

VANTAGE POINT

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COVER PHOTO : A 94-member advance team in uniform of the North Korean squad for the Asian Games in South Korea's western port city of Incheon arrives at Incheon International Airport on Sept. 11. The communist country sent 150 athletes and 123 officials and referees to compete in 14 of 36 sports in the 16-day international sport event that began on Sept. 19. (Yonhap)

N. Korea's Aggressive Diplomatic Gestures

Utilizing a diplomatic strategy appears to be a novel approach for the North, considering that it has traditionally relied on military threats.

■ By Lee Kwang-ho

Despite every unfavorable condition, North Korea has been engaging in a flurry of diplomatic activities to escape from its international isolation. Pyongyang's aggressive gesture is well-timed with the emerging mood for possible dialogue with the United States, Japan and European countries, as well as its southern neighbor.

Pyongyang's move is a reflection of its attempts to break away from a worsening environment as the socialist country is under a set of sanctions imposed by the global community for its nuclear ambition. But it would be difficult for North Korea to make its voice heard as the international community shares the need for zero tolerance toward Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions.

Utilizing a diplomatic strategy appears to be a unique novel approach for the Kim Jong-un regime, especially considering that it has traditionally relied on military threats and saber-rattling to grab international attention. More recently, the icy relations between North and South Korea and between North Korea and the U.S. are showing signs of thawing, although there has not yet been any definite progress. The North's new diplomatic tactics have also emerged amid deteriorating relations with China, its long-time ally and economic benefactor.

New Diplomatic Approach

Pyongyang's brisk diplomatic efforts are spearheaded by its veteran diplomats, including Kang Sok-ju, a secretary of the North's ruling Workers' Party in charge of international relations. Kang made a tour of Germany, Belgium, Switzerland and Italy, starting from early September for about 10 days, to meet political figures in those countries. Given his status in North Korea, Kang's visit to Europe takes on significance at a time when burgeoning signs of the North's diplomatic contact with major countries are growing.

Pyongyang's new top diplomat, Ri Su-yong, was to attend the U.N. General Assembly in late September, which would mark the first time that a North

Korean foreign minister has visited New York in 15 years. Ri spent more than a month on trips to African and Middle Eastern nations before traveling to Southeast Asia in August. He has also just traveled to Iran to attend the Asian African Legal Consultative Organization, where he harshly criticized Washington's application of sanctions on Pyongyang.

Veteran North Korean diplomat Kang Sok-ju's rare trip to Europe in September appears to be Pyongyang's latest move to engage the international community to escape from its isolated status. Kang, a close confidant of the late leader Kim Jong-il and vice foreign minister from 1986 to 2010, was involved in talks between the U.S. and North Korea in the 1990s on its nuclear program.

He was also Pyongyang's negotiator behind the landmark 1994 Geneva Agreed Framework that called upon the regime to freeze the operation and construction of nuclear reactors in return for light water reactors and oil as well as a gradual normalization of diplomatic ties.

Kang called for the implementation of past inter-Korean agreements as the first step toward improving bilateral ties. The remarks by Kang come as the two Koreas' ties have been strained over Pyongyang's short-range missile launches and the South's annual military drills with the United States.

Return of Seasoned Diplomat

The 75-year-old Kang arrived in Berlin on Sept. 6 on the first stop of a five-nation tour that also took him to Belgium, Switzerland, Italy and Mongolia. Speaking to reporters in Berlin, Kang called for the implementation of past agreements that were signed between the two Koreas



Kang Sok-ju (R), the secretary handling international relations in North Korea's ruling Workers' Party, shakes hands with German Ambassador to Pyongyang Thomas Schaefer at Sunan Airport in the North Korean capital, Pyongyang, prior to his departure for Europe. (AP-Yonhap)

following their leaders' summit meetings in 2000 and 2007. The deals became the basis for temporary reunions between families separated by the 1950-53 Korean War and a series of joint economic projects, including the industrial park in the North's border city of Kaesong.

Kang's visit to Europe has drawn attention due to his possible meetings with Japanese and U.S. officials there. Diplomatic sources in Seoul said Kang Sok-ju might also meet with high officials from Japan during his stay in Switzerland as a ranking official dealing with the Japanese abduction issue was in Geneva for a seminar.

In May, North Korea agreed to re-investigate the fate of Japanese people believed to have been abducted by the North's agents in the 1970s and 80s. In July, Pyongyang launched a special committee to investigate the cases and in return, Japan lifted some of its unilateral sanctions imposed on North Korea.

Japan's recent move has raised concerns of a negative impact on trilateral cooperation among Seoul, Washington and Tokyo on curbing the North's nuclear weapons programs. A

Japanese government official recently reaffirmed Tokyo's push for talks with Pyongyang, saying that North Korea's continued missile and rocket launches will not affect the ongoing discussions on the abduction issue.

Also, North Korea's Foreign Minister Ri Su-yong is expected to not go beyond Kang's arguments during his planned visit to New York in late September to attend the U.N. General Assembly.

Still, their trips have drawn attention as a possible sign of change in the communist state's recalcitrant stance. South Korea's Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se said recently that the North's aggressive diplomatic moves signaled its "desperate" need to break from its international isolation and overcome economic woes.

But Kang's remarks made it clear Pyongyang remained far from fundamentally changing its course of action. A day before Kang embarked on his European tour, the U.N. nuclear watchdog said it had seen signs indicating North Korea may again be operating a reactor to make plutonium for atomic bombs.

The North's repeated demand for an unconditional resumption of the six-party talks reflects its intention to secure status as a nuclear weapons state and get the U.S. to agree to hold negotiations on nuclear arms control. The impoverished regime has defended its nuclear program as a "treasured sword" to counter what it regards as U.S.-led hostility.

During their talks in Washington on Sept. 9, chief nuclear envoys from South Korea and the U.S. made it clear they had no intention of letting Pyongyang replay old games. They reaffirmed that the North should first take concrete actions to demonstrate its commitment to denuclearization, if the six-party talks, which also involve China, Japan and Russia, are to be resumed.

But foreign media downplayed Kang's European tour as insignificant. North Korean diplomat Kang has completed a 10-day tour to Europe, but the trip yielded little progress, according to the Voice of America on Sept. 16. Kang found it impossible to meet major political figures, something he had hoped to do in an attempt to alleviate the country's international isolation, said VOA, the U.S. state-run official external broadcast institution.

Cold Responses

His visit to Europe, however, proved fruitless since Kang failed to meet any government officials except one in Switzerland, according to VOA. In Germany, Kang met members of the Social Democratic Party. Kang managed to hold a meeting in his second destination, Belgium, with Elmar Brok, the chairman of the European Parliament Committee on Foreign Affairs, and Stavros Lambrinidis, EU special representative for human rights, but they only restated their earlier criticism of North Korea's nuclear program and its human rights abuses.

Brok said on Sept. 9 after roundtable talks with Kang that they had discussions that were "very clear and frank," especially on Pyongyang's nuclear issue. "We have said that they should give more clear commitments that they will not become a nuclear power for the future," Brok said in an interview broadcast on the European Parliament's website. The European Union has backed the United States on stronger sanctions against Pyongyang after its third nuclear test in February 2013.

North Korea's foreign minister, Ri Su-yong, is a close confidant of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un. Since his inauguration as top diplomat in April, Ri has toured Southeast

Asia, where he engaged in multilateral diplomacy for the first time in August during an Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) security summit in Myanmar, holding separate meetings with his Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi, and Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida. Ri spent more than 50 days between May and July traveling to many countries in Africa and the Middle East.

Most recently, Ri traveled to Iran, where he met Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and other ranking officials there. Ri was participating in the 53rd meeting of the Asian-African Legal Consultative Organization held in Tehran.

In his speech to the legal organization on Sept. 15, Ri harshly criticized the U.S. imposition of sanctions on North Korea.

“North Korea considers that invoking one’s national legislation to impose sanctions on and blockade against a few select states which have different social system is a gross violation running against universal principles of international law,” Ri said.

He continued, “The U.S. has abused the Security Council resolutions and, basing itself on it, applied sanctions against my country and let third countries follow the resolutions, thus negating outrageously the right of our people to development. All this vividly illustrates that Security Council resolutions catering only for the interests of some big powers.”

N. Korea’s U.N. Presence

In New York, Ri was to make a keynote address, in line with both of his only predecessors: Foreign Minister Kim Yong-nam in 1992 and Foreign Minister Paek Nam-sun in 1999.

There is already speculation that Ri will not be addressing a friendly audience at the U.N.



This file photo shows North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Su-yong attending the ASEAN Regional Forum in Myanmar on Aug. 9. (Yonhap)

It is widely expected that Ri will have to respond in some form to the February report by the U.N. Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in North Korea, which condemned the regime for its crimes against humanity and called for urgent action by the international community, including a referral to the International Criminal Court.

Rebutting international criticism of its human rights situation, North Korea on Sept. 13 issued its own assessment of the country’s policies that “guarantee genuine rights of the people.” In late September, a ministerial-level meeting on the North’s rights record is scheduled to be held in New York on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly for the first time. It is expected to be attended by South Korea’s top diplomat, Yun Byung-se, and U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry.

It is speculated that Ri, who enjoys considerable power and Kim’s trust, may have been tasked with improving Pyongyang’s relations with Washington, including the resumption of the six-party talks on North Korea’s denuclearization, which have been stalled since

2008, during his upcoming U.S. visit.

Pyongyang's channel in New York, where the U.N. is headquartered, serves as an informal means of communication with the United States, as the country does not have official ties with Washington. Speculation is growing that North Korea and the United States may revive their contact channels amid reports that high-ranking officials from the U.S. made a secret visit to Pyongyang on a military aircraft on Aug. 16 to discuss the issue of three detained American citizens.

Experts said it is too early to predict whether the North's relations with the U.S. will improve in the foreseeable future, given that Washington is not likely to change its policy on Pyongyang ahead of the midterm elections in November. The White House said on Aug. 31 that U.S. policy on North Korea remains unchanged, which is that Pyongyang must demonstrate its commitment to ending its nuclear ambitions through action if it hopes to reopen negotiations with Washington.

Possibility of N. Korea-U.S. Contact

Nevertheless, Washington appears to be attempting to reach out to Pyongyang over the humanitarian issue of securing the release of U.S. nationals being detained in North Korea. The question on many analysts' minds now is whether dialogue over the detainees' release will pave the way to future negotiations or degenerate into a standoff after another battle of nerves.

The U.S. urged North Korea on Sept. 14 to release the three American citizens after Pyongyang's highest court sentenced one of them to six years of hard labor for committing "hostile" acts against the country. Matthew Todd Miller received the sentence during a

trial on Sept. 14 at the North's Supreme Court. Miller had been indicted on charges of tearing up his tourist visa and seeking asylum upon entering the North in April.

But the KCNA said Miller "committed acts hostile to the DPRK (North Korea) while entering the territory of the DPRK under the guise of a tourist."

The two others are Jeffrey Edward Fowle, who entered the North in late April and has since been detained for leaving a Bible in a hotel, and Kenneth Bae, a Korean-American missionary, who was detained in late 2012 and has since been sentenced to 15 years of hard labor for unspecified anti-state crimes.

North Korea has sought to use the detained Americans as leverage to reopen long-stalled nuclear negotiations with the U.S. Pyongyang arranged all three of them to be interviewed by the American news channel CNN and got them to ask Washington to send a special envoy.

Before that, speaking at a Washington think tank on Sept. 4, newly appointed six-party talks special envoy Sydney Seiler called the detainee issue a "significant obstacle" to relations with Pyongyang. The specific mention of the detainee issue as a humanitarian concern by Seiler, who took over North Korea duties at the State Department in September, was widely seen as unusual -- giving the impression that Washington was tying together the nuclear issue and humanitarian concerns, two areas traditionally kept separate.

In this critical situation, South Korea's presidential national security adviser Kim Kwan-jin traveled to Washington, D.C. from Sept. 13 to 16. Analysts here say it provided an opportunity for Seoul to persuade North Korea to open up to both the United States and the South. But sending Kim Kwan-jin to

Washington was seen as a move to strengthen cooperation with the United States as well as to prevent a situation in which Seoul may be excluded, experts say.

But there have not been any details available on talks between Kim and his U.S. counterpart, Susan Rice. After talks with U.S. Deputy Secretary of State William Burns in Washington, Kim said he and Burns discussed North Korea and its nuclear program but did not elaborate. Asked whether their discussions included the North's human rights record, Kim said he believes the issue will be dealt with at the United Nations.

South Korean Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se is scheduled to attend the U.N. General Assembly in September, and South Korean Defense Minister Han Min-koo is slated to visit Washington for the annual Security Consultative Meeting (SCM) in October. President Park is scheduled to attend the U.N. General Assembly to deliver a speech.

But it is still unclear whether there is any breakthrough for improving inter-Korean relations in the immediate future. North Korea's premier Pak Pong-ju said on Sept. 9, "We will do our best to improve North-South relations," in a televised speech in celebration of the 66th anniversary of the founding of the Communist state.

South Korea proposed that the two Koreas hold high-level talks in August to discuss the reunion of families separated by the 1950-53 Korean War and other bilateral issues. However, North Korea did not respond. It was not immediately clear whether Pak's conciliatory gesture represents a policy shift toward South Korea or whether it is just rhetoric not backed up by any action.

Premier Pak's comments came two days

after North Korea warned that its ties with Seoul won't improve unless the United States withdraws its troops from South Korea. About 28,500 American troops are stationed in South Korea to help deter possible military aggression by the North.

S. Korea's Efforts

In its latest provocations, North Korea on Sept. 6 fired three short-range missiles into the sea off its east coast. The firing marked the 19th time that North Korea has launched missiles or rockets so far this year, with the number of projectiles fired totaling 111, according to South Korea's military.

The South also hopes for another event to get families separated mostly by the 1950-53 Korean War temporarily reunited. The South imposed what are called the May 24 sanctions after the North torpedoed the Cheonan, a South Korean Navy corvette, in March 2010. The sanctions virtually cut off all economic and cultural exchanges between the two Koreas, except for a joint economic factory park in the North Korean border town of Kaesong.

Still, there are hurdles blocking the immediate resumption of the high-level inter-Korean talks. North Korea on Sept. 13 denounced South Korea's continued proposal to hold high-level talks, saying that Seoul should first stop all anti-Pyongyang hostile activities, including floating propaganda leaflets into its territory, before making such a "deceptive" offer.

