

The KCNA commentary said, "The possibility of mainland attacks by our missiles, much advertised by the U.S., is only sophistry for their attempts to justify the missile defense system and to tighten their military hegemony



South Korean President Park Geun-hye (L) and visiting U.S. President Barack Obama receive a briefing on the countries' combined readiness against North Korea during their joint visit to the Korea-U.S. Combined Forces Command (CFC) in central Seoul on April 26. (Yonhap)

over the Asia-Pacific region.”

North Korea is in possession of a variety of missiles, but it has never fired a shot at a foreign country that does not disturb them, the KCNA report said, calling the North “a pacifist nation.”

Some experts said that the North is close to or has finished its development of long-range missiles that can reach U.S. territories closer to the Asian region.

As North Korea intensifies nuclear and missile threats, South Korea and the U.S. agreed on April 16 to hone their combined defense capabilities through more joint drills, the allies said after bilateral military talks in Washington.

At the two-day Korea-U.S. Integrated Defense Dialogue (KIDD), the two countries

shared the view that North Korea’s recent provocations undermine the stability of the Korean Peninsula and the region, they said in a joint statement.

They cited the North’s missile launches and artillery fire in the Yellow Sea, the infiltration of small unmanned aerial vehicles and threats to carry out a fourth nuclear test.

The U.S. reaffirmed its continued commitment to provide and strengthen extended deterrence for South Korea using the full range of military capabilities, including the U.S. nuclear umbrella, conventional strikes and missile defense capabilities, it added.

The allies also talked about Seoul’s request for a delay in the transfer of wartime operational control (OPCON), now slated for December 2015. According to the statement,

South Korea and the U.S. will continue cooperating to develop the future command structure, combined operational plans, South Korea's critical military capabilities, and U.S. bridging and enduring capabilities.

Of late, it was known that a U.S. House of Representatives committee unanimously passed a bill that contained an amendment that recommends delaying the transfer of wartime operational control from Washington to Seoul.

The bill's passage follows an agreement made in April between South Korean President Park Geun-hye and U.S. President Barack Obama. The House Armed Services Committee passed the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015 at a meeting on May 7, diplomatic sources said.

Park and Obama agreed in April at a summit in Seoul to consider once again postponing Korea's takeover of OPCON. Washington was originally slated to transfer wartime operational control in 2012 but pushed it back to 2015 at the request of the Lee Myung-bak administration in June 2010.

But the North's KCNA report of May 9 further said the North developed various kinds of diversified missiles to cope with the U.S. moves for a nuclear war against it.

Nuclear and missile threats to the region are coming from the U.S., the KCNA said, adding, "A plan to spend a total of 37 billion U.S. dollars for the MD till 2019 is now under discussion at U.S. Congress."

"The DPRK (North Korea) is fully ready for nuclear and missile stand-off with the U.S. The revolutionary armed forces of the DPRK will blow up the headquarters of the enemies by merciless missile strikes, should even a single missile is fired at any area of their side,"

the KCNA stated.

On May 7, Pyongyang harshly criticized what it called Seoul's move to hold security consultations with Tokyo. In a KCNA report, the North said that the South Korean puppet forces are moving to intensify a military nexus with Japan while working hard to conclude a South Korea-Japan agreement for the protection of military information under the manipulation of the U.S.

"There was also a discussion on the exchanges of military information at recent high-level military talks among the three parties in Washington," it claimed.

"Park Geun-hye seeks to realize the exchanges of military information between South Korea and Japan by such a crafty way as signing a memorandum of understanding for the exchanges of military information among the U.S., Japan and South Korea," it said.

It said the conclusion of the agreement on the protection of military information with Japan is an "act of treachery" as it accelerates Japan's militarization and paves the way for its reinvasion of Korea.

Trilateral Defense Talks

Meanwhile, a Seoul official said on May 11 that the defense ministers of South Korea, the U.S. and Japan are expected to meet on the sidelines of the Asia Security Summit in Singapore late in May, with expected discussions on cooperation in dealing with the North Korean nuclear program.

"South Korean, U.S. and Japanese defense ministers have met annually during the Asia Security Summit, and this year is expected to be no exception, considering the North's

nuclear provocations,” the official said. “Specific topics of the meeting are not currently in discussion,” the official at the Seoul’s defense ministry added.

The official said it was unclear whether the defense ministers would discuss signing a military information sharing pact, a sensitive issue for Seoul given the ongoing diplomatic tension with Tokyo over history and territory rows.

“The issue is still in the stage of internal discussion within the (South Korean) government,” he said. Defense Minister Kim Kwan-jin will represent the South Korean delegation at the Asia Security Summit slated for May 30-June 1.

Still, Seoul is cautious on a trilateral military intelligence deal on North Korea. A Seoul official recently said that South Korea will cautiously approach the issue of signing a deal on sharing military intelligence on North Korea with Japan and the United States by taking into account the public opinion over sensitive historical issues.

“The defense ministry basically supports intelligence sharing on North Korea’s nuclear test and missile launches (with the U.S. and Japan),” ministry spokesman Kim Min-seok said in a briefing. “But first of all, the government should establish strategies and review details before starting the official process.”

Seoul and Tokyo had come close to a military intelligence sharing pact two years ago, but the move fell through due to strong domestic backlash because South Koreans still harbor lingering resentment against the former colonial ruler. Korea was under the Japanese colony from 1910 to 1945.

A recent attempt to sign a memorandum of understanding between the two Asian neigh-

bors and their ally, the U.S., which requires a lower level of commitment, has also come under criticism that the Seoul government was viewed as seeking ways to circumvent criticism from reaching a bilateral deal with Japan.

The issue came into the spotlight again after U.S. President Obama, during his recent Asia trip, encouraged South Korea and Japan to put concerted security efforts toward overcoming historical disputes.

In a related development, President Obama’s pick of a senior Pentagon official as his new envoy to Seoul is viewed as aimed at strengthening not only the Seoul-Washington alliance but also trilateral security cooperation with Japan.

Mark Lippert, chief of staff to Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel, has a firm belief that the regional powers should take a separate approach to security cooperation and historical disputes, according to Pentagon officials. Such a stance may run counter to Seoul’s deep-rooted sensitivity to Tokyo’s territorial claims and interpretation of history.

At a Washington forum on U.S.-Japan relations in late April, Lippert emphasized Washington’s efforts to bolster trilateral cooperation, especially on missile defense to counter North Korea’s threats. He also said the U.S. hopes for tripartite defense ministerial talks in Singapore in late May when the military chiefs of the three nations gather for an annual security forum, called the Shangri-La Dialogue.

Having worked as assistant secretary of defense for Asian and Pacific security affairs for a year until May 2013, Lippert led the U.S. delegation to the annual Defense Trilateral Talks (DTT) with South Korea and Japan. (Yonhap)

Speedy Construction and Disaster

The accident may have been caused by shoddy construction due to corruption and the North's practices of building construction works in a lightning speed.

■ By Kim Tae-shik

An apartment building under construction in a posh region of the North Korean capital of Pyongyang has collapsed, causing an unspecified number of casualties, according to the North's state media on May 18.

The North's Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said the accident occurred in the Phyongchon District on May 13 as "the construction of an apartment house was not done properly, and officials supervised and controlled it in an irresponsible manner."

The KCNA, however, did not elaborate on the exact cause of the collapse nor the number of casualties.

The KCNA reported that a "state emergency mechanism" was formed to rescue survivors and treat the wounded, and senior officials met with bereaved families and citizens in the district to express "deep consolation and (issue an) apology."

Rare Apology

It is uncommon for North Korean media to report such news of a massive accident.

It is also rare for ranking officials to pub-

licly apologize for a construction accident to the people, and the North's media reported it quickly, indicating that the North Korean leadership is very much concerned with the accident's consequences. Among the ranking officials who made apologies were Choe Pu-il, minister of People's Security, Sonu Hyongchol, general officer of the Korean People's Internal Security Forces, and Cha Hui-rin, chairman of the Pyongyang City People's Committee.

"Choe Pu-il said the responsibility for the accident rests with him as he failed to uphold well the WPK's (Workers' Party of Korea) policy of love for the people," the KCNA said.

North Korea had reported a train explosion at Ryongchon railway station in April 2004 saying that about 150 people were killed and 1,300 injured. There was no report about an apology of relevant North Korean officials at that time. In 2010, Premier Kim Yong-il made an apology in a meeting of some thousands of small administrative unit heads for the failure of currency reform. However, North Korean media made no report about the apology.

North Korea watchers here say the North Korean leadership may have been greatly con-

A senior North Korean official is bowing in apology to citizens over the May 13 collapse of a 23-story apartment building in Pyongyang, whose death toll has yet to be disclosed. The North's state-run daily Rodong Sinmun reported it on May 18. (Yonhap)



cerned as the accident took place in the heart of the North's capital. The Phyongchon District is at the center of Pyongyang along with Chung and Photong River regions, and there are many prestigious schools in the region.

Families of senior military officers and middle and upper-class citizens are living in the Phyongchon region. Most of the residents in the collapsed apartment are known to be families of key officials of the People's Security Ministry, one of the three top power organs of the socialist country.

The KCNA reported that leader Kim Jong-un "sat up all night, feeling painful after being heard of the accident, instructed leading officials of the party, state and the army to rush to the scene, putting aside all other affairs, and command the rescue operation to recover from the damage as early as possible," quoting a senior Workers' Party official.

The North's state-run newspaper Rodong Sinmun also ran a photo in which an official is seen bowing in apology to a group of people.

Although the media did not elaborate on the number of casualties, Seoul officials suspect a

considerable number of people may have been killed in the collapse of the 23-story building.

"In North Korea, it is common that people move into a new apartment even before the construction is completed. About 92 households may have been living in the apartment," a South Korean government official said, asking for anonymity.

Experts say the North's prompt public apology may be part of the communist regime's efforts to contain potential unrest by power elites and highlight the Swiss-educated young leader's focus on people's livelihoods.

Although most North Koreans struggle to make both ends meet, the selected communist elite in the reclusive country live in high-rise apartments and dine in Western-style restaurants in the well-maintained capital.

"North Korea's media coverage of the apartment collapse may be intended at promoting Kim Jong-un's image as a sincere leader who takes good care of people's livelihoods," said Kim Yong-hyun, a North Korea expert at Seoul's Dongguk University.

The quick apology may also be aimed at showing contrast between South and North

Korea with regards to promptness in state-level response to such accidents. North Korean media in recent weeks have criticized South Korean President Park Geun-hye for her government's "poor response" to the April 16 sinking of the ferry Sewol, one of the worst maritime disasters in recent history.

"North Korea's prompt report on the incident may be aimed at contrasting it to the South's Sewol incident," Kim said.

In a related move, Kim Jong-un stressed safety during a visit to a construction site days after the Phyongchon apartment accident.

The North's media reported on May 21 Kim visited a construction site for apartments for educators of Kim Chaek University of Technology along the Taedong River in Pyongyang.

During the visit, Kim stressed the soldier-builders' slogan of "let us take responsibility for the safety of the project and guarantee its absolute quality for all eternity," and called on all construction workers "to learn the style of successfully ensure the safety of the structure," the KCNA reported.

The leader then ordered the builders to complete the construction by Oct. 10, the founding anniversary of the Workers' Party of (North) Korea, according to the KCNA.

He was accompanied by Choe Thae-bok, secretary of the Central Committee of the party, and Lt. Gen. Ma Won-chun, director of the Designing Department of the National Defense Commission, according to the KCNA.

As the North's media pointed at improper construction and irresponsible supervision as the reasons behind the collapse, the accident may have been caused by shoddy construction due to corruption and the North's practices of

building construction works in a lightning speed.

A North Korean defector from Pyongyang reportedly said a high-rise apartment house was collapsed during construction in 1992 and corruption like the diversion of construction materials and short construction period were cited as the reasons for the accident.

North Korea has carried out the project to build 100,000 homes in the capital since September 2009 at the instruction of the then leader Kim Jong-il. North Korea planned to complete the project by the end of 2012, a very short period for the North Korean construction industry.

North Korea built 2,700 homes in Changjon Street of the Mansudae Region in June 2012, after 13 months of construction. At that time Kim Jong-un visited a 45-story apartment house and expressed special thanks to construction workers.

Masikryong Speed

North Korea have boasted some major construction works built in a very short time, including the massive ski resort in Masik Pass or Masikryong. Leader Kim Jong-un expressed satisfaction over the construction of the ski resort by the end of last year and urged all industrial sites to follow suit in the spirit of the "Masikryong Speed."

Having turned out in response to the Party's appeal to create the "Masikryong speed," they (workers) carried out many construction projects, like the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum, Unha Scientists Street, Munsu Water Park and Masikryong Ski Resort, in a short period as befitting the creations in the era of the Workers' Party, Kim Jong-un said in

this year's New Year's Address.

The Rodong Sinmun emphasized in an editorial on Jan. 4 the need for all service personnel and people to dash ahead in the spirit of "Masikryong speed" under the leadership of Kim Jong-un.

"The 'Masikryong speed' is a new speed for grand socialist construction, a result of Kim Jong-un's great plan for building a rich and powerful nation and his leadership based on patriotic devotion," the editorial noted. It added that the completion of the construction of the world-class ski resort in a matter of a little over one year is a historic miracle that can be wrought only by service personnel of the KPA equipped with "the revolutionary soldier spirit."

North Korea recently began using a new term the "Korean speed."