The North has so far ignored the offer, as it ramped up criticism about Seoul's joint military exercises with the U.S. The North said that the propaganda campaign is "driving the present inter-Korean relations into a deeper mire of catastrophe." (Yonhap)

Action Programs for Inter-Korean Cooperation

S. Korea said it will consider allowing the resumption of inter-Korean cooperation projects and South Korean investment in North Korea if “conditions are created.”

■ By Kim Tae-shik

The South Korean government has released a set of detailed projects for economic cooperation with North Korea, including some massive infrastructure projects in the impoverished country, in the hope of improving inter-Korean relations through the Korean Peninsula trust process and making substantial preparations for the reunification of the two Koreas in the future.

In a report to the National Assembly, the Unification Ministry said on Aug. 18 the government will study renovating the expressway linking the North Korean border town of Kaesong to the capital, Pyongyang, and the railroad stretching from Kaesong to Sinuiju bordering China within this year on the premise that the conditions for those projects would be created and the strained Seoul-Pyongyang relations improve.

While checking the progress of inter-Korean relations, the government will push forward with the resumption of suspended inter-Korean trade and economic cooperation projects on a step-by-step basis, the ministry said, suggesting that inter-Korean economic projects which have been suspended by the so-called May 24 Measures can be resumed one by one depending on the progress of the improvement in inter-Korean relations. All inter-Korean trade and economic cooperation was suspended by the May 24 Measures taken following the North's sinking of the South Korean naval ship Cheonan in March 2010, which claimed the lives of 46 South Korean sailors.

The government said it will consider allowing the resumption of inter-Korean cooperation projects and South Korean investment in North Korea if “conditions are created” and consider renovations of roads and railroads in the North. Also included on the government's project list for consideration are flood prevention efforts for the North's Imjin River, assistance for North Korea's fisheries together with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and revitalization of inter-Korean maritime transportation.

These implementation programs are part of the 10 major tasks for 2014 under the Second Basic Plan for Inter-Korean Relations Development for the period of 2013 to 2017.

The ministry announced the basic plan in October 2013 but it was the first time that it revealed

Unification Minister Ryoo Kihl-jae presides over a meeting of the Inter-Korean Relations Development Committee at the government complex in Seoul on July 31 to review a plan to implement this year's projects of the 2013-2017 Basic Plan for Development of Inter-Korean Relations. (Yonhap)



concrete implementation projects as tasks for inter-Korean cooperation although it attached premises for favorable conditions.

Among the 10 tasks that should be intensively promoted are the opening of dialogue between the authorities of the two Koreas; settlement of humanitarian issues; expansion and deepening of mutually beneficial exchange and cooperation; development of the Kaesong industrial complex; the seeking of sustainable peace on the Korean Peninsula, including the settlement of North Korea's nuclear development; and preparation for national reunification.

Newly Suggested Cooperation Projects

The road and railroad renovations, the anti-flood project at Imjin River and the support for North Korea's fisheries industry are new projects the government has never announced.

The government also revealed its intention to help North Korea provide economic education to its people in concert with international nongovernmental organizations and seek joint development of the North's natural resources.

The ministry reported to the parliament it will establish ways to activate maritime transportation from South Korea's Busan port to North Korea's Rajin port and to Russia and consider completing the connection of an inter-Korean railroad for the Silk Road Express (SRX), a project to connect rail and road networks from South Korea to Europe, when the conditions are created for that purpose.

In addition, it will seek inter-Korean exchanges in various fields, such as the study and preservation of history, culture and arts and sports as means of restoring the homogeneity of the Korean people.

When conditions are met, the government plans to carry out projects to restore Korean culture, including joint excavation of the ancient Goguryeo Kingdom tombs and a joint exhibition of the four editions of the Joseon Wangjo Sillok, or the Chronicles of the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910).

The package plan also includes the government's previous proposals for inter-Korean exchanges -- the early holding of reunion events for families divided since the 1950-53 Korean War; settlement of the issues of Korean War prisoners and South Korean people abducted by the North, creation of a peace park in the demilitarized zone, humanitarian aid to North Korean people, development of the inter-Korean factory park in the North's border town of Kaesong; building up of political and military trust and the seeking of progress on North Korea's denuclearization.

In a related move, the government sent an invitation on Sept. 11 to North Korean authorities to participate in the 12th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity to be held in PyeongChang, South Korea, in October.

The invitation was a follow-up to President Park Geun-hye's package proposal on Aug. 15.

Park offered North Korea a set of package proposals for inter-Korean cooperation projects in her Liberation Day speech on Aug. 15 while urging Pyongyang again to give up its nuclear weapons programs and accept Seoul's offer of high-level talks meant to improve South-North relations.

The projects that Park called practical include those for cooperation on the environment, culture and infrastructure to improve people's livelihoods.

Park stressed that it is urgent to create a channel for environmental cooperation to reconnect and restore the severed ecosystem on the Korean Peninsula.

Starting from jointly managing the rivers and forests that run from the North to the South, it is necessary to expand mutually beneficial, cooperative projects, Park said in the message commemorating the 69th anniversary of Korea's liberation from Japanese colonial rule.

"To kick-start such a collaboration, I hope North Korea will participate in the 12th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity to be held in PyeongChang, South Korea, in October," she said. "I believe that the meeting will serve as a venue to seek ways to create a South-North environmental community, through in-depth discussions among professionals from both Koreas and many other nations."

She said a channel for the livelihoods of the people has to be opened and separated families have to be given chances to meet together.

Neither the unification ministry's implementation programs for inter-Korean cooperation nor Park's Liberation Day proposals are expected to be materialized in the immediate future as North Korea would not reply to Seoul's proposals, which have preconditions such as progress in North Korea's denuclearization and progress in South-North relations.

The proposals also lack two of North Korea's key demands -- the removal of the May 24 Measures and the resumption of inter-Korean tours to its scenic Mount Kumgang resort. The cross-border tour program carried out by South Korea's Hyundai Asan was suspended in 2008, after a South Korean tourist was shot dead by a North Korean soldier there.

North Korea has vehemently condemned the South's proposals and the demand to give up its nuclear weapons program.

President Park suggested that North Korea should follow in the footsteps of Kazakhstan in giving up its nuclear weapons and emulate Vietnam and Myanmar, which opted for reform and openness, noting that those countries enjoy peace and prosperity.

North Korea has repeatedly rejected similar international calls to end its nuclear program in return for diplomatic concessions and aid.

The socialist country has vowed to develop its economy and nuclear arsenal in tandem, viewing its nuclear program as a powerful deterrent against what it claims is Washington's hostile policy against it.

Pyongyang's Demands

The Rodong Sinmun, the North's main newspaper, said in an article on Aug. 17 that Park's address is a "window-dressing filled with hackneyed words as she repeated the preceding stand, having no solution to the inter-Korean relations," referring to the lack of mention of the May 24 Measures and the Mount Kumgang tour program.

The organ of the North's ruling Workers' Party of Korea claimed that the way to improve inter-Korean cooperation has been shut by the South's "anti-unification" May 24 Measures, adding that it is a great contradiction that Park mentioned opening the channels for cooperation but didn't talk about lifting the measures.

North Korea demanded on Sept. 15 that South Korea lift a set of economic sanctions and stop other "hostile" acts against Pyongyang as a precondition for high-level talks that Seoul has proposed.

In a commentary titled "Dialogue and confrontation can't be compatible each other," the North's Rodong Sinmun stressed that "the South's May 24 Measure and suspension of a tour program to Mount Kumgang are hampering efforts for inter-Korean reconciliation."

The newspaper also called on the South to halt regular joint military drills with the United States and remove "anti-reunification legal and systematic devices." "It's the very first step to open the door for dialogue," it said.

The government has repeatedly declared that it would not remove the economic sanctions unless Pyongyang takes responsible measures for the Cheonan sinking and North Korea's shelling of the South Korean border island of Yeonpyeong in 2010. North Korea has not admitted its responsibility for the two deadly provocations, claiming that South Korea fabricated the incidents.

Accordingly, it would be difficult to see these projects be put into practice any soon.

Nevertheless, North Korea experts say that the government's announcement of the massive cooperation projects, despite practical problems, may be a sort of strategy to lure North Korea to respond to the South's proposals for dialogue. South Korea has repeatedly urged North Korea to hold high-level talks to discuss a wide range of inter-Korean issues since it first made the proposal on Aug. 11, but the North has not responded to it.

Kim Yong-hyun, a professor at Dongguk University in Seoul, said the revelation seems to be aimed at suggesting the items that Seoul can offer to North Korea in economic cooperation in which the North is interested, although it is difficult for the projects to be realized right now. (Yonhap)

N. Korean Delegation at Incheon Asian Games

The public enthusiasm for the North Korean delegation participating in the Asiad was not so high in comparison with previous sports events held in South Korea.

The 17th Asian Games, a sports festival for 4.5 billion Asians, kicked off Sept. 19 for its 16-day run in the South Korean city of Incheon with a gala opening ceremony. The Asiad is an international sports festival to encourage harmony among Asians through athletic competition. All 45 member countries of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA), including North Korea, are participating, with about 15,000 athletes and staff, with athletes vying in 439 events in 36 sports and disciplines.

North Korea sent a 273-member delegation to this year's Asiad south of the border, including 150 athletes competing in 14 sports. They are hoping to win about 10 golds, in weightlifting, wrestling and women's football among others, to finish in the top 10.

Despite tense inter-Korean relations, North Korea's athletes got an unexpectedly rousing welcome at the opening ceremony. When the North Koreans appeared on the stage, a loud roar went up in the stadium. Wearing blue jackets and white pants, they waved back and boxing coach Sok Yong-bom, the North's flag bearer, shook the big leading flag toward the cheering crowd at the other side of the stadium.

The two countries are technically still at war, and a recent spike in tensions prompted speculation about what kind of reception the North's delegation would get at the gala

launch of the 17th Asiad. But the enthusiasm was not reciprocated, unlike with other teams who beamed and smiled. The North's athletes and officials managed only the slightest of grins as they paraded around the ground waving their flag.

Reactionless Athletes

The stern approach echoed the team's blank response to an athletes' village welcome ceremony on Sept. 18, when they looked on expressionless as a South Korean breakdance group spun and flipped to South Korean popstar Psy's hit "Gangnam Style."

The North Korean flag has already proved contentious at the Asian Games, with the Incheon organizers saying they will confiscate any found on South Koreans entering any of the venues.

Officials have also removed the North's flag from the streets around venues after anti-Pyongyang activists protested about having the emblem flying amongst them. Anyone waving the North's flag or singing the country's anthem in the South could face arrest, in accordance with Seoul's anti-communist National Security Law.

The Incheon Asian Games Organizing Committee said on Sept. 10 that it has "decided to display only OCA flags and the game

emblem on the streets with the national flags of participating countries to be hoisted only at game venues.” In previous international sports competitions, the participation of North Korea has been a favorable factor.

Reflecting this chilly mood, North Korea decided not to send its cheerleaders, which were another point of interest for the media and the public. During the Busan Asian Games in 2002 and the Daegu Universiade in 2003, the North Korean female cheerleaders offered entertaining performances. But this year, North Korea said on Aug. 28 that it could not send the squad, complaining about “unsatisfactory treatment” from South Korean officials. North Korea had initially planned to send 350 cheerleaders, apparently young beauties, to the 2014 Asian Games.

Waning Interest

Despite the chilly atmosphere, the North Korean delegation drew a lot of attention from the media ahead of the start of the Incheon Asian Games, but the public enthusiasm in the South was not so high in comparison with previous sports events held in South Korea.

The main North Korean delegation to the Asian Games, composed of 87 athletes and officials, arrived in South Korea by plane on Sept. 16. The main group, which took a rare direct flight across a sensitive inter-Korean maritime border, was led by Kim Yong-hun, head of the North’s Olympic Committee, and Son Kwang-ho, vice chairman of the same body.

The athletes and officials, clad in white jackets and blue bottoms, waved and smiled at members of the South-North Korean Joint Cheering Team.



A group of North Korean cheerers reacts as their men’s football team scores a goal against China during an Incheon Asian Games preliminary match in the South Korean port city on Sept. 15. (Yonhap)

The joint cheering squad held placards reading “Welcome North Korean athletes!” and “We are one” and flags showing images of the unified Korean Peninsula. The delegation, escorted by South Korean police, left for the Asiad athletes’ village without commenting. Several days earlier, the North’s first batch of 94 athletes and officials arrived in Incheon on Sept. 11.

North Korea has sent most of its high-ranking sports officials to South Korea to lead its delegation at the Asian Games and to engage in sports diplomacy, organizers and experts said on Sept. 17. Kim Yong-hun, who is little known to the outside world, was named the minister of Physical Culture and Sports of the communist country in May. He has been in charge of Pyongyang’s sporting sector under the Kim Jong-un regime. He is also the highest-ranking North Korean official to visit the South since 2009.

Kim is accompanied throughout his stay in South Korea by a handful of vice ministerial-level officials. Kim Pyong-sik, vice minister

of the sports department, takes the role of chief of the North Korean athletes. He brings a wealth of experience in the field both at home and abroad, according to the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA). Son Kwang-ho, vice chairman of the North's Olympic committee, along with its senior member, Jang Su-myong, are also on the list of the North Korean delegation to the Asiad.

Since taking office in late 2011, the North's young leader has put an emphasis on boosting both the sports sector and physical activities among the people, with a goal "to build a strong sports powerhouse." Experts say he aims to shed the country's image as one of the world's most impoverished nations and to create favorable public sentiment at home.

North Korean reporters covering the Incheon Asian Games rely on a rather antiquated piece of technology -- the fax machine -- to send their stories to Pyongyang. South Korea's strict National Security Law bans access to North Korean websites; and for the reporters, this makes it impossible to file their stories via the Internet.

Athletes under Control

Moreover, North Korean athletes and officials are having little contact with representatives of other countries or the media at the Asian Games. "Many athletes from foreign countries are visiting the Athletes' Village's amenities, such as the billiard saloon, cafeteria and Internet cafe, to spend their free time and relax. But we have not seen North Korean athletes yet," an official at the village said.

Most of the North Korean athletes have only been staying in their rooms, except for "special" occasions such as meals. The North

allegedly requested a guarantee of personal security and asked the media to refrain from making its athletes the subject of too much news coverage. Another source at the village said most of the North Korean athletes settle for looking outside through their windows much of the time.