In a national meeting marking May Day, North Korea called on all working people to create a new "Korean speed" in all fields of the revolution and construction in the revolutionary spirit of self-reliance and through collective emulations, upholding the new line of the WPK on simultaneously pushing forward economic construction and the building of nuclear force.

It is a matter of interest if North Korea would refrain from driving its people to expedite construction and other projects in the name of "Masikryong speed," or "Korean speed," on the occasion of the apartment collapse, the North Korea experts said.

Overseas Reaction

Meanwhile, South Korea expressed its condolences to North Korea over the deadly collapse of the apartment in Pyongyang.

"We convey our deep condolences over the

loss of many lives in the accident," South Korea's Red Cross said in a message sent to its North Korean counterpart on May 20 through a dialogue channel at Panmunjom, a neutral village on the inter-Korean border.

China, the North's closest ally, also offered its "deep condolences" to North Korea.

"The Chinese side is very concerned about the accident," China's foreign ministry spokesman Hong Lei told reporters during a regular press briefing. "We extend our deep condolences to those killed in the accident and sincere sympathy to the families of the victims and the injured."

Asked whether China has information about the casualties and whether North Korea asked China's help, Hong replied, "We have learned that there are casualties in the accident. We believe that, under the leadership of the North Korean government, the relevant accident can be properly handled."

United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon also voiced deep sorrow at the loss of lives and injuries from the collapse of a residential building in the North Korean capital, according to his office on May 19.

Ban's "thoughts and prayers are with the victims, their families, and the people" of North Korea, his spokesperson said in a note on the U.N. website.

Ban, formerly a South Korean foreign minister, expressed the U.N.'s solidarity with the North Korean government and offered assistance, added the spokesperson.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies said it has not received any request for help from North Korea over the apartment collapse, according to the Washington-based Radio Free Asia. (Yonhap)

Rainy Days for Beijing-Pyongyang Relations

Russia has not the slightest desire to assume the expensive and troublesome role of North Korea's co-sponsor.

■ By Andrei Lankov. *professor at Kookmin University in Seoul*

Recent reports indicate that there are problems brewing in Sino-North Korean relations. Preliminary data indicates that in the first quarter of this year, the volume of trade between the two countries has dropped an estimated 2.8 percent. This is not a dramatic decrease, to be sure, but, given the speedy growth in Sino-North Korean trade since 2000, this reversal is unusual indeed.

Anecdotal evidence also seemingly indicates that things on the Sino-Korean border are not very good. The amount of merchandise that is moved across the border has visually decreased, and the activity of North Korean foreign trade companies in the Chinese cities of Shenyang and Dandong has also decreased. Some of these companies have lost their top managers: a number of people were called back to North Korea after the purge of Jang Song-thaek, the once-powerful uncle of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, and have not returned.

Indeed, the purge of Jang Song-thaek in December was followed by statements which openly expressed negative views about North

Korea's exchanges with China. The North Korean media clearly indicated that China had taken advantage of Jang's alleged treacherous and irresponsible behavior -- even though China was not directly named.

Among other things, Jang was accused of selling coal to China too cheaply. Thus, from January onward North Korea has significantly increased control over its coal exports to China. This is important because the sale of North Korean cheap coal to China is by far the most important component in North Korean exports to China -- as of 2012, coal constituted 42.3 percent of all North Korean exports to China.

In the official indictment, Jang was also accused of providing a "foreign power" with a 50-year property lease in the Rason special economic zone. This was again a clear hint at China, because the Chinese companies are known to have negotiated such deals. However, in late April North Korean officials denied the existence of such a lease deal in regard to a port pier. This can be reinterpreted in a number of ways, but the most likely

explanation is that North Korea either quietly walked away from the deal or, at least, reinterpreted it in a new way the Chinese side is not going to like.

China as Major Sponsor

It appears that the current crisis has been orchestrated largely by the North Korean side. China has never made any secret of its critical approach to North Korea's nuclear weapons program, and disapproving statements about North Korea's international actions have been delivered by the Chinese a number of times. However, until recently China has showed no willingness to scale down its direct and indirect aid to North Korea.

Such aid is important indeed. As of 2013, the volume of North Korea's trade with China reached a record level of US\$6.55 billion. Nowadays, trade with China constitutes at least 75 percent of North Korea's entire foreign trade. Since 2008, China has also been by far the most important provider of aid, including food aid, to North Korea. It is an open secret that even commercial exchanges between North Korea and China often constitute aid in disguise: not infrequently, Chinese companies enter deals with the North Koreans not because they hope to reap great profits, but because the Chinese government has asked them to do so.

Contrary to what is often stated, such persistent support is not driven by ideological sympathies. As a matter of fact, North Korea is deeply unpopular in China. North Korea's nuclear program is now the object of particular scorn in Beijing: being a legally recognized nuclear country, China does not want proliferation. The internal system of North Korea is also seen by a majority of Chinese analysts

and decision-makers as anachronistic, grossly inefficient and just plain ridiculous.

However, international relations are seldom driven by emotions. There are valid geopolitical reasons that leave China with little choice but to continue with the support of North Korea, however inefficient and dangerous the country might appear at first glance.

The main reason is the need to maintain stability. China is a status quo power: in order to maintain high growth rates, it needs a crisis-free region. If North Korea faces another internal economic crisis, similar to what it experienced in the late 1990s, there are fairly good chances that such a crisis will result in the implosion of the North Korean state. From a Chinese point of view, this would mean a serious and very unwelcome challenge. China will have to deal with an internal conflict in a neighboring country that also has nuclear weapons.

Furthermore, the collapse of the North Korean state is likely to result in the unification of Korea under the control of Seoul. This would mean that a democratic, nationalistic and rather pro-American unified state will emerge on China's northeastern borders -- and this state will probably maintain South Korea's existing military alliance with the United States. This is clearly not what China wants.

Compared to the dual threat of chaos in North Korea and/or North Korea's eventual absorption into the South, the risks presented by the continuation of the status quo appear to be tolerable -- hence Beijing's inclination to maintain the status quo and, if necessary, to provide the North Korean regime with moderate aid, thus increasing its internal stability.

However, if this is the case, and if China is willing to keep North Korea afloat almost no matter what, what makes the North Korean

government unhappy about the present deal? There is some sound logic behind this displeasure, too, even though the personal inclinations and illusions of the new and inexperienced North Korean leader might also play a certain role in shaping this attitude.

Pyongyang's Logic

While the North Korean state was initially created as a successful Soviet exercise in nation-building and social engineering, the North Korean leadership never wanted to be another country's puppet. Apart from their sincere and ardent nationalism, they were driven by pragmatic considerations: an excessive reliance on foreign patrons would make them vulnerable. In 1956, when the Chinese and Soviets indeed attempted to replace Kim Il-sung at the helm of the North Korean state, these worries rang true.

Since then, North Korean diplomacy has always followed a peculiar line. North Korea, whose economy has grown less and less efficient, has always needed foreign sponsors, but in order to be safe it was best always to have two, rather than just one. North Korean diplomats skillfully used quarrels between sponsors, getting from them all kinds of economic and political concessions and giving very little in return.

From the early 1960s to the late 1980s, it was the Soviet Union and China who played the role of sponsors. Later, in the 1990s, North Korean diplomats showed remarkable skill in manipulating tensions between South Korea, China and the United States.

However, in recent years, North Korean diplomats have found themselves in a very dangerous position: they now have only one

sponsor, and a rather difficult one at that. The dependency on China is seen as dangerous, especially given the thinly veiled Chinese disdain for the North Korean social and political model.

North Korean politicians might be afraid that China will one day do what it did in 1956 -- support some local political forces that Beijing considers to be more rational and efficient and help these forces to challenge and replace the current regime (while keeping the state in place). Therefore, it makes perfect sense for the current leadership in Pyongyang to want to keep some distance from China.

In the past, such diplomatic games always meant that there were other countries which Pyongyang saw as likely co-sponsors. Right now, such countries are not in sight. The South Korean government is seemingly in favor of better relations, but recent moves by North Korea indicate that Pyongyang is not particularly eager to work with the current Park Geun-hye administration. There are hopes for better relations with the U.S., but in this case it is the U.S. that is not enthusiastic.

In this regard, much attention has been attracted to the recent flurry of diplomatic exchanges between Russia and North Korea. Over the last few months, a number of significant events have taken place.

Several Russian delegations visited Pyongyang recently. In late April, a group including Russian Deputy Prime Minister Yuri Trutnev paid a three-day visit to Pyongyang, and Trutnev signed an economic cooperation agreement. One month earlier, Alexandr Galushka, Minister of Development for the Far East, visited Pyongyang.

Additionally, the Russian parliament ratified an agreement that forgives some 90 percent of

North Korea's debt to Russia. Actually, this is an old agreement, signed almost two years ago, and the debt was universally seen as unrecoverable anyway. However, against such a background, the ratification has attracted much of the media's attention.

Is Russia Substitute?

These and other developments have prompted much talk about Russia replacing China as the main sponsor of North Korea. Indeed, it might be the dream of the late North Korean leader Kim Jong-il and his advisers. However, they are likely to be disappointed: Russia has neither the intention nor the means to assume such an expensive role.

High-profile political exchanges should not distract our attention from one basic fact: since the early 1990s there has been, essentially, no trade between Russia and North Korea. At present, trade between two countries fluctuates around the US\$100 million mark, with virtually no signs of increase in two decades. In other words, North Korea's trade with China is 65 times larger than its trade with Russia -- a huge difference.

The gap is easy to explain: North Korea does not produce anything that would be of any interest to Russian companies, and it also has no money to pay the going rate for Russian products. No amount of high-level visits and loud publicity is likely to change this basic fact.

During the recent exchanges, Russia and North Korea stated their intention to increase the volume of Russo-North Korean trade to US\$1 billion per annum by 2020. Even if this target is met, this still remains a fraction of the trade between North Korea and China. This

target can be met only if the Russian government will do what the Chinese government has done for the last decade, that is, to subsidize Russian companies willing to do risky and moderately profitable trade with North Korea.

This is not very likely. For China, stability in North Korea is vital. For Russia, North Korea is a rather distant country. Chaos in North Korea is not welcome, but it will happen far away from Russia's major population centers.

For Moscow, the collapse of the Kim Jong-un regime and unification under the control of South Korea are far more acceptable options. As a matter of fact, such unification is likely to bring about the completion of railway and natural gas pipeline projects which are unlikely to be realized in the current political climate (notwithstanding the frequent official claims to the contrary).

North Koreans might now be tempted to believe that Russia, increasingly in confrontation with the West over Ukraine and other issues, will do what the Soviet Union once did in East Asia. This is a mistaken assumption: it has neither the money, nor geopolitical and ideological reasons to do so. Some improvement in relations is possible and indeed welcome for Moscow, but Russia has not the slightest desire to assume the expensive and troublesome role of North Korea's co-sponsor.

Therefore, the deterioration of Sino-North Korean relations is not good news from Pyongyang's point of view. Chinese sponsorship might have come with annoying strings attached, but there are no substitutes for it -- at least, for the time being. It is not clear, however, that North Korean policy planners understand this. (Yonhap)

Diffusion of Unification Vision and Discourse

The starting point of resolving problems on the Korean Peninsula must begin with the problem of unification.

■ By Cho Min. *senior research fellow at Center for Unification Policy Studies in Seoul*

What Is Unification?

Unification is a “peaceful revolution.” Korean unification must be achieved by peaceful means. Given that it will involve comprehensive structural changes of the South and North Korean society, it can be deemed a “peaceful revolution.”

Unification is the process of destruction and construction. It is the process of “creative construction,” opening a new future for the 75 million Korean people based on the destruction and overthrow of an outdated order of the divided system. Unification is also the process of “deconstruction and integration” since it deconstructs the divided system and combines the two principles of the North and South Korean management of state and communitarian lifestyles into one.

Unification and integration are different. Unification refers to a condition in which two states become “one unified state.” It is a political and international legal “event” whereby different states or political entities (polities) are incorporated into one. Through the unification of the Korean Peninsula, the status of “one nation, one country” is achieved.

Integration means the formation of “one people.” Integration can be approached from two perspectives. First, the problem of integration can be seen in terms of the South Korean society’s regional cleavages, and conflicts among ideologies, classes and generations. At present, Korea is characterized by a divided structure of “one nation, two states,” as well a fragmented status of one state, two peoples. In such circumstance, integration becomes the task of national integration through “overcoming the division.”

The other is the discourse of integration applied to inter-Korean relations. In order to achieve unification, the process of convergence and harmony between the two Korea's mutually homogeneous sectors is required. For example, if economic integration, political integration and socio-cultural integration are considered to be realms of macro-integration, micro-integration consists of legal and administrative integration, and integration of the education system and curriculum contents, health care, and science and technology, etc.

What is the relationship between unification and integration? Until now, South Korea has adopted a gradual and step-by-step approach to the issue regarding Korean unification on the logical basis of "integration before unification." In other words, "(low-level) integration → unification → (high-level) integration."

Based on this logic, inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation have been emphasized in order to integrate economic and socio-cultural sectors, and the need for peace establishment has been magnified to enlarge such exchange and cooperation. However, there has not been any progress so far in establishing peace on the Korean Peninsula due to the North Korean nuclear problem. In fact, it is difficult to expect peace based on denuclearization and mutual prosperity without actual changes in the North Korean regime.

Why Must Unification Be Achieved?

A change of thinking is required. This is because a new way of thinking can yield a new path. Although the issue of feasibility is important, the starting point of resolving problems on the Korean Peninsula must begin with the problem of unification.

First, peace is the foremost goal. However, a "peace on division" is no longer stable. Logically, peace by means of unification, or a "peace through unification," ensures a perpetual and stable peace. Therefore, a change in perception from a "peace on division" to a "peace through unification" appears to be necessary.

Unification is the path to achieving perpetual peace on the Korean Peninsula and East Asia. It is impossible to establish stable peace within the framework of a divided Peninsula. If this framework is not overcome, stable peace and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula cannot be guaranteed. Thus far, South Korea's policy toward North Korea and unification was focused on the peaceful management of division, that is, a peace on division. But fundamental changes in international affairs in and outside the Korean Peninsula make it difficult to usher in a new future with a lukewarm response.

Second, the center of civilization between the East and West is shifting. In the midst of such historical transition, the newly formed dynamics in East Asia call for a fundamental changes in the means of South Korea's existence as well as a new form of response. With the division of the two Korea's, it is difficult to secure a promising future in the midst of such structural shifts.

Living on an "island that is not quite an island," we have forgotten the ebullient vigor that howled across Manchuria and its vast fields. Unification provides a path for our youngsters to spread their wings and fly toward the continent and the world as we open up our narrow and confined hearts in a tiny strip of land.

At present, South Korea finds itself at a crucial time to seek new strategies of national development. This begins with being

“management-savvy on the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia,” which grasps the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia at a glance. Management-savvy on the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia serves as a foundation for Korea’s vision and global strategy in the 21st century.

Third, unification can relieve discouragements of South Korea’s contemporary history all at once. We are a “peaceful nation” never having invaded or troubled neighboring countries throughout the history.

Having gone through the failure in creating a modern state in times of imperialist invasion, the humiliation under the Japanese colonial rule and the achievement of the “miracle of the Han River” amid the ravages and ruins of the Korean War, unification will allow us to rise on the international scene once again. It is the way for South and North Korea to join hands to fulfill the “miracle of the Taedong River.” (Taedong River flows through the North Korean capital, Pyongyang.)

A unified Korean Peninsula will provide a venue for the harmony and co-prosperity between maritime and continental forces. It will become the cradle and hub for a “culture of peace” in the 21st century. Thus, a unified Korea will rise as a charming state that can contribute to humanity through a creative and original “civilization of the Korean Peninsula.”

What Type of Unification?

The result of the competition between South Korea’s elan of “let us live affluently” and North Korea’s ethos of “let us live equally” has already been decided throughout world history. However, there is no reason for us to display victory fanfare. Although unification is an ulti-

mate value, an even more important issue is the type of unification that will be pursued. If unification is to be a “creative construction,” the basic direction of unification should be geared toward “let us live equally and affluently.” We should make a “country that lives equally and affluently” based on the elan and the ethos of both South and North Korea.

Nonetheless, unification cannot be approached with only such rosy prospects. There are numerous tantalizing problems, none of which are easy to solve such as the type of government of the unified state, principles of social management, labor issues and means to reform North Korea’s system of ownership.

First, let us think about the type of regime of a unified Korea. At present, there is the issue of whether the North Korean people will accept the notion of applying South Korea’s centralized administrative system to the North Korean region. A common future is only possible if there is respect toward North Korea’s unique political culture and autonomy, which has been formed under the division. If so, it is necessary to design a “Korea-type federal state” composed of eight to 13 regional governments where the principles of decentralization and autonomy can be sufficiently guaranteed.

Second, the issue of a market economy involves choosing the specific type of market economy which will be grafted into a unified Korea. In the case of Germany’s unification, it should be reminded that the mutual affinity between East Germany’s socialistic economy and West Germany’s “social market economy” was an important factor in leading the integration of both German peoples. This is because East Germany had high expectations for the reality of a “social” market economy and social

welfare than it had for West Germany's market economy philosophy. As such, with consideration to the limitations of liberal market economics and the reality in the face of crisis, we should find a new market economy model.

Third, it is crucial to seek an alternative for issues concerning labor in preparation for unification. The unification of Germany did not suffer from a labor crisis as it occurred prior to the advent of a neoliberal era.

Unemployment and labor can become very important issues that determine the social stability and success or failure of unification. In order for unification to become a "blue ocean," prospects for resolving labor issues must be suggested. Moreover, it is mandatory to dispel the fears that unification may end up being favorable for a few chaebol engaged in development agendas while the majority of the population is excluded from opportunities.

Fourth, the backbone of North Korea's ownership system should not be overthrown overnight. The method of dismantling North Korea's ownership system including the national ownership of means of production such as land and enterprises as well as the collective ownership of farms should be carefully reviewed. Rapid privatization will lead to chaos with most public assets becoming the spoils of conglomerates.

How to Move Toward Unification?

The road to unification is long and arduous. But we cannot stop nor can we go alone. If unification is to be based on a "peaceful unification by agreement," then unification cannot be achieved without the agreement (consent) of the North Korean people. The South Korean people's "will for unification" is also

important. In that sense, while elevating the will for unification, discussions on unification should also be further expanded.

The primary issue is, above all, promoting change in the North Korean system when seeking inter-Korean peace and co-prosperity. We cannot merely wait for the North Korea to change for herself.

It is controversial whether "change through cooperation" or "cooperation on the premise of change" is more rational, but it is clear that the precondition for unification, reform and opening is change in North Korea.

Therefore, the regime evolution of North Korea should be induced and changes in political leadership should be pursued. To this end, an "exit" should be provided to ease the anxiety over the future for the North Korea's ruling elite.

Throughout world history, the Koreans were merely an object of the powers and a passive being in the superpower-led hegemony. It was a history of dependency in which we could not decide the fate of our nation but rather left it in the hands of others. The division and war on the Korean Peninsula occurred regardless of the desire and determination of our nation but now peace and unification should be achieved through our own will and capabilities.

Nowadays, unification should not be something to hesitate to do or avoid. Germany seized the opportunity to achieve unification in the rapidly changing world situation; whereas we must create and seek the opportunity on our own to achieve the Korean unification. I have high hopes for unconstrained ideas to flourish over the discourse on unification that will break the dawn of unification. (Yonhap)

The Nutritional Status of North Korean Children: An Analysis of Nutrition Surveys of Them Conducted During 1998-2012¹⁾

I. Introduction

The famine suffered by North Korea in the mid-1990s registers as the worst in recent history. Famine has rarely killed more than 2 percent of a country's population even when many people have starved to death. In the "Great Famine" in China from 1958-62, the number of deaths is estimated at 30-33 million, or 4.5 percent of the Chinese population at that time.²⁾ The number of people who starved to death in North Korea is estimated to range from 2.8 million to 3.5 million, or 12-15 percent of the country's population. In the 1974 famine in Bangladesh, 1.5 million people starved to death, or 2 percent of its population. The comparable figure for the famine in Ethiopia in the 1970s stands at 1 million, or 2.6 percent of the population. When famines occur, it's the groups who are most vulnerable socially, politically and economically that suffer most.

The famine in North Korea increased the infant mortality rate, which relates to the most nutritionally vulnerable age group, while decreasing the birth rate, the number of live births per 1,000 people per year. According to a survey of North Korean refugees in China,³⁾ the mortality rate for children under the age of four from 1995-97 was 89 per 1,000, much higher than the mortality rate of 24 in 1,000 from 1990-95 as surveyed by the United Nations. The former survey also revealed that the average birth rate for North Korean refugees during 1995-97 was just 11 in 1,000, compared with 22 in North Korea during 1990-95, as reported in the U.N. survey. This unfavorable change in both the mortality and birth rates undoubtedly indicates the wors-

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ened nutritional situation that faced North Koreans.

Prolonged serious malnutrition makes people helpless and gradually weakens the function of their bodies and brains. Malnutrition inflicts irreversible damage, particularly upon children under the age of five. When children suffer from malnutrition, their immune system becomes weak and vulnerable to infectious diseases, while their growth and learning ability become stunted. Many suffer from diarrhea, and some of them may lose their lives due to related dehydration. There is a need to recognize the gravity of malnutrition in babies, the most nutritionally vulnerable age group, and secure related data to provide them with proper nutrition.

II. Existing Discussion

Essential for a good grasp of children's nutritional status in a nation is representative data. The World Food Programme (WFP), a specialized agency of the United Nations and the world's largest humanitarian organization addressing hunger and promoting food security, surveyed 3,984 North Korean children under the age of seven in 1997.⁴⁾ But this study faces questions about its representative nature as children were chosen only in five out of nine North Korean provinces -- Kangwon, South Hamgyong, South Hwanghae, South Phyongan and North Hwanghae. The children also attended 40 institutions chosen by the North Korean government. According to the survey, the overall prevalence of chronic malnutrition, also known as stunted growth, was 38.2 percent, and the overall prevalence of acute malnutrition, or wasting, was 16.5 percent. There were wide gaps in the prevalence

between the 40 groups, with the prevalence of wasting ranging from 0 percent to 32.7 percent and that of stunting from 0.6 percent to 74.1 percent.

The survey report said: "The levels of wasting and stunting reported in our study are not necessarily representative of the DPRK (North Korea) population. Because provinces, counties and institutions were all selected by the authorities, the major limitation of the survey is potential selection bias. Moreover, the provinces selected were near the capital and part of the 'rice bowl' area of the DPRK; therefore, they are not representative of the whole country, especially of the mountainous area in the North. In addition, children who may have been too sick to attend the institutions or who may have been hospitalized would not have been present for measurement.

Reviewing the methods of research used, there are indications of limitations in assessing North Korean children's nutritional status. A comparison between the nutrition surveys conducted in 1998 and 2002 by the North Korean Central Bureau of Statistics in conjunction with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the WFP indicates that North Korean children's nutritional status improved considerably during the cited years. The prevalence of underweight children decreased from 61 percent in 1998 to 21 percent in 2002, that of stunting from 62 percent to 42 percent, and wasting from 16 percent to 9 percent. But at stake is the credibility of the surveys because the proportion of low birth weights in the 2002 North Korean survey (6.7 percent) is lower than that for the United States (7.6 percent).⁵⁾ In September and October 1998, the UNICEF, the WFP, the European Union and North Korea did a nutritional survey of randomly selected North Korean children aged

six months to seven years. Fourteen teams surveyed 1,762 children from 3,600 households in 30 counties. For access or security reasons, 82 counties, where 29 percent of North Korea's population were living, were excluded from the survey.⁶⁾ For this reason, it is important to analyze the results of the nutrition surveys of North Korean children in the past years and examine whether or not there are differences in methodology between the surveys.

III. A Comparison between the Methodology and Results of Surveys of North Korean Children's Nutritional Status and Their Analysis

1. The Use of Data on Surveys of North Korean Children's Nutritional Status

This study was made by utilizing the reports of surveys of North Korean children's nutritional status conducted from 1998 to 2012. It analyzed the trend of the prevalence of North Korean children's malnutrition and diseases, plus differences and common points in the surveys. It also examined whether or not there were factors limiting the comparison of year-by-year changes in North Korean children's nutritional status, accessibility to regions and households, the methods of selecting children in a household and the participation of the staff of international organizations in the surveys. It utilized the following data:

- DPRK Central Bureau of Statistics, Report on the Nutrition Survey of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, 1998.
- DPRK Central Bureau of Statistics, Report on the Second Multiple Indicator

Cluster Survey, 2000.

- DPRK Central Bureau of Statistics, Report on the DPRK Nutrition Assessment, 2002.
- DPRK Central Bureau of Statistics, DPRK Nutrition Assessment Report of Survey Results, 2004.
- DPRK Central Bureau of Statistics, DPR Korea Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2009, Final Report 2010.
- DPRK Central Bureau of Statistics, Democratic People's Republic of Korea Final Report of the National Survey 2012.

2. The Trend of North Korean Children's Nutritional Status

1) Stunting

The prevalence of stunting is the percentage of children with a z-score of minus 2, who are relatively short given their age. Z-score is a measure that quantifies the distance a data point is from the mean of a data set. Stunting is an indicator for chronic malnutrition, which can cause lasting growth faltering and is associated with disease. Growth faltering can negatively affect children's development, their immunity, their learning capacity and their productivity at adult age.

The prevalence of stunting decreased from 62.3 percent in 1998 to 45.2 percent in 2000 and further to 27.9 percent in 2012, according to reports of nutrition surveys involving North Korean children. The prevalence of stunting for North Korean children aged between 12 months and 24 months was higher than that for the children aged less than 12 months. That prevalence sharply increased at the ages where North Korean children began to be weaned

Table 1. Prevalence of Stunting for North Korean Children Under⁷⁾

Unit: %

Age Group \ Year	1998	2000	2002	2004	2009	2012
A	-	21.9	17.3	-	12.5	3.7
B	14.5	31.9	22.8	19.4	23.6	8.4
C	48.5	50.2	41.6	27.1	23.9	27.0
D	62.2	47.5	45.6	34.7	32.1	36.8
E	75.1	58.6	47.6	46.7	39.5	33.3
F	77.5	60.3	47.5	50.8	46.5	35.4
G	74.8	-	45.5	46.8	-	-
Overall	62.3	45.2	39.2	37.0	32.4	27.9

Note: A stands for "below 6 months"; B for "from 6 months to below 12 months"; C for "from 12 months to below 24 months"; D for "from 24 months to 36 months"; E for "from below 36 months to below 48 months"; F for "from 48 months to below 60 months"; and G for "60 months or above."