Meanwhile, South Korean Unification Minister Ryoo Kihl-jae visited the athletes' quarters on Sept. 18, looked around the facilities and encouraged his officials working there. The Ministry of Unification, in charge of North Korean affairs for the Seoul government, has sent some 30 officials to the village to support the North's delegation and run a situation room on site. The source said Ryoo did not meet with the North Koreans during his visit. The village features 2,220 units in 22 new apartment buildings in three blocks.

On the eve of the Asian Games, athletes from North Korea were officially welcomed into the athletes' village on Sept. 18. At the welcoming ceremony, the flags of six countries were raised high at the village as the athletes vowed to meet their goals at the multi-sport event.

North Korea's flag was raised at the Asian Games athletes' village as athletes from the reclusive state, appearing at ease during their welcome ceremony, even found time to answer questions from inquisitive journalists.

The athletes at the ceremony, all dressed in white blazers and vivid blue pants or skirts, and wearing pin badges showing images of the country's deceased leaders, Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il, looked much more relaxed on the eve of the event's opening ceremony.

The North Korean flag, which is only allowed at official ceremonies and venues, was raised with the country's national anthem

playing, followed by those of five other nations -- China, Yemen, Bangladesh, Thailand and Singapore.

During the festival for Asians, South Korea went ahead on Sept. 15 with an annual event marking a landmark military operation carried out in this port city during the 1950-53 Korean War, despite North Korea's denouncement of the ceremony. A day earlier, North Korea's Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea, a government body handling affairs with Seoul, denounced the annual event marking the Incheon landing operation as an "unpardonable challenge" to the peace-promoting philosophy of the Incheon Asian Games as well as an "unbearable provocation" to the regime.

Earlier on Sept. 15, Seoul's defense ministry held the commemorative event as scheduled on the Yellow Sea island of Wolmi, which included a 20-minute simulation of the historic naval operation 64 years ago.

The Incheon landing mission, an amphibious operation led by U.S. Army Gen. Douglas MacArthur, is celebrated as one of the decisive Korean War battles here.

Loyalty to Leader

After the athletic competition began, North Korean weightlifter Kim Un-guk broke two world records on his way to victory in the men's 62-kilogram event on Sept. 21. Kim lifted a total of 332kg to break his own previous world record by 5kg, giving North Korea its second gold at the Asiad. North Korean weightlifter Om Yun-chol claimed his country's first gold medal at the 2014 Asian Games on Sept. 20 in a record-breaking fashion.

Kim had set the previous world record in

the total weight in winning the 2012 Olympic gold in London. "Breaking the world record is something all athletes wish for," the 25-year-old said during an interview. "I tried to set a better score than the one from the London Olympics, and I succeeded (this time)."

"North Korea's national flag flutters in my heart, and the only ones who can wear this flag on them are sports players," Kim added, gently laying his hand on his chest, where a design of the communist country's flag is sewn onto his uniform. Wrapped up in a large North Korean flag, the world champion wiped away tears as he stood listening to his home country's national anthem while standing at the top of the podium during the victory ceremony.

A day earlier, in the men's 56kg, Om lifted 170kg in the clean and jerk to break his own world record and captured the gold medal. Om broke his own world record with a lift of 170kg in the clean and jerk. He also hoisted 128kg in the snatch earlier for an Asian Games record total of 298kg.

Om, 22, had lifted 169kg during the Asian Senior Interclub Weightlifting Championship held in Pyongyang last year. This is the first career Asiad gold for Om, but the results were very much anticipated by many for the 2012 Olympic gold medalist and the 2013 world champ. "With our leader Kim Jong-un's teachings in mind, I pledged to do my best," the North Korean weightlifter said in an interview after his victorious feat.

A crowd of South Korean fans sat in the bleachers and cheered for the North Korean athlete, holding together a sign that read "Om Yun-chol is the best" in Korean, while shouting out his name and the phrase "We are one," to their northern neighbor. (Yonhap)

Pyongyang's Release of Human Rights Report

N. Korea's release of its human rights report suggests it may be feeling heavy pressure in the face of growing international criticism of its dire rights conditions.

■ By Lee Kwang-ho

North Korea has long been labeled one of the worst human rights violators in the world. But the communist nation has bristled at any talk of its human rights conditions, calling it a U.S.-led attempt to topple its regime.

After a barrage of criticism over its dismal human rights record, Pyongyang has recently taken an unexpected diplomatic step by tackling the human rights situation, an issue that will be discussed at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).

North Korea on Sept. 13 issued its own assessment of the country's policies that "guarantee genuine rights of the people." The release of such a document was a rare move by the socialist state.

Unexpected Diplomatic Step

The report prepared by its Association for Human Rights Studies glossed over the report by the United Nations Commission of Inquiry (COI) in February that detailed a wide array of systematic crimes against humanity, including those related to the regime's labor camps and the torture carried out on its own citizens.

The North's official Korean Central News

Agency (KCNA) carried the report, which asserted that Pyongyang enjoyed basic rights such as freedom of speech and religion, to highlight "efforts exerted by the country to protect and promote human rights."

The official news agency said the "all-inclusive" report written by the country's Association for Human Rights Studies "reflects the characteristics of the socialist system, human rights policy pursued in North Korea and its actual human rights performance."

According to the KCNA, the comprehensive, five-chapter report "aims to help the public properly know about the efforts exerted by the country to protect human rights, to lay bare the false and reactionary nature of the reckless anti-North Korean human rights racket, and to wipe out prejudice and misunderstanding."

The report, published along with several domestic institutions and non-governmental organizations, academic institutions and experts in various fields, includes the ideological foundation of its rights framework, the history of its development, major difficulties in its pursuit of the best policy and data on future prospects, it noted.

Observers in Seoul said the release of the report apparently suggests Pyongyang may be

feeling heavy pressure in the face of growing international criticism of its dire rights conditions. The communist regime does not tolerate dissent, holds hundreds of thousands of people in political prison camps across the nation and keeps tight control over outside information.

COI Report

North Korea's human rights record has drawn greater international attention after the U.N. Commission of Inquiry (COI) issued a report early this year. On Feb. 17, the COI released a report after a yearlong investigation in which it concluded that senior members of North Korea's military regime, including leader Kim Jong-un, had committed or overseen a broad range of crimes against humanity and advised the U.N. Security Council to bring the issue to the International Criminal Court (ICC). It described reports of victims being summarily executed, subject to rape, forced into abortions and persecuted for reasons, including political or religious beliefs.

In response, North Korea has defended itself through its latest report. Claiming that "the hostile forces are peddling the issue in a bid to tarnish its image and bring down the social system and ideology" and that it has never opposed dialogue on the matter. The North said the release of its own report shows its will to creditably fulfill its responsibility in the field of human rights and a positive measure to promote international cooperation.

"We will continue to exert our utmost efforts to foil the anti-North Korean human rights campaign of the hostile forces and meet all their challenges, step up the peaceful economic construction, steadily improve the people's living standard and thus provide the peo-



This image, taken on Feb. 13, shows U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry (L) and South Korean Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se attending a joint press conference after their talks in Seoul. (Yonhap)

ple with better conditions for enjoying their rights," according to the KCNA.

The association behind the report was established in 1992 and has played a role in countering international campaigns aiming to improve the communist country's rights situation and to protect defectors.

In this connection, Pyongyang's decision to send its foreign minister to attend a U.N. session for the first time in 15 years seems to have a more immediate purpose of countering the build-up of momentum toward global action against its human rights violations.

In late September, a ministerial-level meeting on the North's rights record is scheduled to be held in New York. This will be the first time a separate ministerial meeting on North Korean human rights will be held along the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly session, which U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry will attend.

South Korean Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se and Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida are also scheduled to attend the U.N. General Assembly session, as is North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Su-yong. The North Korean minister's presence appears to be

indicative of Pyongyang's intention to come out of isolation.

The United States is working toward passing a U.N. resolution on North Korea's human rights situation, which is likely to be supported by Japan and the European Union, according to diplomatic sources. However, North Korea may be looking to combat such a move.

Kang Sok-ju, a veteran North Korean diplomat and a secretary of the central committee of the Workers' Party, made a rare visit to Europe recently, during which he met with officials of Germany, Belgium, Switzerland and Italy. Human rights was a key issue in discussions in Brussels with Elmar Brok, the chairman of the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs.

A diplomatic source in Washington told Yonhap News Agency that Kerry's decision to attend the event reflects his commitment to speak out about the North's human rights issue. In his Asia policy speech in August, Kerry called strongly for an immediate shutdown of all North Korean political prison camps, known as "gulags," stressing that such "deprivation of human dignity just has no place in the 21st century."

Sydney Seiler, a new U.S. special envoy for the six-party talks, hinted at the possibility of taking a "two-track approach" by linking nuclear weapons and human rights as policy goals.

Analysts also said Pyongyang's remarkable shifts -- as seen in the dispatch of its foreign minister to the UNGA for the first time in 15 years, releasing its own voluminous reports on human rights and confronting the global community's increasing anxiety with a willingness to accept dialogues on human rights with other countries -- seem to be a reaction to the hostile atmosphere toward North Korea.

They say that North Korea's latest move is a noticeable departure from the past, when it showed knee-jerk reactions to outside pressure by branding it as outright "interference with internal affairs and an attempt to subvert the nation."

Seeking U.N. Resolution

Recently, a group of former American officials, scholars and activists sent a letter to Kerry, urging him to participate in the event, saying his participation would help generate widespread support of a strong U.N. General Assembly resolution on the North's human rights record.

"A side event in particular ... would provide an excellent opportunity for ministerial-level discussion of the key findings of the Commission of Inquiry's report, and help lay the groundwork for widespread support of a strong UNGA resolution," they said in the letter.

The Center for Strategic and International Studies made the letter public on Sept. 12. The group of 14 people, who undersigned the letter, included former U.S. Assistant Secretaries of State Morton Abramowitz and Lorne Craner; Victor Cha, chief analyst on Korea at the CSIS; and Roberta Cohen, co-chair of the Committee for Human Rights in North Korea.

The group also welcomed the U.S. interest in co-sponsoring a draft resolution on North Korea currently being written by Japan and the European Union.

They stressed that the text must contain language urging the Security Council to consider new targeted sanctions against those who are most responsible for crimes against humanity, prioritize the commission's call for immediate access to North Korea's prison camps for human

rights monitors and humanitarian groups, and endorse the creation of a field-based office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

“The human rights situation (in North Korea) remains incredibly poor, and we want to bring other countries together to draw attention to it to see if we can help push to get some change,” State Department deputy spokeswoman Marie Harf said at a Foreign Press Center briefing on Sept. 15.

But she declined to provide specifics of the meeting, saying details will be fleshed out over the coming days. “We’ve talked about this at the U.N. before. We’ve talked about it in other bodies as well,” she said. “Look at an American citizen who was sentenced to a fairly severe sentence in North Korea for something that in most other countries wouldn’t even be something you got arrested for.”

She was referring to Matthew Todd Miller, sentenced by the North’s highest court to six years of hard labor on Sept. 13 for tearing up his tourist visa and seeking asylum upon entering the North in April. He is one of three U.S. citizens in custody there. The widespread view is that Pyongyang is using the detained Americans as leverage to reopen talks with the U.S.

The two other Americans are Jeffrey Edward Fowle, who entered the North in late April and has since been detained for leaving a Bible in a hotel, and Kenneth Bae, a Korean-American missionary who was detained in late 2012 and has since been sentenced to 15 years of hard labor for unspecified anti-state crimes.

Pyongyang’s UNCRC Entry

Controversy over the North’s dire human rights record is nothing new. But the international community’s concern grows ever deeper

after a compelling resolution was adopted by the COI. The commission is determined to set up a U.N. body solely aimed at dealing with North Korea after establishing a mechanism for penalizing human rights violators according to international law. As a result, a U.N. office devoted to monitoring North Korean human rights will open in Seoul.

In a related development, North Korea signed the optional United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) protocol, the Voice of America (VOA) reported on Sept. 11, quoting the United Nations. The U.N. noted that the North’s bureau director for its foreign ministry, Ja Song-nam, attended a signing event at the U.N. headquarters on Sept. 11.

The optional protocol is an international treaty that contains 17 clauses related to child trafficking, prostitution and pornography. The treaty also contains specific regulations, punishment measures and global cooperation guidelines regarding victimized children.

The reclusive country’s signing was initiated in May during a Universal Periodic Review at a U.N. Human Rights Council meeting in Geneva. The council advised the North to consider ratifying the protocol. Accepting the convention, North Korea is to submit in two years a report regarding the steps it has taken to carry out the protocol. The U.N.’s Committee of the Rights of the Child will examine it before putting the convention into effect.

The North’s authorization of the protocol for children’s rights along with the convention for the Rights of the Disabled in July are prompting speculation that the cloistered country is seeking to ward off international criticism about its alleged human rights violations. (Yonhap)

THAAD Deployment in South Korea

Washington has made no secret that it is considering deploying a Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) battery, an integral part of its MD system, to South Korea, citing evolving threats from North Korea.

■ By Kim Tae-shik

The United States has wrapped up its survey of candidate sites for its advanced missile-defense (MD) system to be deployed in South Korea, with a final decision on the deployment likely to be made before their annual defense ministers' meeting in October, sources in Seoul recently said.

Washington has made no secret that it is considering deploying a Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) battery, an integral part of its MD system, to South Korea, citing evolving threats from North Korea, although it is the official stance of the U.S. administration that nothing has been decided regarding the controversial issue.

THAAD is designed to shoot down short-, medium- and intermediate-range ballistic missiles at a higher altitude in their terminal phase using a hit-to-kill method.

"Earlier this year, the U.S. carried out a site survey on several locations in Asia, including South Korea, for the possible deployment of the THAAD battery and its military effects in the region," a source well-versed in the issue told Yonhap News Agency on Sept. 1, adding that the survey was the second of its kind after

the first one in 2012.

For its own strategic consideration, South Korea has been pushing to develop its own missile shield system, the Korean Air and Missile Defense (KAMD) system.

South Korea, however, has said that it does not oppose Washington's plan to deploy the THAAD here "in order to protect its troops stationed here." About 28,500 U.S. troops are currently stationed in South Korea, a legacy of the 1950-53 Korean War.

Final Decision Imminent

"The two countries were supposed to make a final decision this summer on the THAAD deployment here," another source from the U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) said, noting that "chances are high that the allies will fix the details as early as October before their annual defense ministers' talks, as I understand it." The annual Security Consultative Meeting (SCM) involving the defense chiefs from the two nations is slated for mid-October in Washington.