Table 2. Prevalence of Wasting in North Korean Children

Unit: %

Age Group \ Year	1998	2000	2002	2004	2009	2012
A	-	7.8	5.3	-	1.8	4.3
B	17.6	10.4	6.7	6.0	4.8	4.9
C	30.9	11.9	11.9	8.7	5.7	4.3
D	20.5	9.7	8.4	7.3	6.2	3.9
E	13.4	10.2	7.4	7.5	5.0	3.6
F	8.9	11.9	6.3	6.2	5.2	3.3
G	7.8	-	5.6	5.3	-	-
Overall	15.6	10.4	8.1	7.0	5.2	4.0

Note: A stands for "below 6 months"; B for "from 6 months to below 12 months"; C for "from 12 months to below 24 months"; D for "from 24 months to 36 months"; E for "from below 36 months to below 48 months"; F for "from 48 months to below 60 months"; and G for "60 months or above."

onto food. This indicates that infants should be supplied also with such micronutrients as zinc and iron when they discontinue breast-feeding, but many North Korean infants are not taken care of that way, resulting in insufficient growth and development. Many North Korean children are in an undesirable situation where their nutrition gets worse as they age.

2) Wasting

The prevalence of acute malnutrition, or wasting, is the percentage of children with a z-score of minus 2, whose weight is relatively low given their height. The wasting prevalence decreased from 15.6 percent in 1988 to 10.4 percent in 2000 and further to 4.0 percent in

2012. The children aged between 12 months and 24 months had a higher prevalence of wasting than other age groups.

3) The Prevalence of Underweight Children

The prevalence of underweight children is the percentage of children with a z-score of minus 2, whose weight is relatively low given their age. It decreased from 60.6 percent in 1998 to 27.9 percent in 2000 and 15.2 percent in 2012.

The infants aged between 12 months and 24 months were more likely to be underweight than those aged between sixth months and 12 months, and those aged between 24 months and 36 months had the highest prevalence of any age group.

4) The Prevalence of Diseases

The prevalence of diarrhea among North Korean children during 2000-2004 was about

19-20 percent. The comparable rate was 13.8 percent in 2009 and 8.5 percent in 2012, according to the surveys. To measure the prevalence, the surveys polled guardians of the targeted children. The figures are for the children showing symptoms of diarrhea two weeks before the surveys. Diarrhea was the key cause of death for children under the age of five and dehydration was responsible for most of the deaths by diarrhea. We can prevent symptoms of dehydration in children with fluids and water and reduce their mortality rate. Because zinc deficiencies can increase the prevalence of diarrhea, nutrition intervention through the supply of micronutrients is also important.

The prevalence of respiratory diseases, which are responsible mainly for the deaths of children under the age of five, was 12 percent in 2000 and 2004, and 6-7 percent in 2009 and 2012. Pneumonia and acute respiratory diseases are representative of respiratory ailments, and the prevalence of respiratory dis-

Table 3. Prevalence of Underweight North Korean Children

Age Group \ Year	Unit: %					
	1998	2000	2002	2004	2009	2012
A	-	7.7	7.6	-	5.6	2.9
B	34.2	21.5	12.0	14.1	17.4	8.2
C	56.3	31.4	24.9	20.5	16.2	13.6
D	66.8	34.0	25.5	27.3	21.7	18.5
E	69.7	32.4	20.2	26.3	21.7	18.0
F	61.6	39.0	21.0	26.6	21.3	20.0
G	64.9	-	20.7	22.5	-	-
Overall	60.6	27.9	20.2	23.4	18.8	15.2

Note: A stands for "below 6 months"; B for "from 6 months to below 12 months"; C for "from 12 months to below 24 months"; D for "from 24 months to 36 months"; E for "from below 36 months to below 48 months"; F for "from 48 months to below 60 months"; and G for "60 months or above."

eases was measured through antibiotic use two weeks before the survey.

5) The Mortality Rate

The mortality rate for infants refers to the number per 1,000 who die within one year of birth, and that for children under five refers to the number who die within five years of birth. Children's death rate was surveyed based on data collected through a government census. North Korean babies' mortality rate increased from 22.5 in 1,000 persons in 2000 to 33.2 in 2012. The death rate for children under the age of five also increased to 48.2 in 2000 to 53.4 in 2012.

3. Methodology of Surveys of North Korean Children's Nutritional Status

1) Selection of Areas for Surveys

Included among the areas for surveys in

1998 and 2000 were nine provinces, namely those of Kangwon, Ryanggang, Jagang, South Phyongan, North and South Hamgyong, and North and South Hwanghae, plus three cities comprising Kaesong, Nampho and Pyongyang. In 2002 and 2004, the provinces of Kangwon and Jagang were excluded, and in 2004 only one city, Pyongyang, was included.

In the 2009 and 2012 surveys, the nine provinces and Pyongyang were selected for data collection. In 1999, survey teams accessed 130 out of 206 areas, 30 out of 212 in 2000 and 163 out of 206 in 2002.

2) Selection of Households and Children

In the 1998 survey, households were selected systematically from a list of registered domains. In the 2002 survey, children were selected from nurseries randomly chosen from a list of registered institutions and then their mothers brought them to places where data was collected. The 1998 survey included all

Table 4. Regional Accessibility

Province \ Year	Unit: %					
	1998	2000	2002	2004	2009	2012
Kangwon	o	o	x	x	o	o
Ryanggang	o	o	o	o	o	o
Jagang	o	o	x	x	o	o
S. Phyongan	o	o	o	o	o	o
N. Phyongan	o	o	o	o	o	o
S. Hamgyong	o	o	o	o	o	o
N. Hamgyong	o	o	o	o	o	o
S. Hwanghae	o	o	o	o	o	o
N. Hwanghae	o	o	o	o	o	o
Kaesong City	o	o	o	x	x	x
Nampho City	o	o	o	x	x	x
Pyongyang City	o	o	o	o	o	o

children in all sampled households aged 6 to less than 84 months, but the 2002 survey selected only the youngest in the household. The age of sampled children ranged from less than a month to 83 months in the 2002 survey and from six months to 59 months in the 2012 survey.

4. The Nutritional Support System for North Korean Children

This study faced limits in grasping the trend of North Korean children's nutritional status because sampling methods of the aforementioned surveys differed from each other. Therefore, objectivity in sample selection should be ensured, and analyses of collected data should be standardized. This will make it possible for the surveys to provide correct information on North Korean children's nutritional status.

This study revealed that the prevalence of stunting and that of underweight North Korean children aged below five years was very high. An improvement in this undesirable nutritional situation facing North Korean children requires, among other things, provision of high-calorie and high-protein foods and nutrients such as zinc, magnesium and potassium.

Very important in decreasing the prevalence of stunting for North Korean children is to provide them with high-protein foods of good quality. Maize rice, which is North Koreans' staple food, contains insufficient tryptophan and lysine, which are indispensable amino acids. For this reason, it is necessary to supply North Korean children with legumes such as beans, nuts and peas to make up for an insufficient supply of essential amino acids. On a long-term basis, it is desirable to supply North Korean children with such high-protein foods

as milk and eggs.

When people eat maize rice as their staple food, they can suffer from deficiency of Vitamin B3, also called niacin, because its absorptivity and bioavailability in humans are low. Like all the B-complex vitamins, niacin helps digestive enzymes convert carbohydrates into energy. Moreover, they can suffer from dermatitis, diarrhea, or dementia as excessive maize rice intake can negatively affect their skin, nervous system and gastrointestinal tract.

IV. Conclusion

This study was made to provide basic data necessary for efficient nutrition supports by comparing and analyzing the methodologies and results of the surveys of North Korean children's nutritional status conducted annually between 1998 and 2012. A review of the trend in the nutritional situation facing North Korean children showed that the prevalence of stunting, wasting and underweight children has decreased gradually, but the 2012 survey revealed that the prevalence of stunting and that of underweight children were still high at 27.9 percent and 15.2 percent, respectively. Ryanggang Province topped the list for stunting prevalence with 39.6 percent, followed by Jagang Province (33.5 percent) and South Hamgyong Province (32.9 percent). Noteworthy is that the gap in the stunting prevalence between Ryanggang Province and the capital Pyongyang was as wide as 20 percentage points. The prevalence of diarrhea and that of respiratory diseases were 8.5 percent and 6.5 percent, respectively, indicating that it is urgent to prevent and manage the diseases, which serve as key factors in the deaths of

children under the age of five. The mortality rate for children under the age of five, an indicator of the severity of the disastrous and emergent situation facing the state, was 53.4 in 1,000 persons in 2012, up from 48.2 in 2000, implying malnutrition among North Korean children remained extremely serious.

This study compared and analyzed the differences in the study methods between the surveys conducted between 1998-2012 in an effort to clarify whether there was a limit in interpreting the trend in North Korean children's nutritional status. Differences between the surveys were found in the selection of regions and households, children per household, the age category of the children to be sampled, and in the extent of participation by the staff of international organizations. Starting in 2002, the staff of international organizations could not participate directly in data collection but only observe it, suggesting their role was extremely restricted.

There were obstacles to directly comparing nutritional status because the surveys conducted during 1998-2012 exposed considerable differences between them in the methods of examining and studying collected data. But this study will undoubtedly provide useful information to understand nutritional questions and their gravity among North Korean children by comparing the nutritional indicators in relation to stunting, wasting and being underweight, among other measures.

Recommendations for nutritional support projects for North Korean children, based on the results of this study, are as follows. First, it is desirable to concentrate the nutritional support projects in the nutritionally vulnerable provinces of Ryanggang, North and South Hamgyong, Kangwon and Jagang. Second, North Korean children's nutritional status still

remains troublesome, with a high prevalence of stunting. Essential to improving this unfavorable situation is to provide North Korean children with fortified foods supplemented with nutrients such as protein, calcium, magnesium and zinc. And on a long-term basis, it is necessary to create an environment where North Korean children can eat such foods as meat, fish, eggs, legumes and milk products.

(The original Korean text of this essay is carried in the April 2014 edition of The KDI Review of the North Korean Economy published by the Korea Development Institute, a state-run think tank, in Seoul.)

Notes:

- 1) This study concerns data produced by summarizing and rearranging the report of a policy study assigned to a research fellow by the Unification Ministry in 2013.
- 2) Devereux, Stephen, *Famine the Twentieth Century*, Institute of Development Studies, 2000, pp.6-9.
- 3) Robinson, Courtland, Myungken Lee, and Kenneth Hill, Gilbert Burnham, "Mortality in North Korean Migrant Households: A Retrospective Study," *Lancet*, Vol. 354, 1999, pp. 291~295.
- 4) Katona-Apte, Judit and Ali Mokdad, "Malnutrition of Children in the Democratic People's Republic of North Korea," *Journal of Nutrition*, Vol. 128, 1998, pp.1315~1319.
- 5) Noland, Marcus, *Famine and Reform in North Korea*, Institute for International Economics, 2003, p.9.
- 6) Robinson et al. (1999), op. cit., p.291.
- 7) This and following tables are based on the surveys of North Korean children's nutritional status conducted in 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2009 and 2012.

Internal Affairs**S. Korea's Cardinal Yeom visits inter-Korean factory park in N. Korea**

SEOUL/PAJU (Yonhap) -- South Korea's Cardinal Andrew Yeom Soo-jung paid a landmark visit to North Korea on May 21 to meet with South Korean Catholics working at a joint inter-Korean factory park and expressed his hope for continued dialogue between two Koreas to promote peace.

"Visiting the Kaesong Industrial Complex where South and North Koreans work together, I saw hope that (the two Koreas) can overcome pain and sorrow," Yeom told reporters upon arriving at the Customs, Immigration and Quarantine office (CIQ) in Paju from his trip to Kaesong. "I believe peace could be achieved if good-willed people talk to each other and make sincere efforts."

Cardinal Yeom met South Korean Catholics workers in the factory park and toured facilities before returning home, but he did not meet North Korean officials in the complex, Rev. Huh Young-yeop, spokesman for the Archdiocese of Seoul, said.

The one-day trip to the North's western border city of Kaesong came as tensions persist over North Korea's possible nuclear test and its recent verbal tit-for-tat with rival South Korea.

It marked the first time that a Catholic cardinal has visited North Korea. It also comes less than three months before Pope Francis visits South Korea.

Although the North Korean border city is just 60 kilometers north of Seoul, the cardinal said he felt like the people in the two cities live far away as they cannot freely cross the border to meet each other.

Although there was speculation that the cardinal may also visit Pyongyang to lay the groundwork for a possible visit by Pope Francis to the North, the Archdiocese of Seoul said Yeom's trip is not linked with the pope's upcoming visit to South Korea.

"Cardinal Yeom visited the Kaesong Industrial Complex to keep a promise to meet South Korean Catholics there because his plan to visit them on the last Christmas Day was canceled for several reasons," Huh said during a briefing at the CIQ office.

Pope Francis is set to visit South Korea from Aug. 14 to 18 to participate in a Catholic youth festival and to preside over a beatification ceremony for 124 Korean martyrs.

Pyongyang was once dubbed "the Jerusalem of the East," for Christianity that flourished in the North. In the mid-1940s, about 200,000 Protestants and 57,000 Catholics lived among the 9.1 million people in what is now North Korea, according to South Korean documents.

North Korea claims it guarantees religious freedom, and it has a Catholic church and two Protestant churches as well as a Russian Orthodox church, but critics say they are for propaganda and open only when foreign visitors attend services.

North Korean defectors in South Korea say North Korea severely cracks down on any religious activity, viewing it as a challenge to leader Kim Jong-un's rule.

N. Korean leader visits hospital after deadly apartment collapse

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un has visited a hospital after a deadly collapse of an apartment building under construction in the capital city of Pyongyang that claimed casualties, the state news agency reported on May 19.

Kim toured the Taesongsan General Hospital along with his wife, Ri Sol-ju, and two senior officials, including Lt. Gen. Ma Won-chun, director of the Designing Department of the powerful National Defense Commission, the Korean Central News Agency said in a dispatch.

Kim said “he was pleased to visit the hospital, expressing his expectation and conviction that the officials, surgeons and nurses of the hospital would achieve bigger successes in treatment, management and operation of the hospital,” according to the dispatch.

The report of Kim’s trip to the hospital came six days after a 23-story building collapsed in Phyongchon District in Pyongyang, an accident that North Korea has blamed on improper construction and irresponsible supervision of the construction.

Senior North Korean officials have offered a public apology to a group of North Korean people in what could be the first public apology over an accident in the communist country.

The North did not elaborate on a death toll and said it ended its rescue operation on May 18, but South Korea suspected a considerable number of people may have been killed in the accident, noting about 92 households may have been living in the high-rise apartment. (Yonhap)

N. Korean leader’s aunt appears again in documentary film

The aunt of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un has appeared in a rerun of a documentary film, a move that could confuse outside analysts on whether she was ousted from power.

The North’s state television aired the documentary on April 29 that showed Kim Kyong-hui visiting a soccer stadium along with her nephew Kim Jong-un.

The documentary was first aired on Feb. 11, and North Korea did not edit out scenes of Kim Kyong-hui on April 29, when it aired a rerun of the film.

On April 20, the North’s television also aired a photo of Kim Kyong-hui and her elder brother, long-time leader Kim Jong-il, taken together during their trip to a textile factory in Pyongyang.

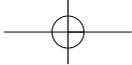
Kim Jong-un took over the communist country after his father Kim Jong-il died of a heart attack in December 2011.

The North’s confusing signal came two weeks after North Korea aired a rerun of another documentary that edited out scenes of Kim Kyong-hui’s trip to the Kumsusan Palace of the Sun.

The mausoleum in Pyongyang is home to the embalmed bodies of the country’s two late leaders, Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il, who are the grandfather and father of the current leader.

The original version of the documentary showed Kim Kyong-hui paying tribute to Kim Jong-il at the mausoleum in December 2012, along with Kim Jong-un and other top officials.

The documentary was first aired on Dec. 13, just two days after the North executed her once-powerful husband, Jang Song-thaek, on charges of treason.



In Feb. 16, the North's television aired the same documentary, though it edited out scenes of Kim Kyong-hui and replaced them with the ones that showed Kim Jong-un paying tribute to his father in December, along with his wife, Ri Sol-ju.

On April 15, the North's television aired the edited version of the documentary again, prompting South Korean officials to believe that Kim Kyong-hui had been removed from posts related to the Workers' Party.

Still, they have said it remained unclear whether she was purged.

In December, Kim Kyong-hui failed to show up at the second anniversary of her brother's death, raising questions about her political fate.

Kim Kyong-hui was last seen in public on Sept. 9, when she watched a military performance.

It is a commonly observed practice to airbrush out purged officials in North Korea.

Jang was found to have been edited out of a rerun of a documentary film that aired on the country's main television channel just days before his execution. (Yonhap)

N. Korea leader attends KPA meeting

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un has chaired a key meeting of a top military commission to decide on organizational matters, the country's state media said on April 27.

At the enlarged meeting of the Central Military Commission of the Workers' Party of Korea, Kim and the North's top policymakers "discussed issues arising in further developing the Korean People's Army (KPA) into the powerful Paektusan revolutionary army faithful to the party, the leader, the country and its people," according to the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) report monitored in Seoul.

The military commission is the key organization of the ruling party that controls all matters of running the country.

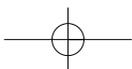
The date of the meeting was not specified but is likely to have been held on April 26, coinciding with U.S. President Barack Obama's visit to South Korea. Obama arrived in South Korea on April 25 on his second stop of his four-nation Asia tour and left the country the following day.

"He stressed the need to enhance the function and role of the political organs of the KPA if it is to preserve the proud history and tradition of being the army of the party, win one victory after another in the confrontation with the U.S. and creditably perform the mission as a shock force and standard-bearer in building a thriving nation," the KCNA said in an English-language dispatch.

In a separate dispatch, the KCNA said, "(Kim) guided a shelling drill of a long-range artillery sub-unit tasked with hitting major targets in the southwestern waters on the occasion of the 82nd anniversary of the heroic KPA." The anniversary falls on April 25. (Yonhap)

N. Korea calls for Kim's monolithic leadership

North Korea called on its military to rally around the monolithic leadership of Kim Jong-un on April 25 as the country marked the 82nd anniversary of the founding of its powerful military, the



world's fifth largest.

Kim became the supreme commander of the 1.1 million-strong military as he took over the country in late 2011 when his father and longtime leader, Kim Jong-il, died suddenly of a heart attack.

The North's main newspaper, the Rodong Sinmun, claimed the military should be at the forefront in safeguarding the young leader.

The latest appeal coincides with a trip to Seoul by U.S. President Barack Obama.

North Korea's latest nuclear threat is expected to be a key agenda item for Obama's talks with South Korean President Park Geun-hye on April 25.

On April 24, the North warned that its military will "mercilessly wipe out" aggressors if they intrude into the North's territory, air and seas even slightly. (Yonhap)

External Affairs

N. Korea slams Japan for collective self-defense push

North Korea urged Japan on May 16 to stop seeking a greater security role abroad by exercising the right to collective self-defense, calling the move "a first step to overseas invasions."

In a press conference a day earlier, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe called for a review of the interpretation of its pacifist constitution to permit the use of collective self-defense.

By removing the decades-old constraints on its military, Japan is trying to allow the troops, known as the Self-Defense Forces, to fight alongside its allies even though its homeland is not under attack.

The move "is needed to realize its ambition of overseas expansion and re-invasion," the Rodong Sinmun, the main newspaper of the ruling Workers' Party of (North) Korea, said in a commentary.

"It is needless to say that it will be the first step of Japan's overseas invasion to achieve its long-sought ambition to rule the world," the newspaper added.

Bashing Tokyo for the failure to look back on its wartime atrocities, the North claimed that Japan "will eventually be rejected by the international community."

In a separate article carried by the Rodong Sinmun, the communist country also blamed the United States for "instigating Japan to seek militarism-based rightward moves."

"The U.S. has been tapping Tokyo to maintain its military hegemony and to counter rival powers in the Asia Pacific region," according to the newspaper.

Abe has been supportive of revising the pacifist constitution, citing China's growing military build-up and North Korea's nuclear threats.

Despite its denial, concerns and speculation have grown particularly among Asian nations, including South Korea, which experienced Japan's harsh colonial rule in the early '20s.

Upon the announcement, the U.S. government reaffirmed its support for Tokyo's push to expand its military role. (Yonhap)



N. Korea warns Japan could be hit by 'fiery lightning' in case of conflict

North Korea warned on May 13 that Japan could face a military strike if Tokyo revives its past militarism.

The North's main newspaper, Rodong Sinmun, claimed that Japan's move to exercise the right of collective self-defense underscores its desire to expand its military muscle abroad and invade unspecified countries again.

It also warned that the Asia-Pacific region could be plunged into a state of war if Japan exercises the right of collective self-defense.

"Japan should keep in mind that it could be the first hit by a fiery lightning in case of conflict," the newspaper said, referring to a military strike.

North Korea did not clarify if it intended to strike Japan in case of a conflict.

The warning comes amid reports that Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe plans to hold a news conference on May 15 calling for the right to exercise collective self-defense.

In April, the United States said it "welcomes and supports Japan's consideration of the matter of exercising the right of collective self-defense."

Also on May 13, South Korea expressed a negative view of Japan's bid to exercise collective self-defense, arguing that it is desirable for Japan to keep an exclusively defensive posture.

Exercising collective self-defense would allow Japan to fight alongside its allies, something that has been considered beyond the scope of its war-renouncing constitution.

The two Koreas and China are wary of Japan's moves in light of its past militarism. Japan ruled the Korean Peninsula as a colony from 1910-45 and controlled much of China during World War II. (Yonhap)

N. Korea defends racist attacks on Obama

North Korea on May 12 defended racist attacks on U.S. President Barack Obama by its citizens and officials, calling them "a proper reaction" to slander by the American leader.

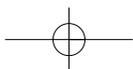
The North's Foreign Ministry said Obama's comments critical of North Korea during his recent trip to Seoul were "an unpardonable insult" to its people and their resentment at the U.S. is running high.

"The resentment expressed by individuals of (North Korea) at Obama recently was a proper reaction to him who malignantly insulted and slandered the dignified North Korea," the ministry said in comments carried by the country's official Korean Central News Agency.

The North's response came just days after the White House condemned the North's personal attacks on Obama.

"While the North Korean government-controlled media are distinguished by their histrionics, these comments are particularly ugly and disrespectful," Caitlin Hayden, a spokeswoman for the National Security Council, said in the previous week in a statement.

On May 2, the KCNA carried a lengthy Korean-language diatribe against Obama, including com-



ments purporting to have been made by a North Korean worker, a military officer and two other officials.

The North Korean worker called Obama “a monkey in Africa” with a disgusting “crossbreed appearance.” He also said Obama should go to the home of monkeys before suffering further humiliation in the world of people.

The insulting comments -- which were apparently orchestrated by the county’s propaganda machine -- came in response to Obama’s recent comments critical of North Korea.

Obama declared in April in Seoul that Washington wouldn’t hesitate to use its military if South Korea is attacked, warning that North Korea can’t guarantee its security even if it continues its nuclear weapons programs.

Obama, together with South Korean president Park Geun-hye, visited the command center of the allies’ combined forces in Seoul as a show of unity against North Korea, which has shown signs of preparations for another nuclear test.

Obama also said that the North Korea situation is of direct concern to the U.S., and said threats will get North Korea nothing other than greater isolation. (Yonhap)

N. Korea in final stages of nuclear test preparations: Seoul’s defense chief

South Korean Defense Minister Kim Kwan-jin said on May 8 that North Korea has made all necessary preparations for its fourth nuclear test and is waiting for the right timing to put its plan into practice.

Kim made the remarks amid concerns over a looming nuclear test by North Korea, with recent satellite imagery showing increased activities at its main test site in Punggye-ri.

“North Korea can conduct an atomic test whenever it makes a decision,” Kim said in a meeting with senior reporters and editors in Seoul.

Although Pyongyang has entered the final stages of preparations, he said it could take time before making a decision for political gain.

“North Korea is very good at psychological manipulation,” Kim said. “Thus, we cannot rule out the possibility that the North could intentionally delay (the nuclear test) or employ a deceptive tactic simultaneously.”

Seoul officials had raised speculation that the reclusive regime could carry out an underground test ahead of U.S. President Barack Obama’s visit to Seoul in late April. The North had warned of a “new form” of nuclear testing to bolster its nuclear deterrence. Tension remains high as the North said it will go ahead with testing a new atomic device following Obama’s visit.

Kim said South Korean and U.S. forces have maintained high vigilance against a potential test, while the Seoul government has been making diplomatic efforts to deter the unpredictable communist regime from the provocative act.

“China, which can control North Korea, may be well aware of what it means for the North to conduct its fourth nuclear test,” Kim said. “The international community also firmly opposes North Korea’s atomic test.”

Kim said he believes the impoverished communist nation has made considerable progress in its

atomic program and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un will not give up the country's nuclear weapons.

North Korea is believed to have used plutonium in its first two tests in 2006 and 2009. After the North's last underground test in February 2013, analysts failed to determine whether the device used highly-enriched uranium or plutonium.

Experts said Pyongyang has gradually made progress in making a powerful, smaller warhead, but has yet to master the technology to make a warhead that fits a long-range missile. (Yonhap)

China denies report on contingency plans for collapse of N. Korea

China on May 6 denied a published report that its military has drawn up contingency plans to cope with a possible regime collapse in North Korea, saying that the document had an unspecified "ulterior motive."

China's foreign ministry spokeswoman, Hua Chunying, made the comment when asked about the May 3 report by Japan's Kyodo News that the Chinese military was preparing for a possible regime collapse in the North.

Kyodo cited internal documents of China's military as a source of the paper.

"To my knowledge, the relevant report is groundless and with an ulterior motive," Hua said at a regular press briefing. "We hope the Korean Peninsula will maintain stability and we hope North Korean people will have a stable and comfortable life."

According to the Kyodo report, the contingency plans call for the establishment of refugee camps along the border with North Korea to handle an expected huge influx of North Koreans and "respond to foreign forces" if its regime collapses.

The report said China's military appears to have drawn up the plans last summer, or months after Pyongyang conducted its third nuclear test in February 2013.

China is North Korea's last-remaining key ally and its economic lifeline. (Yonhap)

N. Korean official says no piers for China at special trade zone

Chinese companies have not leased piers at a port of North Korea's free trade zone, a Pyongyang official has told Hong Kong media, raising speculation that the shock execution of the North Korean leader's uncle might have soured business ties with its key ally.