Local newspapers also reported the Seoul-

Visiting U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert O. Work speaks to members of the U.S. Army at Osan Air Base in Pyeongtaek, south of Seoul, on Aug. 21. He stressed the importance of the theater missile defense system for the Seoul-Washington alliance against North Korean provocations. (Yonhap)



Washington consultations on the deployment of THAAD are in the final stages and that an announcement will come shortly.

Quoting diplomatic and military sources in Washington, the daily *Munhwa Ilbo* in Seoul said on Sept. 2 the U.S. has selected South Korea as one of the sites for the preferential deployment of THAAD and started production of key devices for the system.

The paper also said the two countries would have an in-depth consultation on the THAAD deployment in South Korea during a visit to Washington by the country's top national security adviser, Kim Kwan-jin, in September.

Kim discussed a wide range of North Korea issues, including South Korea's 2010 sanctions on the socialist country and the North's nuclear program, when he held talks with his U.S. counterpart Susan Rice in Washington, the sources said.

Kim met with Rice and some top security and diplomacy officials during his visit on Sept. 14-17, but there were no reports about discussions on the THAAD deployment.

"The allies will soon wrap up their discus-

sion on the deployment. The two are expected to officially announce it through a meeting of foreign and defense chiefs in October," the paper quoted the source as saying.

South Korean Defense Minister Han Min-koo will also visit Washington in October to attend the SCM, to be followed by a meeting of the allies' foreign and defense chiefs, called the "2+2 meeting."

The vernacular daily *DongA Ilbo* also reported that the U.S. is considering Pyeongtaek, 70 kilometers south of Seoul, as the most feasible site to station the THAAD battery in South Korea.

Quoting a top U.S. defense department source, *DongA* said Seoul and Washington are in their final stages of consultation over the deployment of THAAD in South Korea and that the allies would officially announce the decision in the SCM or the meeting of the defense and foreign ministers of the two countries in October.

"Pyeongtaek, which is scheduled to become new home to the American military's Yongsan Garrison currently in central Seoul, and the

2nd U.S. Infantry Division on the border (with North Korea), would be a top candidate for the deployment as the region would be a hub of the U.S. Armed Forces,” said the source, adding that the U.S. needs to protect its troops and their families from continuous threats from North Korea.

The relocation of U.S. bases in and north of Seoul to Pyeongtaek is slated for the end of 2016 in accordance with an agreement signed by the two allies in 2004.

Pentagon's Stance

A top official at Seoul's defense ministry, however, said that the news reports have not been confirmed.

Kim Min-seok, spokesman for the ministry, said on Sept. 5 that the U.S. defense department confirmed that it has made no decision about the THAAD deployment in South Korea.

Kim also said the Pentagon confirmed that there were no requests from the South Korean government or consultations between the two allies about the deployment.

The request for THAAD deployment in South Korea was made by the USFK and the U.S. defense department has not made any decision on the request, Kim stressed.

In Washington, Pentagon press secretary Rear Adm. John Kirby told reporters on Sept. 2 the U.S. and South Korea are continuing to discuss how best to defend the Korean Peninsula from North Korean threats, but he declined to discuss specifics on the issue of missile defense.

“We are in constant consultation with our allies on the peninsula about the requirements to defend the peninsula appropriately,” Kirby

said at a press briefing in response to a question from Yonhap News Agency whether the U.S. intends to deploy the battery despite opposition from China and Russia.

“I just don't have anything for you today,” he said.

The U.S. move has been a source of controversy, as it is widely seen as a push on South Korea to join its costly MD system and share the burden. Deploying one unit is expected to cost some 2 trillion won (\$1.98 billion).

In a press conference in Seoul on Aug. 21, visiting U.S. Deputy Defense Secretary Robert O. Work said the U.S. hopes “to have an extremely interoperable system between the United States' theater missile defense and the KAMD,” though he did not elaborate further.

The United States has no objection to South Korea's plan to develop its own missile defense system but hopes that it would be interoperable with the existing U.S. system, the senior U.S. official said

Work's visit to the Asia-Pacific region, including South Korea, Guam, Hawaii and Japan, seemed to “have something to do with the THAAD battery,” another source said, requesting anonymity.

Earlier in May, a top U.S. military official called for closer cooperation with Seoul and Tokyo to thwart missile threats from North Korea.

“We're encouraging our allies and partners to acquire their own missile defenses and to strengthen regional missile defense cooperation that will result in better performance than individual countries acting alone,” Adm. James Winnefeld, vice-chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff, said at the Atlantic Council's global missile-defense conference in Washington on May 28.

Citing the North's intercontinental ballistic missiles, Winnefeld said the Pentagon is considering deploying more missile-defense systems in the Asia-Pacific region, in addition to a THAAD unit on Guam, to counter North Korea.

His remarks come one day after the Wall Street Journal reported that Washington is considering a plan to deploy the THAAD system in South Korea. The remarks also followed the passage of a bill for the 2015 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) in the U.S. House of Representatives on May 22, which requires the secretary of defense to explore ways to strengthen trilateral cooperation with South Korea and Japan on ballistic missile defense, including system integration and more information sharing.

The 2015 NDAA stipulates that, "The Secretary of Defense shall conduct an assessment to identify opportunities for increasing missile defense cooperation among the United States, Japan and the Republic of Korea."

It calls on the secretary to evaluate such candidate areas as "greater information sharing, systems integration and joint operations," and submit a report to Congress no later than 180 days after the act goes into effect.

Seoul's defense ministry, however, said it has not been notified by the U.S. of the relevant issue, simply stressing that it will look into the matter should Washington send any official request.

Criticism over Deployment Plan

The U.S. move to deploy the system in South Korea has been condemned not only by North Korea but is also opposed by China and Russia.

North Korea criticized the United States for seeking to deploy the advanced missile-defense system in South Korea.

Pyongyang accused the U.S. of exacerbating the security situation on the peninsula by pushing for the establishment of the THAAD system.

Pyongyang's state-controlled media claimed the move is part of Washington's military strategy aimed at destroying the "strategic balance" in the region and overpowering other countries.

"China, which views the U.S. THAAD system to be deployed in South Korea as targeting it, issued warnings several times," the North's main newspaper, the Rodong Sinmun, said on Sept. 2. "China has made preparations for dealing with it in case of an emergency situation."

The U.S. push for a missile-defense system in the South has put not only the peninsula but also Northeast Asia in great danger, the paper claimed.

China and Russia also have expressed opposition to the U.S. move, seeing it as a threat to their national and security interests, though American officials have said the country's missile system is purely defensive and is not aimed at those countries.

Critics in South Korea have also claimed the planned deployment is part of a broader U.S. attempt to get the Asian ally to join its missile-defense system. Seoul has said it won't join the U.S. system, and will instead develop its own missile-defense system. (Yonhap)

North Korea's Dash toward Sports Power

“Kim Jong-un has been striving to promote sports, with a goal of building a sports powerhouse. Good performances in international competitions are a crucial means for North Korea to enhance its status in the international arena.”

North Korea has been making all-out efforts to promote its sports and foster its athletes in order to make the country a sports powerhouse as a means of accomplishing its goal of building a socialist “kangsong taeguk” or a great, prosperous and powerful nation, since young leader Kim Jong-un took the helm of the reclusive country in late 2011.

Kim, himself an avid sports fan, has made vigorous attempts to boost sports and create a sports fever among the people, making frequent visits to sports facilities under the name of “field guidance” and instructing officials to renovate obsolete sports facilities and build new ones.

He also encouraged meritorious athletes and coaches and ordered officials to give various favors to sports figures to raise their morale.

Statistics from the South’s Unification Ministry showed that Kim appeared at sports events 25 times in the first 11 months of 2013, compared with only six appearances in the previous year.

Of those 25 visits, 16 were made in the latter half of the year, indicating his activities were getting brisker.

The Rodong Sinmun, the North’s main newspaper, said in September 2013 that Kim made 16 public appearances in August and eight of them were for sports events.

In September 2013, Kim visited the Pyongyang Gymnasium, the largest indoor sports facility in North Korea, which has just completed its renovation work.

The (North) Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) also reported that Kim, along with his wife, Ri Sol-ju, watched the 2013 Asian Cup weightlifting championships in Pyongyang on Sept. 15.

Kim watched a basketball game with Dennis Rodman, a former National Basketball Association star, who visited Pyongyang in early September and met with table tennis players who won the mixed doubles event of the World Table Tennis Championships in late August.

Koh Yu-hwan, a professor of North Korea studies at Seoul’s Dongguk University, said that sports is a kind of ruling skill in North Korea and that the North Korean leader seems to be trying to defuse people’s political dissatisfaction by boosting sports fever.

At the order of Kim, North Korea started

remodeling the May Day Stadium in Pyongyang last year and 75 percent of the work has been finished as of July. The 150,000-seat stadium is North Korea's largest sports facility.

The KCNA reported that soldier-builders finished the plastering and painting of office rooms and corridors covering tens of thousands of square meters and installing tiles covering thousands of square meters and that ministries and national institutions, charged with landscaping the vicinity of the stadium, have made big efforts to tending fields with new species of turf and trees.

Face-lifts for Sports Facilities

Kim ordered the remodeling when he visited the stadium in September 2013. The KCNA said Kim instructed the changing of entire seats in the stands, along with the implanting of rubber boards and artificial turf that meet international standards and the installation of lighting facilities for night games. North Korea's top officials, including Choe Ryong-hae, then director of the General Political Bureau of the Korean People's Army, accompanied Kim on his visit to the stadium.

Kim also showed deep interest in promoting soccer and the North Korean soccer team's participation in international events has been brisk ever since.

The KCNA reported in May that supreme leader Kim sent synthetic grass for football training grounds to various sports teams and football teams, including Amnokgang Sports Team, Kigwancha Sports Team, Pyongyang Sports Team and Sonbong Football Team.

Seeing the fashionable training grounds that seem to be covered with blue carpets, officials,



North Korean leader Kim Jong-un (second from L) claps while watching an "inspection" game of the North's national football squad for the Incheon Asian Games in this undated image released by the KCNA on July 20. (Yonhap)

players and coaches vowed to make positive contributions to the development of North Korean football by raising a strong wind for training, the KCNA said.

Kim also "inspected" soccer games, including games of male, female and young soccer teams.

North Korea watchers in Seoul said the special effort of North Korea to promote soccer is designed to attribute the development of the most favorite sports among the people to Kim's leadership.

While watching a soccer game in April, Kim instructed officials to hold soccer games often and stressed that the promotion of sports is an important task to promote the dignity and honor of the Songun Joson (military-first North Korea).

When North Korea designated Kim as the heir to his father, the late Kim Jong-il, in June 2009 and the country qualified for the 2010 World Cup final round, North Korea presented various honors to the members of its national soccer team.

North Korea also built a luxurious apartment complex for athletes and their families

along the picturesque bank of the Pothong River in Pyongyang last year as a gift from Kim Jong-un for meritorious athletes.

Rewards for Athletes

The KCNA said the apartment was equipped with a set of household appliances, high-class furniture and there are amenities such as a medical clinic, restaurant and laundry in the complex.

Among the athletes who moved to the apartment were table tennis player Kim Jong, World Weightlifting Championships gold medalist Sol Gyong, soccer coach Kim Gwang-min and table tennis coach Kim Chol-ung.

In a ceremony of awarding entrance certificates for the flats, Kim Ki-nam, secretary of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK), said "the houses reflect Marshal Kim Jong-un's great expectation that the sports persons will display ardent enthusiasms and faithfully uphold the WPK's idea on turning the DPRK (North Korea) into a sports power."

He stressed the need for officials in the sports field, players and coaches to make contributions to demonstrating the dignity and honor of Songun (military-first) Korea with gold medals.

Riding on the "sports fever" led by the country's top leader, North Korean athletes also made brisk participation in international sports competitions and reaped handsome results. North Korea participated in 19 major international events in 2013, including the East Asian Cup Soccer Competition held in Seoul in July.

The Pyongyang Radio reported that North

Korean athletes won 360 medals in about 60 international competitions in the first 10 months of 2013, more than four times the number of medals the country won in the previous year.

Quoting officials of the State Physical Culture and Sports Guidance Commission, the radio said big accomplishments in the sports area are being made continuously this year.

The commission officials said the brilliant accomplishments in the sports area were attributable to the wise leadership of Kim Jong-un, chairman of the National Defense Commission (NDC), and stressed that "Chairman Kim established the powerful leadership of the state sports systematically that can build a sports power."

Kim established the State Physical Culture and Sports Guidance Commission under the powerful NDC in November 2012.

More recently, North Korea is making fresh investments in various sports, including diving, roller skating, trampoline and cycling tours in the hopes of competing in international events, while spending money to foster young athletes, in particular.

Early this year, North Korea set up associations for roller skating, roller figure skating and trampoline. In May 2013, North Korea hosted its version of the Tour de France cycling event in Pyongyang, while it dispatched a team of athletes to the 2012 Paralympics in London for the first time.

North Korea also became a regular member of the International Paralympic Committee in 2013.

North Korea sent a 273-member delegation, including 150 athletes, to the Asian Games that kicked off on Sept. 19 in South Korea's western port city of Incheon. The North's del-

egation was led by Kim Yong-hun, the North's sports minister and head of the North's Olympic Committee.

The North Korean squad includes North Korea's global stars who have won medals in Olympic and world championships, including weightlifters Om Yun-chol and Kim Un-guk.

As was the case in recent days, those who win medals in the Asian Games are expected to be rewarded, possibly with homes and fancy cars.

Honorary titles are also expected for the gold medalists, which would entitle them to a pension, according to North Korea watchers. Last year, the country conferred on female marathoner Kim Kum-ok and her coach the title of "the athlete of the people."

A gold medal will also earn athletes a ticket to meet the country's leader, Kim Jong-un. Kim met and encouraged the members of the women's national football team last year after they returned home with a gold from the 2013 EAFF Women's East Asian Cup.

In addition, North Korea will hold a massive sports competition in October. The Rodong Sinmun said on Sept. 18 the country will hold a nationwide social sports event from Oct. 1 to 10 in Pyongyang. Athletes selected from provinces and large cities like Pyongyang, Rason and Nampho will participate in the competition, the second of its kind since the inaugural competition was held in October 2013.

Development of Sporting Goods

North Korea also is stepping up its efforts to develop international-standard sports appliances, such as balls, shoes and socks.