China reportedly agreed to invest about US\$3 billion in developing the free trade zone in North Korea's northern city of Rason, formerly known as Rajin and Sonbong, in late 2011. The special trade zone sits across the border from China's northeastern Jilin province.

There have been media reports that Chinese companies have leased two piers at the Rason port, but Kim Chun-il, a division chief of the port's foreign business bureau, denied such reports during an interview with Hong Kong-based Phoenix TV.

Asked by a Phoenix TV journalist whether China won the right to exclusively use two piers at the port, Kim replied in Korean, "There are no piers that are specially used by the Chinese side."

“They (Chinese people) have said so, but we have never formally rented out Pier 1 and Pier 2 to them,” Kim said.

The interview was made during a 72-minute special TV program on the Rason trade zone, which was aired on April 19. The program’s video footage can be seen on the website of Phoenix TV.

Kim said that Russia leased Pier 3 at the port, adding that North Korea plans to modernize the two piers on its own.

Since Jang Song-thaek, the once-powerful uncle and political regent to North Korea’s young leader Kim Jong-un, was executed in December on charges including treason and corruption, Chinese experts have privately raised concerns that the fall of Jang could affect economic ties between North Korea and China.

Jang had been considered an advocate of Chinese-style economic reforms and was in charge of key business projects with China.

Among a myriad of accusations announced by North Korea’s state media at the time of the execution, Jang was accused of selling “coal and other precious underground resources at random. Consequently, his confidants were saddled with huge debts, deceived by brokers.”

“Jang had no scruples about committing such act of treachery in May last year as selling off the land of the Rason economic and trade zone to a foreign country for a period of five decades under the pretext of paying those debts,” the North’s statement said.

Although it is uncertain whether the “foreign country” points to China, the fact remains that the Rason economic zone was jointly developed by China. (Yonhap)

Inter-Korean Affairs

Businessman fined 1 mln won over rail project in N. Korea

South Korea has fined a businessman 1 million won (US\$977) for making an unauthorized contact with North Koreans over a project to build a high-speed railway and a parallel road in North Korea, an official said on May 13.

The unification ministry imposed the administrative penalties in March on the businessman, identified only by his last name Kim, for meeting with North Koreans in China in December for the project, the ministry official said.

South Koreans are required to win the government’s approval before a meeting with North Koreans and their trip to the communist neighbor. The two Koreas still technically remain in a state of war since the 1950-53 Korean War ended in a truce, not a peace treaty.

Kim has encouraged local companies to join a project to build a railway and a road connecting Kaesong near the border with South Korea to North Korea’s northwestern city of Sinuiju via Pyongyang.

In December, an opposition lawmaker claimed that North Korea and China had agreed to build a

high-speed railway and a road parallel to it that link the three North Korean cities.

Still, the ministry downplayed the possibility of local companies participating in the project.

The ministry said it is nearly impossible for South Korean firms to make massive investments in North Korea due to sanctions imposed by Seoul on Pyongyang in 2010 following a deadly sinking of a South Korean warship by the North.

The North has refused to take responsibility for the sinking of the warship, which claimed 46 South Korean sailors' lives. (Yonhap)

Seoul eyes conferences to promote Northeast Asia peace initiative

South Korea is seeking to hold two international conferences in October as part of efforts to implement President Park Geun-hye's policy for promoting peace in Northeast Asia, Seoul's foreign ministry said on May 12.

Seoul is pushing to hold a two-day meeting to be attended by government and private experts to exchange views on such soft issues as the environment, energy and disaster relief, the ministry said.

Another conference, tentatively named Northeast Asia Peace-Promoting Cooperative Meeting, will be opened following the forum with the participation of government officials.

The meetings will be held in an effort to implement Park's "Northeast Asia peace and cooperation initiative," according to government officials.

The vision calls for countries in the region to build trust through nonpolitical cooperation such as in environmental issues before coping with political and security matters.

The government plans to invite officials from the U.S., China, Japan, Russia, North Korea and Mongolia, but it is not clear whether North Korea would join the meeting, according to ministry officials. Those from Southeast Asian countries and the European Union are likely to join the meetings as observers. (Yonhap)

S. Koreans unwilling to shoulder unification cost: poll

Four out of 10 South Koreans are unwilling to shoulder the economic burden of potential unification with North Korea, a poll showed on May 7.

The survey of 1,001 people nationwide found that 44.3 percent of the respondents said they have no desire to pay a dime while 31.9 percent said they are willing to pay less than 50,000 won (US\$48) per year as costs of unification.

It also showed that 11.7 percent said they are willing to pay between 50,000 won and 100,000 won per year as costs of unification. Only 1.2 percent said they are willing to pay more than 1 million won per year.

The poll, commissioned by a research institute of Seoul National University, also found that 45.8 percent said they support unification between the two rival Koreas, though there is no need to hurry for unification.

A state-run think tank has estimated that the initial costs for the integration of the two Koreas

could range from 55 trillion won to 249 trillion won. The estimate, which is projected to cover the first year of integration, was based on the assumption that the two neighbors could be unified two decades from now, according to the Korea Institute for National Unification.

South Korea said unification would provide the Korean people with a springboard to prosperity by marrying South Korea's capital and technology with North Korea's rich natural resources.

Meanwhile, North Korea has long suspected that Seoul could be plotting to absorb Pyongyang.

The two Koreas still technically remain in a state of war since the 1950-53 Korean War ended in a truce, not a peace treaty.

Hankook Research, a local polling firm, conducted the survey between Nov. 28 and Dec. 16, and the survey has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.1 percentage points. The survey results are included in a recent policy report submitted to the unification ministry by Seoul National University. (Yonhap)

Inter-Korean tension feared to last for months: experts

North Korea is likely to continue its verbal attacks on Seoul until late summer when a joint South Korea-U.S. military drill is planned, experts said on May 2, suggesting protracted inter-Korean tension down the road.

Inter-Korean relations have slipped into a confrontational mode since March, especially after Seoul joined the international call, issued during a nuclear security summit in The Hague, on the North to give up its nuclear weapons program.

President Park Geun-hye's declaration of her push to unite the divided nations in March further aggravated cross-border tension, with Pyongyang accusing Seoul of attempting to achieve unification by absorption.

North Korea, through its state media in late March and April, called Park "an eccentric old spinster" and criticized Seoul for its incapability shown during botched rescue efforts in a recent deadly ferry sinking off the southwest coast.

The level of the North's recent slander toward the South, including a stream of invective against Park, was seen as being the most scathing since the Park administration took power in early 2013.

It was a stark turnaround from February, when the two Koreas jointly hosted reunions of families separated across the inter-Korean border and agreed to halt slander against one another during their rare high-level talks.

A government official said that "North Korea's criticism of South Korea seems to be harsher than the level during the Lee Myung-bak administration."

Pyongyang had taken a confrontational stance almost throughout the five-year term of former President Lee, who held a hard-line policy on the communist country.

"It appears difficult to form a dialogue-friendly mood for a long time," the official said.

North Korea watchers also said that the North's ratcheting-up of confrontation may be aimed at increasing pressure on Seoul to get more economic incentives.

Despite North Korea's consistent calls, Seoul has been withholding the resumption of inter-

Korean tour business at Mount Kumgang and refusing to remove economic sanctions slapped on Pyongyang for its past provocations.

Experts added that Pyongyang's recent tension escalation may be aimed at inducing Seoul to change its attitude on its North Korea policy, including on anti-Pyongyang sanctions. They also said the confrontational mode may likely continue into late summer.

"North Korea may have concluded that it's not the right time to seek to mend fences with South Korea amid grim conditions including the nuclear weapons issue, which is at a stalemate," said Kim Yong-hyun, a professor of North Korea studies at Dongguk University in Seoul. "The North suggested in its recent move that the ball is in South Korea's court to change its attitude in order to solve inter-Korean problems."

"The current tension may continue into the summer given that the North has recently mentioned the Ulchi-Freedom Guardian (UFG)," said Jang Yong-seok, a senior researcher at the Institute for Peace and Unification at Seoul National University.

This year's UFG, an annual joint combat readiness exercise between Seoul and Washington, is slated for August and September.

Other experts said the current cross-border tension, if extended much further, is feared to derail President Park's much-trumpeted push to seek unification with Pyongyang, as well as her plan to mend ties through her signature trust-building plan. (Yonhap)

N. Korea conducts live-fire drill near western maritime border

North Korea staged a live-fire drill near the western maritime border on April 29 without provoking the South to fire back as none of the shells fell south of the boundary, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) said.

The North fired about 50 artillery shells from two coastal bases for about 10 minutes starting at 2 p.m. The drill came hours after the North notified the South that it would carry out the exercise in waters north of the Northern Limit Line (NLL) in the Yellow Sea.

Following the announcement, South Korea has stepped up military readiness by dispatching warships and early warning surveillance aircraft, as well as fighter jets, near the area to prepare for a potential clash.

"The North's shells fell in waters about 3 kilometers north of the NLL," JCS spokesman Eom Hyo-sik said. "The South Korean military is currently monitoring North Korean artillery units, while maintaining high military readiness."

Residents on five northwestern border islands were advised to take shelter in evacuation centers during the drill. The evacuation order was lifted at around 3:20 p.m., the JCS said.

The North carried out a shelling drill on March 31 near the same region while South Korea and the U.S. were carrying out their annual joint military exercise.

The last exercise sharply stoked tensions as the two Koreas exchanged artillery fire across the western maritime border after some of the North's shells fell into southern waters.

Seoul's defense ministry considered the North's drill in the volatile region as a "provocative act,"

saying it is looking into Pyongyang's intention behind the exercise.

"The North's conducting shelling drill toward southern waters implies its provocative nature," ministry spokesman Kim Min-seok said in a briefing ahead of the drill. "We are carefully monitoring North Korea's exercise to sternly react if any of its shells fall in southern waters."

President Park Geun-hye also ordered the military to respond "according to principle" if North Korean artillery rounds fall in South Korean territory.

The latest move comes after Pyongyang launched vitriolic rhetoric against Park following her summit talks with U.S. President Barack Obama, who visited Seoul on April 25 as part of his Asian trip.

The two leaders warned that any provocations by North Korea, which is believed to be preparing a fourth nuclear test, would make the communist regime more isolated. (Yonhap)

N. Korea says ferry disaster reveals S. Korea's incapacity

North Korea attacked South Korea's poor handling of a recent deadly maritime accident, claiming on April 29 it revealed the South's incapacity.

The North's main newspaper, the Rodong Sinmun, said public anger is mounting in South Korea over the sinking of the ferry Sewol that left 302 people dead or missing, mostly teenage students.

The 6,825-ton ferry Sewol capsized and sank off South Korea's southwestern coast on April 16. Of the 476 people on board, only 174 people were rescued, with 193 others confirmed dead and another 109 people unaccounted for as of April 29.

Shortly after the accident, the Seoul government had issued erroneous information including the number of survivors and passengers aboard the doomed ferry, drawing public criticism over its poor handling of one of the country's deadliest maritime accidents.

The newspaper claimed that the South Korean authorities are concerned that the public anger could deal a blow to the June 4 local elections.

The North's criticism came just days after Pyongyang expressed its deep condolences over the sinking of the ferry in an extremely rare conciliatory gesture.

Inter-Korean relations are currently at one of their lowest points in many years. (Yonhap)

S. Korea to upgrade Patriot missile defense by 2020

South Korea's arms procurement agency on April 28 approved a US\$1.3 billion plan to upgrade its present PAC-2 air defense system and buy PAC-3 missiles by 2020 to improve its anti-ballistic missile capability to counter North Korean threat.

South Korea currently operates 48 PAC-2 missiles imported from Germany and seeks to adopt the advanced interceptors as part of plans to build the indigenous Korean Air and Missile Defense (KAMD) system.

The project aims to upgrade the PAC-2 fire control system to enable it to fire both PAC-2 and PAC-3 missiles from 2014 to 2020, with U.S. defense contractor Raytheon considered as a main

contractor.

DAPA will also buy “hit-to-kill” PAC-3 missiles by U.S. aerospace firm Lockheed Martin through the foreign military sales (FMS) program between 2016 and 2020.

“The patriot system is the key weapon of KAMD to counter North Korea’s ballistic missiles. Once the upgrade is completed, it is expected to minimize damage on the ground by missiles,” DAPA spokesman Baek Young-hyeong said in a briefing.

The PAC-3 directly hits the incoming missiles at an altitude of 40 kilometers, with a higher interception rate than PAC-2. The present system uses blast-fragmentation warhead that could send debris from the exploded missile to the ground.

DAPA will open a bidding for the Patriot upgrade program in June and finalize a deal by November, and proceed with the FMS process for PAC-3 missiles during the same period with a goal to sign a deal within the year, Baek said. (Yonhap)

S. Korea’s railway chief wraps up rare visit to N. Korea

The head of South Korea’s state rail company headed home on April 28 after making a rare week-long visit to North Korea where she attended an international conference concerning transportation between Europe and Asia.

Choi Yeon-hye, president and CEO of the Korea Railroad Corp. (KORAIL), and other officials arrived at the Beijing Capital International Airport earlier in the day from Pyongyang en route to South Korea, a KORAIL official who accompanied Choi said by telephone.

The KORAIL official, who asked not to be named, declined to give details, including what topics Choi discussed during the Pyongyang meeting of the Organization for Co-Operation between Railways (OSJD).

Before departing for North Korea on April 21, Choi told reporters in Beijing that she would ask the OSJD to allow South Korea to win a formal membership. In March this year, South Korea became an associate member of the international rail body.

North Korea, China and Russia are formal members of the organization.

Choi’s visit, which came at a tense time when North Korea has threatened to conduct a fourth nuclear test, drew attention because she may discuss a plan to link South Korea’s railway with Russia’s trans-Siberian railway via North Korea.

South Korea has long talked about bringing to fruition the ambitious rail project, though it has made little progress due to political and security tensions in the region. (Yonhap)

S. Korea approves private humanitarian aid to N. Korea

South Korea endorsed private humanitarian aid to North Korea on April 24, an official said, in the latest assistance to Pyongyang despite lingering tensions on the Korean Peninsula.

The government is allowing the Medical Aid for Children private aid group to ship fever reducers, cold medicine and other medical supplies worth 75 million won (US\$227,000) to a children’s

hospital in Pyongyang.

The planned shipment brought the total amount of assistance to the North by South Korea's private aid groups to more than 2 billion won in 2014.

South Korea has vowed to bolster humanitarian assistance to North Korea, though Pyongyang has called Seoul's offer of nutritional support to pregnant women and infants an "insult" to North Koreans. (Yonhap)

FOREIGN TIPS

N. Korea, China to launch tourist charter flight in July

North Korea and China will launch another tourist charter flight in July, China's state-run media said on May 19, as the reclusive North approves more tour routes from its neighboring Chinese cities in an apparent bid to boost tourist income.

The charter flight service between Changchun, the capital of northeast China's Jilin province, and Pyongyang will begin from early July, China News Service reported, citing a Chinese tourism official in Jilin.

The new flight service, apparently available for mainland Chinese people, came after North Korea's national flag carrier, Air Koryo, and the Chinese province signed a contract, according to the unnamed Chinese official.

"This would make travel to North Korea easier and safer for Chinese tourists and businessmen from Changchun," the official was quoted as saying.

North Korea had operated tourist charter flights from Shanghai and Yanji of Jilin province during peak tour seasons.

North Korea is one of the world's most secretive and isolated nations, but Pyongyang has stepped up efforts to attract foreign tourists since last year by offering more international and domestic flights.

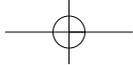
In early May, North Korea started its first one-day cycling trip from the Chinese border city of Tumen. The tour is not available for non-Chinese travelers.

China also launched its second train travel service to North Korea in April. The opening of regular rail services from China's northeastern city of Jian to the North Korean capital of Pyongyang makes Jian the second city offering such service after the Chinese border city of Dandong. (Yonhap)

Australia donates US\$2.8 mln in food aid to N. Korea

Australia has donated 3 million Australian dollars (US\$2.8 million) to help feed children and pregnant women in North Korea, a U.S. news report said on May 14.

The Australian government earmarked the money for donation for North Korean children and



mothers-to-be for fiscal 2013 spanning from July last year to June 2014, and they finished the paperwork for the donation to the World Food Programme (WFP) in early May, according to the report by the Washington-based Radio Free Asia.

Jenna Hand, a spokeswoman for the Australian Agency for International Development, said some agency officials visited North Korea late last year to inspect food distribution by the WFP there.

The Australian government, however, has no further budget earmarked for aid to the impoverished country, she said.

Australia severed its direct development assistance to North Korea in 2002 after the North officially announced its development of nuclear weapons. Since then the country's aid has been limited to humanitarian help through international bodies. (Yonhap)

3 N. Korean crew members to stand trial in Panama in June: report

Three members of a North Korean ship seized by Panama last year for carrying Cuban weapons are scheduled to appear for a trial in Panama in June, a U.S. radio report said on May 13.

The court set the date for June 4 for the captain and two crew members of the Chong Chon Gang, the Washington-based Voice of America said, citing Prosecutor Roberto Moreno of the Panamanian Attorney General's Office.

Moreno said a judge can issue a ruling within 30 days, though it may take months if the North Koreans appeal the verdict.

The trial comes 11 months after the Panamanian authorities seized the North Korean ship carrying Soviet-era MiG-21 fighter aircraft, surface-to-air missile and other arms-related material hidden under sacks of sugar.

Panama released the other 32 crew members of the Chong Chon Gang without charge after North Korea paid US\$690,000 in fines in February.

A panel of experts said in a report to the United Nations Security Council that the shipment itself and the transaction between North Korea and Cuba were violations of sanctions imposed on North Korea.

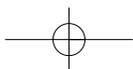
The example of Panama with the Chong Chon Gang shows that determined action can thwart prohibited activities on the basis of existing measures, the panel said in the report published in March.

North Korea "presents a stiff challenge to Member States" of the United Nations, the panel said. (Yonhap)

N. Korea expected to produce 1.9 mln tons of rice in 2014: U.N. food agency

North Korea is expected to produce 1.9 million tons of rice in 2014, the same amount that the country is estimated to have produced last year, the U.N. food agency said on May 13.

The figure represents an increase from 2010, 2011 and 2012 when North Korea's average rice production reached 1.7 million tons, the Food and Agriculture Organization said in a biannual global food report posted on its website.



The report said per capita rice consumption in North Korea is forecast to reach 67.8 kilograms this year, compared with 65.4 kg from a year earlier.

It also said North Korea is forecast to produce 2.3 million tons of maize this year, compared with 2.2 million tons in 2013.

Rice is a key staple food for both South and North Koreans, though North Koreans also rely on maize due to chronic food shortages.

The North has relied on international handouts since the late 1990s when it suffered a widespread famine that was estimated to have killed 2 million people. (Yonhap)

European business delegation to visit N. Korea in Sept: report

A European business delegation plans to visit North Korea in September to explore business opportunities in the isolated country, a U.S. radio report said.

The Washington-based Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported on May 7 that the delegation is set to travel to the North from Sept. 23 to Sept. 28, citing GPI Consultancy, a consulting company in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, that focuses on North Korea and other developing countries.

The delegation is also scheduled to attend a trade fair in Pyongyang and tour North Korea's industrial sectors as well as discuss with North Korean officials the benefits and challenges of doing business in North Korea, according to the report.

The RFA said the delegation's makeup has not been set yet. (Yonhap)

N. Korea rations 420 grams of food to each person in April

North Korea doled out 420 grams of food to each person per day in April, the same amount as in the previous month, a news report said, on May 6.

Citing the U.N. World Food Program's office in Pyongyang, the Washington-based Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported that April's daily food ration per capita was unchanged from March though the North marked the 102 birthday of Kim Il-sung, founder of the communist country and grandfather of current leader Kim Jong-un.

The founding father died in 1994, and his birthday is one of the most important holidays in North Korea.

The RFA said April's daily food ration was much lower than the 600 grams recommended by the U.N. agency.

North Korea's daily food ration, which amounted to 400 grams in January, has been hovering at 402 grams since then.

The Washington-based Voice of America (VOA), meanwhile, said the WFP provided 2,405 tons of food aid to the impoverished country in April.

The food assistance in April was up 50 percent from March and the largest monthly amount this year, but it was much lower than the 4,093 tons provided during the same month a year earlier, the VOA reported.

The WFP has also suspended operations of five out of its seven confectionery factories in North Korea due to a fund shortage, the VOA said. (Yonhap)

NASA satellite spots huge fires burning in N. Korea

A satellite photo released by NASA on May 2 shows dozens of fires in North Korea, some of which appear to be wildfires.

According to the imagery captured by the agency's Aqua satellite on April 25, some of the fires are in heavily forested areas in the eastern part of the country.

"Many fires appear in farming areas along rivers," NASA said, adding many people farm marginal land along rivers in the mountainous areas.

"They use fire to clear debris from last year's crop and to help fertilize the soil for the coming season," the agency said. "However, some of the fires were burning in heavily forested areas, suggesting that they might be wildfires." (Yonhap)

N. Korea increases car, liquor imports from Hong Kong in 2013: report

North Korea increased imports of vehicles and alcoholic beverages from Hong Kong in 2013, despite an overall drop in bilateral trade, a South Korean report showed on May 1.

The trade representative office for Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA) in Hong Kong said Pyongyang spent US\$4.36 million to buy vehicles, up 27.5 percent from the year before, a large number of them with over 3-liter engine and seating capacity for more than 10 people.

Cars were the second-largest single product imported by North Korea from Hong Kong after electronic components, the office said.

"The cars were made in other countries and shipped through Hong Kong," it said.

North Korean imports of alcoholic beverages shot up 51.3 percent in 2013 from 2012, with whiskey and vodka making up the bulk of products shipped. Though liquor products only accounted for 1.4 percent of goods shipped from the former British colony to Pyongyang, its annual growth rate surpassed that of all others last year.

This trend continued into 2014, with North Korea's purchase of alcoholic beverages soaring 758.8 percent in January and February vis-a-vis the previous year, according to the KOTRA office.

The latest report showed that two-way trade dropped 57.2 percent on-year to \$26.99 million, with Hong Kong's exports falling 53.7 percent. It said no crude oil, grain and fertilizers were shipped to the North.

Imports from North Korea nosedived 87.9 percent to \$770,000.

The report showed that in the first two months of this year, Hong Kong's exports to North Korea was down 67.9 percent on-year, while imports fell 63 percent. (Yonhap)

U.S. says N. Korea still bound by NPT rules

A senior U.S. government official said on April 29 North Korea is still obliged to follow rules under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) despite its withdrawal from the treaty in 2003.

Thomas Countryman, assistant secretary of state for international security and nonproliferation, said NPT members will discuss the North Korea problem during the Preparatory Committee (PreCom) meeting for the 2015 Nuclear Non-Proliferations Treaty Review Conference underway in New York.

“The NPT requirements remain binding upon the DPRK,” he said at a Foreign Press Center briefing via video conference from New York. The DPRK is the acronym for North Korea’s official name, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.

He cited Pyongyang’s agreement in 2005 to return to the NPT “at an early date” and U.N. Security Council resolutions calling on the communist nation to act in accordance with rules that apply to NPT members.

Countryman stressed the seriousness of the “threat that North Korea poses not only to its neighbors and itself but to the nonproliferation treaty in the international nonproliferation regime.”

He added the issue will be addressed “openly and forthrightly” in the PreCom session that opened on April 28 for a 12-day run.

North Korea acceded to the NPT in 1985 but announced its withdrawal in 2003.

In a 2005 landmark deal with its five dialogue partners -- South Korea, the U.S., China, Russia and Japan -- it agreed to return to the NPT at an early date and abandon all of its nuclear program in exchange for political and economic incentives.

But it has since conducted three known nuclear tests and claimed to be a nuclear state.

Countryman was emphatic that the NPT serves as a key element of international security and the basis for international nuclear cooperation.

“We will continue to address the serious challenges of cases of noncompliance with treaty obligations, and will continue to support expanding access to the peaceful uses of nuclear energy,” he said.

Countryman is the chief U.S. delegate to the drawn-out negotiations with South Korea on revising their civilian nuclear cooperation.

The two sides have struggled to rewrite the so-called “123 agreement” amid Seoul’s push to expand its non-military nuclear program.

Seoul wants to leave the door open for enriching uranium and reprocessing spent fuel some day.

Still, the Obama administration is concerned about a possible negative impact on its global non-proliferation drive.

The veteran diplomat avoided a direct answer to a question about whether such differences are being narrowed.

“I am negotiating a nuclear cooperation agreement with the Republic of Korea. But not this week,” Countryman said. “We will conclude a nuclear cooperation agreement with the valued ally, the Republic of Korea, in the near future.”

It would reflect the fact that South Korea is not only a vital partner of the U.S. but also is a leader in civil nuclear technology, he added. (Yonhap)

Kim Jong-un pays 'huge attention to detail' for wax figure of his late father

North Korea's young leader Kim Jong-un paid "huge attention to detail" in the making of a wax figure of his late father by Chinese artists, checking details of the sculpture to make it perfectly duplicate his father's features, China's state media reported on April 28.

The wax figure of Kim's father, Kim Jong-il, who died on Dec. 17, 2011, has been on display at the North's International Friendship Exhibition Center, an ostentatious palace museum at Mt. Myohyang, since July 2013.

The Chinese artists, including Zhang Molei and Jia Wenlong, known for making a wax figure of the North Korean founder and Kim's grandfather, Kim Il-sung, were again offered to make the wax sculpture of Kim Jong-il by North Korea in 2012.

Jia told the state-run Global Times newspaper that they and North Korean artists had "longtime disputes" over which photo should be used as the model picture of the wax figure of Kim Jong-il.

"Kim Jong-il was seriously ill due to a massive stroke in his last days, which made him look awful," Jia was quoted as saying. "But we had to show his kindness and wisdom rather than the illness."

The two sides eventually agreed to use a photo of Kim Jong-il displayed at the memorial service of the late leader, Jia said.

"Kim Jong-un paid huge attention to detail," the newspaper said. "He even checked the teeth, neck and hair of the sculpture.

"North Korea sent over 100 photos to make sure the wax statue was perfect," the newspaper said, adding that the North also gave "a full set of shoes, glasses and an overcoat as well as other clothes" of the late leader to help the Chinese artists perfectly duplicate his figure.

North Korea is notorious for promoting a personality cult for the ruling Kim dynasty.

In the two-page feature story, the Chinese artists admitted that they felt "great pressure" to make the wax figure of Kim Jong-il.