The KCNA reported on Sept. 5 that the

Athletic Apparatus Institute under the Academy of Sports Science recently developed a new type of marathon shoes.

A pair of the shoes weighs 139g. The bottom of the shoes is made of elastic materials and their outer rims are made of flexible and ventilative materials.

North Korean media also introduced the development of new footballs and shoes for footballers, while the country produced new uniforms to be worn by athletes participating in the Asian Games.

Meanwhile, North Korea's recent development of sports equipment was mainly targeted for young athletes who belong to youth sports schools across the country.

The "Choeusu (ace)" football and socks which North Korea boasted to be the highest-class are originally planned to be supplied to youth sports schools, reflecting the North Korean leader's highest interest in rearing young sports elites.

North Korean television stations also started reporting the results of youth national athletic championships for the first time this year, indicating the status of youth sports was elevated than before.

North Korea watchers say the promotion of sports in the North is aimed at improving the image of the North Korean leader and to strengthen the unity of its people while diverting their discontent away from the leadership.

"Leader Kim has been striving to promote sports, with a goal of building a sports powerhouse," said Kim Yong-hyun, a North Korea expert at Seoul's Dongguk University. "Good performances by its athletes in international competitions are a crucial means for the reclusive regime to enhance its national status in the international arena," he added. (Yonhap)

Effectiveness of U.N. Sanctions on North Korea

Country reports are a valuable source of information to understand how the international community contributes to effective implementation of sanctions on North Korea.

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North Korea has recently been subject to a greater amount of economic pressure than ever. The United States and European Union (EU) have gone beyond United Nations (U.N.) sanctions and imposed even tougher measures against North Korea. Financial companies were encouraged to use caution in dealing with not only companies listed on the U.N. sanctions list but all North Korean companies and individuals. China came on board with stepped-up restrictions in 2013 by increasing custom checks on goods destined for North Korea following the requirements of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions. However, the volume of North Korea's arms sales increased by 20 percent in 2012. According to the HIS Balance of Trade Report issued in February 2014, North Korea has engaged in US\$11 million of arms sales in 2013. Indeed, exports of ballistic missile to Egypt, Syria, Iran and Myanmar drew attention from international observers; and anti-tank guided missiles, in particular, showing up in the Middle East reveal North Korea's involvement in the arms trafficking market.

Undoubtedly, there is a gap between the desired outcome and reality. The Panel of Experts report dated March 6, 2014 mentioned that it could not determine if the level of prohibited activities decreased or increased because not all inspections and seizures of prohibited items are immediately reported to the U.N. Sanctions Committee and North Korea is found to be involved in services or assistance related to the manufacture, maintenance or use of arms. The report stressed that North Korea is increasingly using multiple and tiered circumvention techniques and hence recommended that the Security Council make additions to the list of prohibited military goods as well as individuals and entities subject to sanctions. The investigation of foreign-sourced items found in the Unha-3 long-range rocket debris shows that off-the-shelf items or items just below prohibited parameters were assembled.

Even though the U.N. sanctions aimed to discourage North Korea from developing nuclear and missile programs and taking actions that threaten regional peace, it has not effectively served this purpose.

Uneven Implementation of UNSC Resolutions

Currently, economic sanctions on North Korea serve as coercive diplomacy which offers an alternative to reliance on military action. However, uncertainties are associated with U.N. sanctions. First, North Korea might not consider sanctioning states' resolve seriously and might not back off. Second, North Korea can use the economic damage to arouse anger from its population in the face of an external enemy. Third, countermoves can weaken the willingness of the sanctioning states. Another problem is that sanctions are interactive in nature. North Korea can move so as to alter the perceived costs and benefits associated with its actions with the expectation of relenting pressure by increasing credibility of its nuclear threats.

To achieve the desired outcome of U.N. sanctions to stop North Korea from further missile and nuclear development and persuade Pyongyang to show cooperative behavior, it should be considered whether the potency and credibility of sanctions is sufficient; whether sanctions limit options available to North Korea; whether international demands infringe on North Korea's major, not vital, interests; and whether diplomatic efforts are sought for. Examining how UNSC resolutions have developed and how compliant U.N. member states are to those resolutions helps us assess whether the international pressures effectively

deter North Korea's illicit activities. This can be examined based on an assessment of country reports submitted to the Sanctions Committee. It would be a mistake to overplay the importance of these reports because many of them are unable to produce sufficiently detailed reports on national actions. However, country reports are a valuable source of information to understand how the international community contributes to effective implementation of sanctions on North Korea.

The UNSC resolution has expanded the scope of actions and strengthened enforcement measures. However, the gap between the language on paper and practice on the ground should not be overlooked. Country reports show that implementation has been unevenly carried out. The problem is that the slowness of implementing sanctions can give North Korea time to adjust psychologically and otherwise, thereby undermining the coercive effect. As of July 2014, the number of reports from U.N. member states pursuant to Paragraph 22 of Resolution 1874 (2009) and Paragraph 25 of Resolution 2094 (2013) were 74 and 35, respectively. Among 74 reports to the Committee, only 16 reports were submitted within the deadline. The overall number of reporting member states in compliance with Resolutions 1718, 1874, and 2094 is now 97, which means that over half of the U.N. member states have yet to report on the implementation of resolution.

The level of cooperation varies among those who submitted reports pursuant to UNSC resolutions 1874 and 2094. Sanction implementation of 26 states was limited to expressing their endorsement or distributing notifications domestically. Only 21 states indicated that enforcement measures were established by

national authorities. The scope of implementation also varies widely. In the case of measures that are relatively easy to conduct, member states informed implementation measures by their national authorities. These include arms embargo and financial restrictions, and 63 and 60 countries mentioned measures to enforce arms embargo and financing in their reports, respectively. However, for other measures that involve operation risk and cost such as cargo inspection and monitoring of persons fewer member state reported measures undertaken at the national level. Only 43 states reported on cargo inspection related measures, and 37 states reported on monitoring of designated persons.

Key to the success of U.N. sanctions on North Korea is encouraging states with substantial trade links to North Korea. However, not all of North Korea's major trading partners and states with diplomatic relations with North Korea filed reports to the Committee. Taiwan and Hong Kong, which are not member states of the U.N., are the sixth and seventh largest trading partners with North Korea, respectively, and it is unknown how U.N. sanctions are implemented in these regions. Most states that have North Korean embassies do not fully implement UNSC resolutions. One out of 10 North Korea's major trading partners (China, Russia, India, Thailand, Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Ukraine, Brazil and Bangladesh) in 2013 respects its full obligation to comply with the UNSC Resolutions 1874 and 2094.

North Korea has limited ties with the international community and there are only 24 embassies in Pyongyang. Only half the countries having embassies in North Korea submitted their country reports and even these countries issuing reports to the U.N. undertake lim-

ited actions.

The national implementation reports submitted by those having diplomatic missions of North Korea vary considerably in content. Six countries took actions limited to notifying the relevant authorities. Only seven countries limited their actions to arms embargo or/and financial sanctions. Only four countries implemented measures in full scope, and three countries did not mention any action implemented domestically in their reports. Such uneven practices by U.N. member states may weaken credibility of punishment for North Korea's noncompliance, which is not conducive to the successful application of coercive diplomacy against Pyongyang.

Limits of Sanctions Regime

Admittedly, global governance is not perfect. North Koreans can use air and sea routes with little risk of inspection. North Korea reportedly has access to some Southeast Asian ports as routes of transporting prohibited items. However, a significant number of member states in Asia take a minimalist approach to sanctions. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is currently pursuing the establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community through integrating industries across the region to promote regional sourcing. Such efforts include streamlining business process for faster cargo clearance to prepare for implementation of the ASEAN Single Window. Transactions of prohibited items are not subject to the same level of scrutiny globally, and most ASEAN countries lack dual-use control legislation and specific regulations regarding catch-all provisions, crucial components of export controls. Besides, due dili-

gence requirements in Asia are not as stringent as those in the West. Because previous U.N. sanctions have made international banks avoid transactions with North Korea, a large portion of North Korea's foreign trade is done on a cash basis, which creates troubles with tracking the flow of funds to and from North Korea.

States have different trans-shipment policies. In the case of transit, a cargo enters the transportation hub and leaves on the same vessel. In the case of trans-shipment, a cargo is off-loaded, and then is loaded onto a second vessel. Since the cargo does not enter states' customs territory, it becomes harder for national authorities to keep records of those cargoes leaving ports. Traditional illicit trade hubs are the United Arab Emirates (UAE), China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan, and Turkey. North Korea's trade with these countries amounts to 71 percent of its international trade. Not only relaxed oversight by local authorities, but also trans-shipment traffic, complex business links, inadequate information technology systems and differing priorities are of great concern.

The key to effective sanctions depends on a nation's ability to take domestic measures, meaning that the level of states' compliance hinges on the states' willingness and capacity to meet the international standards. Whether or not states observe the UNSC decision depends on practices of national authorities after transmitting the texts of resolutions to the relevant entities.

Not all reports mention follow-up measures such as collecting data from the relevant ministries and other state bodies to evaluate practices and prosecution of any case in violation of UNSCRs. Whether national courts can

exercise jurisdiction over which criminal acts differs between states. If a state has a broad mandate, it can effectively deal with special offences for the breach of UNSCRs. Therefore, bureaucratic culture, communication system, staffing, and law enforcement mechanism are all crucial.

Has the united voice of the international community been delivered to North Korea? The UNSC held extensive discussions on the issue of authorizing military enforcement under Chapter 7, Article 42 of the U.N. Charter and the extent of cargo inspections.

The fact that the Chinese refused to include military enforcement in the resolution indicates that China fears an escalation of tension and a possible use of force against North Korea. China finds its own national interests in maintaining stability on the Korean Peninsula more important than forcing Pyongyang to the brink of collapse. Its intent is communicated, although not spoken. North Korea knows that the penalty for noncompliance is likely to be something short of a war.

Is the motivation of the sanctioning states stronger than North Korea's? The intensity of North Korea's resolve may be superior to that of the U.N. member states participating in the U.N. sanctions. North Korean leader Kim Jong-un is currently capitalizing on the development of missile and nuclear weapons capability as a means to legitimize his regime. The Workers' Party of Korea Central Committee Plenary Meeting on March 31, 2013 adopted a new policy line of parallel economic construction and nuclear weapons development. North Korea continued to warn that it had diversified its precision nuclear strike means and stress that its simultaneous pursuit of both economic development and nuclear weapons capabilities

are non-negotiable.

Is North Korea vulnerable to international pressure? The regime has strengthened government functions by controlling the flow of money, and hence the fifth column effect is minimal. On the other hand, the rally-around-the-flag effect is observable in North Korea as people attended a rally where they declared to be ready to fire long-range nuclear-armed missiles at the United States. North Korea's nationalist response indicates that leadership uses the U.N. sanctions to strengthen domestic support from the populace, place the blame for economic instability on the outsider, and direct resentment toward those who have imposed the sanctions.

Are inducements combined with sanctions? Realistically, the magnitude of the positive inducement can stretch from providing North Korea with a face-saving way out of a crisis to an extensive settlement through quid pro quo. To ensure reciprocity, one should understand that a fully calibrated carrot-and-stick diplomacy should be prepared. If North Korea is unsure that reciprocation will follow, it may question whether the costs of the concessions are worth the return.

Therefore, decision-makers should be advised based on understanding the step-by-step linkages between giving incentives and receiving concessions. This approach is not at all incompatible with South Korea's trust-building process.

Conclusion

North Korea seems to be more motivated to coerce others than is the international community in relative terms. The United States believes that the new sanctions will bite hard,

but North Korea may choose to accept economic losses in anticipation of achieving overriding political goals. It is difficult to completely isolate North Korea from potential markets for exports. Market readjustment allows North Korea to pave ways to generate income out of arms sales. Sanctions raise the costs of conducting trade and finance as North Korea has to charter roundabout ways, but developing new export markets by offering increased interest payments and discount prices is not at all impossible. States with less interest in sanctioning North Korea can be potential business partners.

In order to increase coercive credibility, sanctions should be backed by strong political will. Continuous monitoring of the effectiveness of sanctions based on analytical efforts and monitoring how North Korea seeks to circumvent the pressure by any means available should continue. For these efforts, national authorities need to develop their own capabilities to implement U.N. resolutions by participating in global efforts to increase strong control and oversight, cooperatively collecting and analyzing available information, defining a set of particular violations, operating technical and training assistance programs, allocating resources to the surveillance and investigative agencies coordinating investigation, arrest and extradition of individuals among states.

(This is an abridged version of "U.N. Sanctions as an Instrument of Coercive Diplomacy against North Korea," carried in *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* Vol. 16 No. 3 (2014))

The Apartment Construction Market and Urban Politics in North Korea

I. Introduction

In a “serious, unimaginable” accident at a construction site in Pyongyang, an apartment building collapsed on May 13, 2014, claiming casualties, the state-run (North) Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said five days later.

The structure was a 23-story building, furnished with apartments for probably 92 families, that was under construction in Phyongchon District of the North Korean showcase capital, an official at South Korea’s Ministry of Unification elaborated. Drawing the attention of North Korea watchers in Seoul and elsewhere, North Korean Minister of People’s Security Choe Pu-il made an open apology, saying that he failed to identify factors that put at risk the lives and property of the people, and to take related measures, thereby causing an “unimaginable” accident, North Korea watchers’ analyses of the accident have focused on the “speed war” in the North and the Kim Jong-un regime’s reckless pursuit of construction projects. The accident is not the first of its kind in the country. Among similar accidents that have reportedly occurred there in recent years are the collapse of an apartment building in Phyongsong, the capital of South Phyongan Province, in April 2013 and one in Hyesan, the capital of Ryanggang Province, in July 2007.

Hearing the news on the accident, many North Korea watchers expected the North to adjust its policy of rapid construction. But defying their expectations, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un visited the construction site of a 46-story skyscraper furnished with apartments for teaching and research staff of Kimchaek University of Technology on May 20, just one week after the accident, accompanied by a group of senior officials, including Choe Tae-bok, the secretary of the Central Committee of the Workers’ Party of Korea in charge of sci-

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ence and education. Kim was pleased with the rapid pace of construction, praising the military's construction workers, according to a KCNA report the next day. The North Korean regime has been absorbed in the construction of apartment buildings despite a series of aforementioned accidents because high-rise apartment buildings can serve as a means of trumpeting the "superiority" of the North Korean regime and the "excellency" of its leadership.

The North has pushed such projects in a functional relationship called "urban politics,"¹⁾ which concerns the ruling strategy, state power and the domestic market, among other things.

This essay is aimed at analyzing the relationship between the state and the market hidden behind the boom in apartment construction. Above all, it will look into the political and economic meaning of apartment construction throughout North Korean history. It will also examine the relationship between political power and the market, as well as developments regarding shoddy construction involving a union formed by builders in cities other than Pyongyang. Lastly, it will cover the way apartment construction in the North brought about a hierarchy and the differentiation of urban space. In this way, it will investigate the North Korean leader's ruling strategies, the means of survival of state power and the evolution of the market in North Korea.

II. The History of Apartment Construction and Politico-Economic Developments in North Korea

In North Korea, a high-rise apartment building is a symbol useful for trumpeting the supe-

riority of the socialist regime. The North adopts the strategy of a "speed war" to build such giant structures at a rapid pace, aiming to change the landscapes of its cities in a short period of time.

North Korea began to construct apartment buildings on a large scale in the early 1970s,²⁾ based on its experience of constructing modular residential units in the 1960s. In 1972, the North declared Pyongyang the "capital of revolution" demonstrating the superiority of socialism and began the construction of mammoth structures, residences and new streets in earnest.³⁾ At this time, the North began to construct apartment buildings with five-15 floors on the Pyongyang streets of Chollima and Sosong. Marking its leader Kim Il-sung's 60th birthday that year, the North completed the construction of buildings furnished with more than 17,000 apartments on Munsu Street in the eastern part of Pyongyang.⁴⁾

Why did the North place policy priority on the construction of large-scale apartment buildings in the 1970s and the 1980s when the North Korean economy suffered from stagnation because of its excessive investment in the munitions industry since the mid-1960s? This mammoth project of constructing apartments throughout the country required huge funds and large quantities of cement, steel and lumber and aggregate, which refers to any of several hard inert materials such as sand, gravel, or slags. The North was suffering from its worst international credit standing because of its default on loans from foreign countries in the early 1970s. It was also affected badly by the first global energy crisis and skyrocketing international prices of grains. The food situation facing the North began to deteriorate following a rapid increase in its population. For this reason, North Korea watchers, struggling

to understand North Korea's behavior, have had to attribute its policy to factors other than economic rationale.

First of all, we can consider it from a political perspective. North Korea established the status of Kim Jong-il as successor to his father and North Korea founder Kim Il-sung in February 1974 when the eighth plenary session of the fifth-term Party Central Committee elected the junior Kim as a member of the Political Committee, the top policy-making organ of the party. In a move to promote his achievements and back up his image as a prominent leader, the junior Kim campaigned for a mammoth project to construct apartment buildings on the occasion of the senior Kim's 60th birthday in 1972 and 70th one in 1982. Neither projects corresponded with the economic environment facing the North nor its mid-term economic plan. Despite these factors, construction went ahead throughout the country, led by work in Kwangbok Street of Pyongyang, undoubtedly solely for the junior Kim's political ambitions. Earlier, the senior Kim had promised he would provide all North Korean families with a "tile-roofed residence," plus "boiled rice and beef soup." None of the senior officials in the North could express opposition to the project because it was ostensibly aimed at improving the living conditions of North Korean citizens.

Such a mammoth construction project, however, required an adjustment of mid- and long-term economic plans. In other words, the large-scale project for constructing countless apartment buildings disrupted prior economic initiatives, delaying even annual basic programs. The party, the military and labor organizations poured state resources en masse into the construction project which had nothing to do with any prior plan, leaving economic officials help-

less. Moreover, human manpower necessary for the construction project was mobilized under a "speed war" proposed by the junior Kim.⁵⁾ For effective mobilization of manpower, the junior Kim organized squads for "three-point revolution," began to campaign for plan in 1974, and launched a "youth shock task force for a speed war" the next year.

The junior Kim, meanwhile, organized the Second Economic Commission in 1972, and established Office No. 39 in the party to take control of Korea Daesong General Trading Corporation, which had been under the umbrella of the Foreign Trade Ministry. He thus launched the "party's economy"⁶⁾ to manage a slush fund for the party, which has since served as a factor shrinking the official North Korean command economy called the "people's economy." The North has given priority to the production of commodities to be provided to the citizens as gifts, rather than the production of goods under an economic plan. The North Korean leadership has also used luxury apartments as presents for the core class in the North, damaging the North Korean economy. It is noteworthy that most of apartment buildings in the North were designed and constructed under the "teachings" of the North Korean leader, and not based on their economic viability.⁷⁾

So, why has a black market for apartments formed in the North? And why have apartments become a target of the North Korean people's desire? What were the factors behind those developments? First of all, we can consider an answer to these questions from a demographic point of view. It was widely predicted earlier that the North would suffer from severe shortages of residences at the turn of the 1980s when North Korean baby boomers, who were born in the years shortly after the end of the 1950-53 Korean War, reached mar-

riageable age. In the North, the baby boom continued into the 1970s when those born after the war represented more than half of the North's population. With this demographic explosion, the North already faced a food crisis and shortages of teachers in the mid-1960s. In an effort to solve these problems, the North has since built many classrooms and other facilities for schools and trained more college students as teachers, while developing a *juche* (self-reliance) -oriented farming method, forming terraced-fields on the hills, mobilizing urbanites to support farmers and importing food grain from foreign countries. But the North failed to provide proper measures to counter the shortages of residential units predicted in advance.⁸⁾

Second, we can examine it from a viewpoint of the North Korean policy of giving priority to mammoth construction projects aimed at trumpeting the superiority of socialism and its leadership while neglecting practical issues regarding living conditions for its citizens, including the question of housing units. For instance, the North has constructed numerous mammoth monuments and bronze statues for the personality cult of Kim Il-sung since 1974 when it built a monument on Mt. Wangjae in North Hamgyong Province, where the North claims Kim convened a meeting of anti-Japanese guerrillas in March 1933. Structures and facilities in Pyongyang for similar purposes include the Tower of the *Juche* Idea, Kimilsung Stadium, People's Grand Study Hall, Pyongyang Maternity Hospital, Changkwangwon Health Complex, a mammoth skate rink and Changkwang Street.

In the latter half of the 1980s, the North pushed ahead with a series of construction and beautification projects led by those in Pyongyang, in a move to counter a campaign

for reform in the socialist bloc and the 1988 Summer Olympic Games in Seoul. The North also constructed apartment buildings on a large scale in the 1980s under the instructions of Kim Jong-il, who then virtually ruled the North in his capacity as successor-designate. In the three years after 1989, high-rise buildings on Kwangbok Street in Pyongyang furnished with 30,000-household apartments and others with 20,000 apartments on Pyongyang's Tongil Street were constructed upon Kim's command. The North also began to construct an additional 30,000-household apartments in Pyongyang, including 16,000 on Tongil Street in 1992 on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of its claimed victory in the Korean War, and 3,000-6,000 apartments each in such other cities as Wonsan, Shinuiju and Hamhung.⁹⁾

Third, the first-generation revolutionaries, who reached their retirement age in the late 1970s, began to view their residences, granted to them by the state for their comfortable post-retirement living, as their private property. While constructing villas for Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il in many places, the North also began to provide senior officials with a fancy residence each as a gift. Skyscrapers furnished with luxury apartments in big cities and single-story luxury residences surrounded by high walls in other urban areas began to appear.

In the 1980s, demand for residences rose among returnees from China, Russia and Japan, plus North Korean citizens with relatives in foreign countries who could undermine the state system of planned housing with foreign currency. Under this situation, the government offices related to residence allotment turned into hotbeds of illegality and corruption. The black market for residences, which emerged in the 1980s, made nominal the state system for residence allotment for North

Korean citizens.¹⁰⁾

At the turn of the 1990s, the construction of high-rise apartment buildings undertaken on the state's initiative began to decline.¹¹⁾ The government offices began to have to depend partly on private business concerns. Private business concerns even began to carry out the full construction of buildings, securing construction permits from one of the ministries. Because of demographic factors, the demand for apartments in Pyongyang has continued to rise despite the problems facing the North Korean economy. The population of the North Korean capital increased from about 2 million in the early 1990s to 3.5 million today. The number of North Koreans living there without residence registration is estimated at more than 700,000,¹²⁾ implying that shortages of residential units in the capital are serious and that demand is still high.

The construction of high-rise apartment buildings in the North, which had been in the doldrums since the latter half of the 1990s, resumed at the turn of the 21st century. In late 2009, two years before Kim Jong-il's death and shortly after the North's designation of Kim Jong-un as the senior Kim's successor, the development of Pyongyang's Mansudae Street, an area with high-rise buildings furnished with luxury apartments, was completed.

With the official inauguration of the Kim Jong-un regime in April 2012, the construction of high-rise apartment buildings accelerated. Under the "teachings left behind" by Kim Jong-il, the North completed the development of Changjon Street in Pyongyang. The group of 45-story apartment buildings in the Mansudae District was completed within 13 months in June 2012¹³⁾. This was followed by the completion of skyscrapers furnished with apartments on the Unha Scientists Street and

residences for the science faculty of Kimilsung University in 2013. Apartment buildings for scientists specializing in satellites and for the educators of the Kimchaek University of Technology are now under construction, with their completion targeted for the founding anniversary of the Party, falling this year on Oct. 10.¹⁴⁾

The process of developing the market in the North has coincided with commercializing apartments and other residential units. Some North Korean citizens who experienced the "Arduous March" of the mid-1990s later sold their apartments granted by the state for U.S. dollars. At the turn of the 21st century, most apartments were constructed with private capital and those housing units became tradeable goods. For those with political power or a lot of money, an apartment became a more important means of growing their wealth than other good. More and more people are creating wealth through property, and in the course of this development, state organizations and powerful officials have played a leading role to encourage the construction of apartments and the expansion of their market. The state, in collusion with private capital, has garnered profits from apartment construction. The apartment market has continued to affect the price movement of most commodities on the market.

III. The Real State of the North Korean Apartment Construction Market in the 21st Century

The real estate craze has continued in North Korea since the turn of the 21st century as evidenced by the prevalent saying in Pyongyang: "My residence is more important than the

class struggle.” Reportedly, a new class of people with more than US\$1 million each has appeared in the country. They have made large sums of money by, for instance, buying an apartment with floor space of 30-pyeong (one pyeong equals to 3.3 square meters) for \$30,000-\$40,000 and selling it for \$100,000 after remodelling.¹⁵⁾

The boom in the construction market is attributable to the policy of the Kim Jong-un regime putting priority on apartment construction. In particular, the apartment market heated up when the government came out in 2008 with a project for building 100,000 apartments in Pyongyang, setting 2012 as the target year for their completion. The flourish in the real estate market has continued as even the authorities in charge of checking illegal activities in real estate have encouraged speculative investments in the apartment market. The Mt. Paektu Construction Research Institute, a top think-tank in the North Korean construction sector, is reportedly raking in large sums through interior design, while some Chinese companies are poised to enter the North Korean apartment market.

The boom in apartment construction has resulted in the formation of an apartment market mechanism combining state power, private capital, the market and urban bureaucracy. The typical process of apartment construction undertaken in recent years by key government organizations and enterprises is as follows. First of all, it is a rule of thumb that most apartments in Pyongyang are usually built by powerful government organizations and influential enterprises that can obtain construction permits from the authorities concerned. Once gaining a permit, they seek private builders capable of raising funds. There are brokers who are efficient in connecting government organizations

and enterprises with the private contractors and attracting not only domestic funds but those from Chinese merchants and Korean residents in China. The private contractors can be cash-laden individuals or a group of several persons in the form of a consortium. They provide money for buying construction materials and equipment as well as funding manpower. Construction materials and equipment are usually imported from China and import bills are paid with the U.S. greenback. The import permits are issued exclusively by a limited number of government organizations, such as the General Bureau for Capital Construction, the Second Economic Commission in charge of the munitions industry, and the Ministry of People’s Security.¹⁶⁾ Upon signing a contract with a private contractor, the organizations and enterprises submit their construction plans to the Ministry of State Construction Control. It is notable that all projects for apartment construction are included in the state construction plan although most of them are built with money supplied by the private sector, namely, the market. In other words, the North regards even the apartments built with private funds as having been constructed with state resources.¹⁷⁾ Estimates in Seoul suggest that about 80 percent of apartment construction in the North is undertaken by private contractors and that one third of the new apartments there are traded on the market.

Once their project is approved by the Ministry of State Construction Control, government organizations and enterprises undertake construction in connection with the General Bureau No. 7, a construction unit under the umbrella of the Ministry of People’s Security, and the General Bureau for Capital Construction, which manages construction workers from related associations.

IV. Keen Competition among Powerful Organizations for Concessions to Build Apartments in Pyongyang

At present, the construction of major apartments in main cities, including Pyongyang, is monopolized by non-economic organizations, in particular the Ministry of People's Armed Forces, the Ministry of People's Security and the Kimilsung Socialist Youth League. Their monopoly on apartment construction was institutionalized when they began to use their right to import construction materials and equipment for their own profit, riding on the ever rising demand in the construction sector, only to erode North Korea's official command economy. In particular, the Ministry of People's Security under the control of the Administration Department has monopolized profits from apartment construction in Pyongyang.

At the turn of 2010, movements began in every powerful government office to garner profits from construction projects. Competition even emerged among powerful offices to control the General Bureau No. 8, which is related to construction projects. In particular, competition was strong between the Ministry of People's Security and the Ministry of People's Armed Forces, leading to serious disputes.

V. Hierarchical Differentiation of Space through Apartments

Putting together the testimony of North Korean refugees from Phyongsong, the capital of South Phyongan Province, the prices of apartments have been determined to be influenced by the following factors. The first factor

is their proximity to the main railway station in the city because the station plays a pivotal role in connecting the city with Pyongyang and other cities. The second factor is the distance between the apartments and various government offices because residents in the apartments need to visit the offices to make administrative requests and applications. The third factor is their proximity to markets.

A residence within this triangle might cost as much as 10 residential units in other areas. The three factors interrelate well. Activities in the markets need various permits and the approval of government offices, plus easy transportation of commodities. For this reason, we can say that there is a hierarchical system of space in the city formed on a basis of this triangle, and space there is differentiated hierarchically.

The physical space in Phyongsong is structured on the basis of political, economic and social status. In other words, the physical space in the city interrelates with social, economic and political space there. Let's apply to this space structure the argument on the differentiation of social space through capital by Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002), who was a socialist, anthropologist, philosopher, and renowned public in his native .