"It is believed that creating the wax sculptures of the great men is similar to making a statute for God," Jia was quoted as saying. "We have to show our awe," (Yonhap)

N. Korea's grain imports from China halve in Q1

North Korea's grain imports from China decreased by more than 50 percent in the first quarter from a year earlier, data showed on April 27.

According to the Korea International Trade Association (KITA), North Korea imported 26,263 tons of grain, including 23,636 tons of flour, 1,241 tons of rice and 1,192 tons of corn, from China in the January-March period.

The North's imports during the first three months is equivalent to 48 percent of 54,178 tons imported during the same period a year ago, the data showed. Compared with the first quarter of 2012, the country's grain imports from China decreased about 40 percent.

In terms of value, the North's imports of Chinese grain amounted to US\$11.93 million in the first

quarter, down 52 percent from \$24.71 in 2013.

“The drop in the North’s grain imports from China in the period compared with other years seems to be due to an increase in the country’s grain production last year,” said Kwon Tae-jin, a research fellow at the government-funded Korea Rural Economic Institute (KREI). “However, the country may increase its grain imports in the future, as the amount of its grain production is not enough for its people.”

The U.N. World Food Program (WFP) estimates the North produced 5.03 million tons of polished grain between November 2013 and October 2014, up 5 percent from a year ago. (Yonhap)

China’s border city to begin 'bicycle tour' to N. Korea

A Chinese border city of Tumen plans to offer one-day “bicycle tours” to North Korea beginning in early May, a local Chinese media reported on April 26, in the latest sign that the reclusive North is increasing travel opportunities for Chinese visitors.

The bike tours between the northeastern city of Tumen in Jilin province and a North Korean border city of Onsong will begin on May 2, the local newspaper named Yanbian Xinxigang reported on its website.

The itinerary includes a train station, a memorial facility honoring Chinese soldiers killed during the 1950-53 Korean War and a North Korean performance, according to the report.

North Korea is one of the world’s most secretive and isolated nations, but Pyongyang has stepped up efforts to attract foreign tourists since last year by offering more international and domestic flights.

In early April, China launched its second train travel service to North Korea. The opening of regular rail services from China’s northeastern city of Jian to the North Korean capital of Pyongyang makes Jian the second city offering such service after another Chinese border city of Dandong. (Yonhap)

China media urges N. Korea not to conduct 'nuclear, missile tests'

North Korea should abandon its nuclear ambition and refrain from conducting “nuclear and ballistic-missile tests,” China’s official Xinhua news agency said on April 25, shortly after U.S. President Barack Obama warned the North against carrying out its fourth nuclear test.

South Korea has warned that North Korea’s nuclear test site of Punggye-ri is technically ready for a new test. In a written interview with South Korean media earlier in the day ahead of his arrival in Seoul, Obama said North Korea will face a “firm response from the international community” if it conducts a nuclear test.

“For the DPRK (North Korea), it needs to understand that a nuclear-armed Korean Peninsula serves the fundamental interests of none,” Xinhua said in a commentary. “It is imperative that it comply with its due international obligations and refrain from such moves as nuclear and ballistic-missile tests.”

It appears to be rare for the Chinese official news agency to speak against North Korea's possible provocations by mentioning the North by name.

The commentary also urged the U.S., South Korea and Japan not to flex their military muscles.

"For the United States and its allies in the region, they need to make a convincing case about their proclaimed commitment to regional stability," it said.

"Demanding the DPRK to back down on the one hand but flexing military muscles at its door on the other is not helpful; it would only ratchet up Pyongyang's distrust and sense of insecurity," it said.

Angered by a condemnation by the United Nations Security Council over its ballistic missile tests, North Korea threatened late in March to conduct a "new form" of nuclear test. Although the North didn't elaborate, outside experts believe that the North's fresh nuclear test may be based on enriched uranium.

North Korea has so far conducted three nuclear tests, in 2006, 2009 and 2013, at the Punggye-ri site. (Yonhap)

China didn't export crude oil to N. Korea in Q1

China did not export any crude oil to North Korea in the first three months of this year, data compiled by South Korea's government trade agency showed on April 24, in an unprecedented three-month absence of oil shipments amid North Korea's threats of a nuclear test.

Monthly shipments of crude oil from China to North Korea were absent in February, June and July 2013, but it was the first time that China apparently stopped exports of crude oil to North Korea for three consecutive months.

The Beijing unit of the South's Korea Trade and Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA) said in a report, citing data it collected from China's customs authorities, that there were no oil shipments from China to North Korea from January to March 2014.

"To my knowledge, it is the first time that China did not export crude oil to North Korea for three consecutive months and that would impact the North Korean economy," a diplomat at the South Korean Embassy in Beijing said on the condition of anonymity.

China's total trade with North Korea fell 2.83 percent to US\$1.27 billion in the January-March period, compared with the same period a year ago, according to the KOTRA report.

China, the North's main ally and economic lifeline, issued a veiled warning on April 23, to North Korea not to conduct its fourth nuclear test.

"We are opposed to all actions that may lead to an escalation of tensions on the Korean Peninsula," China's foreign ministry spokesman, Qin Gang, told reporters during a regular press briefing, when asked about the possibility of a new nuclear test by North Korea.

"We should cool down the situation, rather than flaring up tensions," Qin said, adding that China was paying "high attention" to reports that said heightened activities have been detected at North Korea's nuclear test site of Punggye-ri. (Yonhap)

PEOPLE

Kim Jong-un : Supreme Commander of the (North) Korean People's Army (KPA), First Secretary of the Workers' Party of (North) Korea, First Chairman of the National Defense Commission (NDC)

- April 16 watches a performance given by the Moranbong Band to congratulate the participants in a meeting of airpersons of the KPA.
 21 guides a flight training of KPA Air and Anti-Air Force Unit 188 honored with the title of the O Jung Hup-led Seventh Regiment.
 21 visits the Songdowon International Children's Camp where its remodeling project is near completion.
 22 visits the January 8 Fishery Station of the KPA.
 22 makes a field survey of the Sunchon Cement Complex.
 24 guides the multiple-rocket launching drill of women's subunits under KPA Unit 851.
 26 guides a shelling drill of an artillery subunit under KPA Unit 681.
 27 guides a shelling drill of a long-range artillery subunit tasked to hit major targets in southwestern waters.
- May 7 sends synthetic grass for football training grounds to various sports teams including football teams.
 9 sends messages to foreign leaders, including Chinese President Xi Jinping, in response to their congratulations on him upon his re-election as the first NDC chairman.
 10 visits the operational airfield in the western region together with his wife Ri Sol-ju to guide "the Combat Flight Contest among Air Commanding Officers of the Air and Anti-Air Force of the Korean People's Army (KPA)-2014."
 14 visits the January 18 General Machinery Plant, and specifies tasks and ways for its modernization.
 14 inspects KPA Air and Anti-Air Force Unit 447 honored with the title of O Jung Hup-led 7th Regiment.

Kim Yong-nam: President of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly (SPA)

- April 18 sends a message of greeting to Robert G. Mugabe, president of the Republic of Zimbabwe, on the occasion of the 34th anniversary of its independence.
 22 sends a congratulatory message to Abdelaziz Bouteflika on his re-election as president of Algeria.
 27 sends a message of greeting to Jacob Gedleyihlekisa Zuma, president of South Africa, on the occasion of the Day of Freedom, its national day.
- May 12 meets with the South West Africa People's Organizational Party of Namibia (SWAPO) delegation at the Mansudae Assembly Hall.

Pak Pong-ju: Premier

- April 17 sends a congratulatory message to Manuel Valls upon his appointment as prime minister of France on April 7.
- 17 sends a congratulatory message to Moussa Mara upon his appointment as prime minister of Mali.
- 29 meets with Yuri Trutnev, deputy prime minister and presidential envoy to the Far East Federal District of the Russian Federation, at the Mansudae Assembly Hall.
- May 3 makes a field survey of spring farming in Sukchon County, South Phyongan Province.
- 4 makes a field survey of the water-way project in South Hwanghae Province.
- 6 sends a congratulatory message to Kalzeubet Pahimi upon his reappointment as prime minister of Chad and a congratulatory message to Abdelmalik Sellal on his appointment as prime minister of Algeria.

CHRONOLOGICAL REVIEW**(Local Events)**

- April 17 The Phophyong Revolutionary Museum in Kim Hyong-jik County, Ryanggang Province, marks its 50th anniversary.
- 23 A reception is given by the Ministry of the People's Armed Forces on the occasion of the 82nd anniversary of the founding of the KPA.
- 23 The 29th National Festival of Science and Technology opens at the Three-Revolution Exhibition House.
- 24 A national meeting is held at the People's Palace of Culture to celebrate the 82nd anniversary of the founding of the KPA.
- 25 Leading officials of the party, state and army including SPA President Kim Yong-nam and Premier Pak Pong-ju visit the Kumsusan Palace of the Sun on the 82nd anniversary of the KPA.
- 26 Kim Jong-il Military Postgraduate Institute is completed at Kim Il-sung Military University on the occasion of the 82nd anniversary of the KPA.
- 27 An enlarged meeting of the Central Military Commission (CMC) of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) is held under the guidance of Kim Jong-un, chairman of the CMC of the WPK and supreme commander of the KPA.
- 28 The rank of vice marshal of the KPA is conferred on Hwang Pyong-so.
- May 1 Senior party and state officials of North Korea celebrate the 124th May Day with working people.
- 1 The KCNA says Kim Tok-hun was appointed as vice-premier on April 30.
- 1 A banquet for workers is given by leader Kim Jong-un at the newly built workers' hostel at the Kim Jong-suk Pyongyang Textile Mill to mark May Day.

- May
- 4 Senior state officials visit the Songdowon International Children's Camp and the January 8 Fishery Station of the KPA.
 - 4 A ceremony takes place to celebrate the completion of the workers' hostel of Kim Jong-suk Pyongyang Textile Mill on the bank of the picturesque River Taedong.
 - 6 The 10th national machine design festival opens with due ceremony at the Central Light Industrial Sample Exhibition in Pyongyang.
 - 9 The Rodong Sinmun calls upon service personnel and people to launch a dynamic agitation for increased production and faster construction so as to bring about a great leap forward on all fronts for building a thriving nation.
 - 14 The Physical Training Center on Chongchun Street of Pyongyang starts its service after being remodeled.

(Foreign Events)

- April
- 18 The Rodong Sinmun slams the U.S. quadrennial defense review report claiming that the review is aimed at steadily bolstering up its three strategic nuclear strike means -- nuclear carriers, nuclear submarines and strategic bombers.
 - 19 A spokesman for the Foreign Ministry claims "the anti-North Korea human rights racket of the U.S. and its allied forces has reached an extremely reckless phase."
 - 21 A WPK delegation led by Ri Chang-gun, vice department director of the WPK's Central Committee, leaves Pyongyang to participate in the 9th Congress of the Workers' Party of Bangladesh.
 - 21 Neil Forbes Davidson, senator from the British Labor Party, and his companion arrive in Pyongyang.
 - 22 The KCNA denounces Michael Kirby, chairman of the U.N. Commission of Inquiry (COI), claiming that his press conference on April 17 was peppered with fabrications and create an atmosphere of international pressure.
 - 24 Delegations of Belarus, Ukraine, Estonia and Vietnam arrive in Pyongyang to take part in the 29th meeting of general directors of the Organization of Railways Cooperation.
 - 24 The Rodong Sinmun claims "Dresden Declaration" of South Korean President Park Geun-hye "is a confrontational declaration flouting the nation's desire for reunification."
 - 28 A government economic delegation led by Vice Minister of Foreign Trade Ri Myong-san leaves Pyongyang to participate in the fourth meeting of the Inter-governmental Joint Committee of North Korea and Nigeria and to visit various countries of Africa.
 - 28 Yuri Trutnev and his party arrive in Pyongyang.
 - 28 Talks between Ro Tu-chol, vice premier of the Cabinet, and Yuri Trutnev are held in Pyongyang.
 - 28 An agreement on trade and economic cooperation is signed between the North's ministry of Foreign Trade and the Amur Regional Government of the Russian Federation.
 - 29 Yang Hyong-sop meets with Ugur Erdener, president of the World Archery Federation, at the Mansudae Assembly Hall.

- May
- 2 Knowledge sharing on special economic zones in the North takes place at Yanggakdo International Hotel hosted by the Korea Economic Development Association.
 - 5 Nasri Gustaman, Indonesian ambassador to Pyongyang, hosts a reception at his embassy on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between the North and Indonesia.
 - 7 Minju Josen, North Korea's Cabinet newspaper, slams South Korea's move to conclude a memorandum of understanding on the sharing of information with the U.S. and Japan as "military nexus against the North."
 - 8 The KCNA condemns South Korean President Park Geun-hye's agreement with U.S. President Barack Obama to re-extend the transfer of war time operation control as "an act of treachery."
 - 9 A delegation of the South West Africa People's Organizational Party of Namibia headed by Secretary General Nangolo Mbumba arrives in Pyongyang.
 - 10 Talks between the delegations of the WPK and the SWAPO are held in Pyongyang.
 - 11 An NDC spokesman blasts the South Korean authorities in a statement for floating again the fiction about "the North's involvement" in the "drone case."
 - 13 The NDC declares it "would finally settle accounts with the vicious Park Geun-hye group of hooligans" condemning the remarks of the spokesman of the South Korean Defense Ministry regarding the North's denial of involvement in drone cases. (Yonhap)

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