Above all, space on the level of political status is the space where the people with much political capital reside. Political capital refers to the ability and resources, probably furnished by a political leader, to occupy, utilize and use material things through his or her political status. The superiority of political capital is mirrored also in physical space of the city. The area with persons and offices enjoying a high political status is perceived as a "good place," or a "wealthy place," or a "place where powerful people live." The areas corresponding to this place in Phyongsong

include the area with provincial and city offices, and the hillside or the mountain ridge around government offices where there are apartments resembling villas for senior officials of the provincial People's Committee, as well as the provincial offices for the Ministry of People's Security and the Ministry of State Security, the North Korean secret police. For this reason, it might be proper to say that according to the quantity of political capital possessed by the dwellers, the differentiation of rank of physical space is formed primarily in a town, a city, a province, or a country. The core of the hierarchy is the area dotted with political capital. This place is the core central space where a hierarchical system in Phyongsong is formed. The space division and its rank formed in accordance with the level of political capital have been effective well before the 1990s and remained unchanged thereafter. There has been no change in that situation probably because economic and other capital still depends on political capital.

Second, space differentiation in the level of economic status corresponds to space differentiation in accordance with the level of economic capital in the space at stake. The stature of economic capital in space differentiation in Phyongsong could be examined on the basis of developments in the mid-1980s. Although a precise analysis of the influence of economic capital upon space differentiation before the 1980s is required, a review of developments on a hypothetical level leads to the conclusion that before the 1980, economic capital did not affect class division among North Korean citizens. In contrast, economic capital has influenced their decisions on the purchase of housing units greatly since the 1990s.

It is noteworthy that North Korean citizens in Phyongsong, who have succeeded in gain-

ing economic capital through market activities, began to break into the central space of the city. They are the people called "donju (money owners)." Armed with their economic ability, they began to obtain the right to reside in the area whose residents are mostly officials with political capital. The newcomers are people who, with their own money, have built apartments in the area dotted with apartments for senior officials of the province and the city. Among the newcomers are also people who have constructed apartments in front of the railway station, in an area furnished with a general market, near Kimjongsuk First High School and in the area around Naengchon Market. Evaluating their status in terms of their occupation of physical space, they have succeeded in reaching a position on the class ladder of the North Korean society similar to that for those with political capital. In other words, economic capital has become the means of helping people climb up the hierarchy based on political capital. But we can hardly believe that economic capital is restructuring the space division and the hierarchical system, because of many factors against that development. Rather, the existing space division and system are being reinforced.

Third, there is space differentiation made in the level of social status. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu argues that social status covers both social and cultural capital. The social capital refers to one's ability to mobilize social links, plus one's resources, while the cultural capital means one's educational or cultural background. In North Korea, however, a person's possession of these two capitals is determined by their family or social background. One's family and social background serves as a factor affecting their ability to mobilize social links and change their job or status. For

this reason, people with unfavorable family and social backgrounds are usually placed under serious restrictions in case they are given a chance to change class. These people tend to be isolated collectively on the periphery of the urban space. In Phyongsong, Chure-dong and Muhwa-dong form this periphery. They are largely isolated from economic activities in the central part of the city.

VI. Vested Rights and Outsiders: Distinction and Space Differentiation

Living in an apartment on a floor of a high-rise structure has been the envy of most North Korean citizens. Apartment buildings that line the roadsides are a symbol of urbanity, in contrast to unfashionable rural life. For this reason, apartments have served as a psychological and physical border between the rural and urban areas. For North Koreans, moving to an apartment has meant a rise in their status as it has been often given to a citizen as a reward for his or her “heroic” behavior. In North Korea, residences are allotted to citizens according to their status based on their family and social background. In other words, if a citizen lives in an apartment, it means he or she is part of the upper socio-political classes.

Apartment prices in the North since the latter half of the 1990s have served as a factor widening the gap between the rich and the poor as rapidly as the pace of their increase, while accelerating inflation in the North. Now, the distinction in people’s wealth, social status and power is exposed more clearly than ever because of the difference between their residences. An apartment has become a form of economic capital to demonstrate wealth and

political status. In this respect, an apartment is a symbolic space stimulating people’s desire to climb up the status ladder in the North. For this reason, we need to understand the North’s apartment construction boom in recent years in terms of social configuration involving the ruling strategy, political power and the market.

A city is a social, physical space and the site of urban politics, which produce political demarcation lines, cultural borderlines and class division lines. In other words, the city is also a social space formed by the strategy to incessantly distinguish people there and make boundaries between them, rather than a fixed one.

Since the 1990s, the political, cultural and class demarcation lines have become more distinctive. The status of economic capital was enhanced when the command economy became to erode, while market activities increased. Citizens can now buy administrative and bureaucratic convenience, plus permits and licenses, with this economic capital. As the housing market grows, some citizens can occupy or possess space by means of economic capital. This situation implies that a hierarchical, class demarcation line formed by the combination of political and economic power is being redrawn more distinctively.

The space demarcation line is being differentiated in a various ways in an environment where individual citizens can possess or occupy physical space within the city through the residence market according to the size of the political and social capital they can mobilize. But this differentiation is reinforcing the space demarcation line formed in and around the area furnished densely with existing political capital, rather than dismantling or restructuring it. This development, however, is taking place by differentiating the area in various ways in terms of status and class. In other

words, one's residence serves as a symbol of his or her class. In this situation political power, economic ability and the desire for cultural demarcation seem to intersect. Of course, people in the past also had a borderline drawn in their mind and it influenced their everyday actions and behavior. But this mental borderline is now becoming more distinctive. Through their residence, they expose and confirm their class.

While people with economic capital break into the area densely populated with people with existing political capital, a demarcation line has begun to form between them. The people with the political capital (or the symbolic cultural capital) have begun to complain that they are living together with merchants with humble origin. They have begun to segregate the cash-laden people who have succeeded in their business. Actually, these merchants have increased their social influence by depending on the people with the political capital, or in cooperation with them. Despite their advantageous position, however, the merchants could go bankrupt at any time should the political power apparatus turn against them. Even the cash-laden businessmen can hardly cross the border of class in North Korea.

(This is an excerpt from a Korean essay carried in the August 2014 edition of the KDI Review of the North Korean Economy, a journal published by the Korea Development Institute (KDI), a government-invested think-tank in Seoul.)

Notes:

- 1) Kevin Ward, and David Imbroscio, "Urban Politics: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol. 35, No. 4, July 2011, pp. 853-871.
- 2) Joo Kang-hyeon, *The 50-year History of the Customs Regarding Ethnic Life in North Korea*, Minsokwon, 1999, pp. 304-305; p. 317.
- 3) *Ibid.*, p. 314.
- 4) *The daily Munhwa Ilbo*, May 28, 2014.
- 5) North Korea has occasionally launched a campaign for speedy works, called a "speed war," or a "battle," including a "speed war of loyalty" and a "70-day battle" in 1974, and a "100-day battle" each in 1971, 1978 and 1980, and a campaign for creating the "speed in the 1980s" in 1982.
- 6) Park Hyung-joong, Choe Sa-hyun, *A Fiscal Split and the Taxation, Fiscal System in North Korea*, The Korea Institute for National Unification, 2013, p. 57.
- 7) Kim Yeong-seong, *The Architectures in North Korea* (data for a speech delivered by Kim, an architect fleeing from North Korea, at the Architectural Institute of Korea in Seoul in July 1993), p. 59.
- 8) Ryu Kyeong-won, "Trading of Residences and an Inside Account on Related Illegalities and Corruptions," *The Limjin River*, No. 3 of 2008.
- 9) Joo Kang-hyeon, *op. cit.*, p. 315.
- 10) Ryu Kyeong-won, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
- 11) Kim Keun-yong, "The Actual Conditions of Residences and Estimates on Demand for Housing Investment in North Korea," *Construction Economy*, Autumn of 2008 (No. 57), The Korea Research Institute for Human Settlements (KRIHS), p. 36.
- 12) *The daily Dong-A Ilbo*, May 27, 2014.
- 13) *Radio Free Asia*, Jan. 23, 2013.
- 14) *The Yonhap News Agency*, May 29, 2014.
- 15) *The Dong-A Ilbo*, Oct. 22, 2013.
- 16) *The Dong-A Ilbo*, May 27, 2014.
- 17) Lim Kang-taeg, "A Hidden Picture behind the Brisk North Korean Market and the Role of State-run Enterprises," *The KDI Review of the North Korean Economy*, June 2014, The Korea Development Institute, pp. 32-33.

Internal Affairs**Handicapped N.K. students to perform in U.K.**

A group of North Korean disabled students will perform in the United Kingdom in October, an aid organization said on Sept. 9, in what appears to be the first such event in a foreign country.

According to DULA, which is registered with the UK government, 12 North Korean students aged 11-20 will stage performances at Oxford University and Cambridge University. They will also appear at the Royal College of Music in London. They will be singing and dancing, and playing instruments including piano, accordion and the Korean stringed instrument gayageum. They will perform traditional Korean songs as well as Western music such as the Phantom of the Opera.

DULA said the students may head to France after the UK performances, although the schedule has not yet been set.

Choson Sinbo, a paper published by pro-North Korean residents in Japan, had reported in August that North Korean handicapped youth would perform in the UK and in France.

DULA said the key characteristic of the event is that the North's Korean Federation for the Protection of the Disabled, the country's NGO for the physically challenged, will work with international organizations.

"We arranged the events to give hope for the future for the disabled youth in North Korea," Lee Seok-hee, a pastor working with DULA, told Yonhap News Agency by phone. "Our hope is that they will get a chance to study in the UK a few years from now."

Public activities by the handicapped in the North have been rare, although they have begun to appear at sports events recently. North Korea sent a team for the first time to a Paralympics at the 2012 London games. The North said it will send a delegation to the 2014 Incheon Asian Para Games next month in South Korea. (Yonhap)

N. Korea to hold major legislative meeting

North Korea announced a decision on Sept. 5 to convene another major meeting of its parliament in late September, which may herald the introduction of an important policy or Cabinet reshuffle.

The second session of the 13th Supreme People's Assembly (SPA) will take place in Pyongyang on Sept. 25, according to the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA).

"A relevant decision of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly was promulgated on Sept. 4," it said in a brief English-language report.

It stopped short of revealing what will be discussed in the upcoming session.

South Korean officials said agenda items will likely include legislative affairs.

"Also, issues associated with organizational changes or personnel management are expected to be discussed," said Lim Byeong-cheol, spokesman for the unification ministry, which handles inter-

Korean ties.

Chances are high that new top military officials will be appointed, watchers said.

Choe Ryong-hae, elected as vice chairman of the National Defense Commission (NDC) in the April session, has taken up the post of the Workers' Party secretary. Jang Jong-nam, then defense minister and member of the commission, was replaced by Hyon Yong-chol.

The SPA is North Korea's rubber-stamp legislature. Its annual session is usually held in March or April, bringing together 687 delegates from across the country.

Sometimes, however, the North opens another meeting in the autumn especially for making public key policy or legal measures.

In an SPA session on Sept. 25, 2012, the North announced the expansion of the nation's compulsory education from 11 years to 12.

In the inaugural meeting of the 13th SPA in April, meanwhile, Kim Jong-un was re-elected as head of the powerful NDC.

In March, 687 new deputies were elected to the SPA for five-year terms in the first election of its kind under his rule. He took power in December 2011 after the death of his father, Kim Jong-il. (Yonhap)

N.K. leader satisfied with new factory: KCNA

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un visited a newly built industrial factory and expressed great satisfaction, Pyongyang's state news agency reported on Aug. 31.

Kim was satisfied with the plant as he "could hardly find any trace he saw last year," and that the plant "did not look like a factory but a rest home," the North's Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said in an English-language report monitored in Seoul.

He had toured the same factory late last year and named it the October 8 Factory to mark the day his late father and former ruler of North Korea, Kim Jong-il, was named the top secretary of the ruling Workers' Party of Korea (WPK).

Kim said it was his intention "to turn the October 8 Factory into a factory representing the nation's industrial establishments" during the visit to the facility, an activity that Pyongyang's news outlets call "field guidance."

The KCNA provided no details on when he visited the facility or where it is located.

Kim, known to be in his late 20s or early 30s and educated in Switzerland, also said that "the factory has a perfect computer-aided integrated production system," according to the KCNA.

The young leader was accompanied by several high-ranking officials, including Hwang Pyong-so, top political officer of the Korean People's Army, and Han Kwang-sang, director of the WPK Finance and Accounting Department, it added. (Yonhap)

N. Korean leader inspects army food factory

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un toured a factory that produces food for the military, expressing

satisfaction over its automated operations, Pyongyang's state media said on Aug. 24.

The (North) Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported that Kim inspected "the November 2 Factory," which is affiliated with the military and produces zeppole, bread and confectionery.

"He expressed great satisfaction over the fact that the officials and employees of the factory have put all production processes on an automatic and unmanned basis, ranging from preparation of foodstuffs to production and packing of products, to carry out the tasks assigned by the party," said a KCNA dispatch monitored in Seoul.

The KCNA didn't specify the location of the factory and the date of Kim's visit.

"He earnestly instructed the officials of the factory to increase the production of varieties of tasty and nutritious foodstuffs for soldiers in the future, too," it added.

The North Korean leader visited the factory in November 2013 and February this year. (Yonhap)

External Affairs

Head of Japan's Kyodo news agency visits N. Korea

The president of Japan's Kyodo news agency arrived in Pyongyang, North Korea's state-run news agency said on Sept. 8.

In a one-sentence dispatch, the Korean Central News Agency said the delegation of the Kyodo News headed by its president, Masaki Fukuyama, arrived in the North Korean capital.

The report gave no further details, including the purpose of the trip.

The visit comes two days after Ho Jong-man, the head of a pro-North Korean organization in Japan, arrived in Pyongyang in his first trip to the North in eight years.

Japan has recently started allowing officials of the General Association of Korean Residents in Tokyo to visit the North as part of a deal between North Korea and Japan on the abduction issue.

In May, North Korea and Japan agreed to re-open the investigation into Japanese nationals kidnapped by North Korean agents decades ago. The abduction issue has been one of the key hurdles to diplomatic normalization between North Korea and Japan. (Yonhap)

Russia says no plan for N.K. leader to visit Moscow

Russia's top diplomat on Aug. 25 dismissed media report that North Korean leader Kim Jong-un may visit Moscow in the near future for summit talks with President Vladimir Putin.

In a press briefing here, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov confirmed that there is no plan yet for Kim to travel to Russia.

A South Korean news outlet earlier reported that Kim is pushing for a trip to Russia in late August or early September. It added Kim is seeking a counter-punch to Chinese President Xi

Jinping, who visited Seoul in early August.

Speculation has grown that relations between North Korea and China are not like before. Pyongyang is apparently reaching out to Moscow. (Yonhap)

Inter-Korean Affairs

Working talks to begin soon on planned U.N. office on N.K. human rights

South Korea will soon begin working-level talks with the United Nations to discuss the specifics of establishing a U.N. field office in Seoul on North Korean human rights, officials said on Sept. 17.

The plan to set up a field-based U.N. structure in Seoul follows the U.N. resolution adopted in March to help stop what they claim are crimes against humanity in North Korea.

The U.N. has later proposed setting up the field office in South Korea to collect evidence and testimonies on the North Korean regime's human rights violations, which the South Korean government has accepted.

The Seoul city government said it plans to enter into working-level talks with the foreign ministry, the U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and South Korea's commission in Geneva on a plan to host the U.N. office in the city's Global Center building in the city center.

Ahead of the March resolution on North Korean human rights, the U.N. commission of inquiry on the issue accused the North Korean regime of "systematic, widespread and grave" violations of human rights.

The North, however, has repeatedly rejected the accusations and denounced the U.N. field office plan.

North Korea has also warned it will launch "merciless punishment" on those involved in the plan as well as staff workers at the envisioned office. (Yonhap)

Wreckage of suspected N.K. drone found near border island: military

The wreckage of a suspected North Korean drone was found near a sensitive inter-Korean maritime border in the Yellow Sea on Sept. 15, the military said.

The wreckage was collected by a fisherman at around 2:20 p.m. while he was fishing in waters near the South Korean border island of Baengnyeong, the Joint Chiefs of Staff said.

The military said it believes the remains belong to a small-size, unmanned aerial drone from North Korea because it looked similar to other North Korean drones found in border areas earlier this year.

Previously, three drones were found crashed in South Korea in March and April, with officials concluding that they were sent from the North for spying missions.

The North, however, has rejected the investigation result. (Yonhap)

S. Korea urges N. Korea to help globalize Kaesong park

South Korea called on North Korea to be more cooperative in luring foreign investors to their joint industrial complex in the North on Sept. 15, the eve of the first anniversary of its reopening.

Seoul's unification ministry said the operation of the Kaesong Industrial Complex (KIC) has been almost fully normalized despite a six-month hiatus from March last year.

The North, however, has maintained a lukewarm attitude toward agreed-upon working-level meetings to discuss ways to develop the facilities, where 125 South Korean firms employ more than 52,000 North Korean workers, according to the ministry.

"The globalization of the KIC has made little progress due to North Korea's uncooperative stance," it said in a press release. "North Korea will have to do what it should do for dialogue (on the future of the KIC) and its globalization."

Seoul has repeatedly called for sub-panel discussions on cross-border travel, communication and customs at the park, a rare symbol of inter-Korean cooperation. Pyongyang has been unresponsive.

The ministry stressed that it's urgent to resolve the issues in order to enhance the KIC's international competitiveness.

No foreign factory is operating in the zone, established in the early 2000s to match North's cheap labor with the South's capital and technology.

Groz-Beckert, an industrial needle maker based in Germany, is set to become the first foreign company to do business in Kaesong, as it plans to open a sales office there in October, not a factory.

The ministry said more than 30 firms from Germany, China and other countries have shown interest in the KIC, located just north of the inter-Korean border. Kaesong is about 60 kilometers north of Seoul.

Potential foreign investors still have misgivings especially about Internet access and investment protection, however, said the ministry.

A council of South Korean businesses in Kaesong, meanwhile, demanded the government roll back a package of tough economic sanctions on Pyongyang, widely known as the May 24 measures.

"It is inevitable to ease or lift the May 24th measures to enable the KIC to be globalized," its head Jung Ki-sup told reporters.

The sanctions, imposed on the North in 2010 after its deadly torpedo attack on a South Korean warship, prohibit South Korean firms from making fresh investment in Kaesong, he pointed out.

The Park Geun-hye administration is still cautious, saying the North should first take responsible steps including a formal apology for the attack on the Cheonan naval ship that killed 46 South Korean sailors. (Yonhap)

S. Korea spots signs of N. Korea's submarine rocket development

South Korea's military confirmed on Sept. 14 it has detected signs of North Korea's development of a submarine-based ballistic missile launch system.

In a report to an opposition lawmaker, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) said there is an indication that the North is developing a submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM).

“There is no intelligence yet that North Korea has an SLBM in operation. But the possibility of a North Korean submarine equipped with an SLBM has been detected recently,” the JCS said in the document submitted to Rep. Jin Sung-joon of the main opposition New Politics Alliance for Democracy.

South Korea and the U.S. are jointly scrutinizing the North’s related move, added the JCS.

A senior South Korean government source also said the South Korean and U.S. intelligence agencies spotted signs that the North has developed a ballistic missile launch tube.

“A missile launch tube for submarine use has been spotted, which appears to have been developed at North Korea’s submarine base,” the source said on condition of anonymity.

Chances are high that the North will test-fire a SLBM in the foreseeable future, and if it is successful, the communist nation is expected to seek to acquire larger submarines, according to the source.

An annual white paper on warships, Jane’s Fighting Ships, said in its 1994 edition that North Korea purchased 40 decommissioned submarines from Russia, including several Golf-class and Romeo-class submarines.

The North has reportedly deployed more than 20 Romeo-class submarines, which are not capable of carrying an SLBM launcher.

It may be modifying 3,000-ton Golf-class submarines for SLBMs, the source said.

In August, a U.S. web magazine, the Washington Free Beacon, quoting unnamed U.S. defense officials, said the U.S. intelligence community has identified at least one North Korean submarine equipped with a ballistic missile launch tube. (Yonhap)

N. Korea repatriates S. Korean man accused of illegal entry

North Korea repatriated a South Korean man on Sept. 11 through the truce village of Panmunjom in an apparent humanitarian gesture, officials here said.

The 52-year-old, identified only by his surname Kim, was apprehended by the North’s authorities after having trespassed into the North via a third country, according to Pyongyang’s state media. They did not elaborate on when he entered the communist nation or the timing of his arrest.

“He was repatriated to the South at 11 a.m. today as scheduled,” a unification ministry official said. “The government will proceed with medical check-ups for him and work to confirm the reason for, and method of, his entry into the North.” (Yonhap)

S. Korea invites N. Korea to biodiversity conference

In what is seen as another peace overture toward North Korea, South Korea formally asked North Korea on Sept. 11 to join an upcoming international conference on biological diversity to be held on its soil.

The South sent an invitation letter for the North to participate in the 12th meeting of the signato-

ries to the Convention on Biological Diversity and related events, according to a unification ministry official.

The letter was signed by Environment Minister Yoon Seong-kyu for his North Korean counterpart, the official told reporters on background.

The meeting is scheduled to open in PyeongChang, some 180 kilometers southeast of Seoul, on Sept. 29, and it will last through Oct. 17.

“We hope North Korea’s delegation will take part in the meeting and join discussions on biological diversity for sustainable development so that South and North Korea can pool their ideas on ways to protect the environment and the ecosystem and also lay the groundwork for expanding inter-Korean environmental cooperation,” the official said.

The move is a follow-up to President Park Geun-hye’s Liberation Day proposal.

In her Aug. 15 speech, she expressed hope that Pyongyang will send a delegation to the international meeting. (Yonhap)

Unification committee hoping to invite Henry Kissinger as special adviser

South Korea’s new committee on national unification is hoping to recruit Henry Kissinger, former U.S. secretary of state, as its special international adviser, a government official said on Sept. 9.

“The international advisory group under the unification committee is trying to recruit a high-profile figure who has interest in Korean affairs and has influence,” the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity. “Former Secretary Kissinger is under consideration.”

It wasn’t certain whether Kissinger, who is 91 this year, would accept the offer, he said.

The unification committee was launched in July on the instructions of President Park Geun-hye to prepare for reunification with North Korea. Park chairs the committee that will have members from both the government and the private sector. It will have four advisory groups.

A recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, Kissinger is highly sought after for advice on foreign affairs. Having served under U.S. Presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford, he is recognized for his role in detente with the Soviet Union and diplomatic engagement with China. (Yonhap)

N. Koreans found drifting on fishing boat return to North

Three North Koreans returned to their home country on Sept. 8 after a fishing boat carrying them was found drifting in waters near South Korea’s easternmost islets of Dokdo a day earlier, the government said.

The North Korean men were allowed to return to the North on the boat earlier in the day in accordance with their wish to do so after undergoing questioning from Seoul authorities, according to the unification ministry handling inter-Korean affairs.

The wooden boat was spotted moving toward Dokdo from about 1.8 kilometers southeast of the islets on Sept. 7, police said.

The North Koreans said they followed the light from a lighthouse after their boat’s power system

broke down, according to the police. (Yonhap)

More than 60,000 S. Koreans likely died before meeting separated family in North

More than 60,000 South Koreans who applied to meet their separated family members in North Korea appear to have died before getting the chance to hold a reunion, government data showed on Sept. 7.

As of Aug. 31, 60,312 of the 129,575 people who applied for family reunions, or 46.5 percent, were dead, according to data from the Ministry of Unification, which handles inter-Korean affairs.

Most of those who died are unlikely to have met their relatives in the North, as only 3,094 families have been reunited through reunion meetings that followed the first-ever inter-Korean summit in 2000.

Of those applicants who are still alive, 10.4 percent are aged 90 or above, while 41.3 percent are in their 80s, and 29.1 percent are in their 70s, according to the data.

The last family reunions were held in February after a hiatus of more than three years. Relations between the two countries had been badly frayed due to North Korea's nuclear and missile tests, among other issues.

On Aug. 11, Seoul proposed that the two sides hold high-level talks on various pending issues, including reunions of separated families. The North has yet to respond to the offer. (Yonhap)

S. Korea opens integrated database on post-unification legal issues

South Korea launched an integrated database on legal issues expected during and after unification with North Korea on Sept. 3, as it steps up inter-agency efforts to prepare for the possible reunification of the divided peninsula.

The unification ministry signed an agreement with two other related ministries -- justice and government legislation -- to cooperate in laying the groundwork for a post-unification legal system.

They agreed to conduct a joint study on potential legal problems and ways to resolve them in the process of unifying with the communist neighbor and in the post-unification era.

The ministries launched an integrated database, www.unilaw.go.kr, on relevant research work, a move intended to enhance the "connectivity and effectiveness" of their tasks.

The deal was signed by Unification Minister Ryoo Kihl-jae, Justice Minister Hwang Kyo-ahn, and Government Legislation Minister Je Jeong-boo.

The reunification of Korea is a signature policy goal of the Park Geun-hye administration. She has said it would be a "bonanza" not only for Korea but also neighboring countries.

The Korean Peninsula was divided after its liberation from Japanese colonial rule from 1910-1945. The two Koreas remain technically at war as their 1950-1953 conflict ended in a truce, not a formal peace treaty. (Yonhap)

S. Korea opens exhibit on relations with N. Korea at truce village

South Korea opened an exhibition of historical photos and documents at the inter-Korean truce

village of Panmunjom on Sept. 1 to help visitors better understand the reality of the divided Korean Peninsula, officials said.

The standing exhibit, called the Panmunjom Gallery, is installed into the fourth floor of the House of Freedom, an administrative building on the southern side of the truce village where an armistice agreement was signed on July 27, 1953, ending the three-year Korean War.

Three display rooms with a total floor space of 200 square meters house 161 pictures, nine video clips and 22 documents on the history of Panmunjom and Seoul-Pyongyang relations over the past six decades, South Korea's Unification Ministry said in a press release.

"The launch of the gallery is expected to serve as hope that Panmunjom will be reborn as a place to prepare for reunification beyond its role as a symbolic place for confrontation and division," Unification Ministry Ryoo Kihl-jae said at the ribbon-cutting ceremony, according to the press release.

Construction on the 450 million won (US\$ 440,000) project began in May.

The ministry expects visitors to view the display each day, as Panmunjom draws around 100,000 foreign and local tourists. (Yonhap)

Daum to launch N. Korean map service

A map service that provides views of North Korea's streets and buildings will be launched by a South Korean Internet portal for the first time in the country on Aug. 29 as part of efforts to disclose what has been secretly guarded information to the private sector, a state-run geographic institute said.

The National Geographic Information Institute (NGII) said the map, which covers North Korea's entire territory, will begin operation through Daum Communications Corp., the South's second-largest online portal, for free.

The map contains the North's administrative districts and their names, and the locations of mountains, roads, landmark buildings and railroads.

Users can access the map through their personal computers, mobile webs and applications both in satellite and electronic map views, the NGII added.

The NGII made the map on a scale of one to 25,000 and 50,000 between 2007 and 2009 and had provided it only to state agencies that deal with North Korean affairs before opening it to the public in March.

"It became far more convenient for people to use North Korea geographic data" with the new service, said an NGII official. "It will lead to changes in North Korean research projects by private companies." (Yonhap)

N. Korea says its workers in Kaesong exposed to benzene

A number of North Korean workers at an inter-Korean industrial complex have recently come down with fevers and suffered from headaches due to possible exposure to toxic chemicals, informed sources said on Aug. 27.

The suspected benzene poisoning has prompted two car parts makers at the Kaesong Industrial

Complex to suspend the operations of related production lines, according to the sources.

While the exact number of workers affected remains unconfirmed, a source said more than 10 employees at the two small factories have suffered from the health problems since July.

North Korea has claimed that its workers were apparently poisoned by benzene as most of them were involved in a leather-heating process to manufacture handle covers and other goods.

Citing its initial probe, however, the South Korean government said the chemical has not been used at the workplace.

“The results of a preliminary probe by the management committee for the Kaesong Industrial Complex showed that materials containing benzene are not used (there),” Lim Byeong-cheol, a spokesman for Seoul’s unification ministry, told reporters.

Seoul is conducting further investigation into the exact cause of the symptoms among the North’s workers, Lim said.

It is the first time that such health problems were reported at the Kaesong facilities, which opened a decade ago.

“If it has occurred due to the working conditions of the factories, I think they will have to make efforts, without question, to improve the working conditions,” Lim said.

The Kaesong factory park, located just north of the inter-Korean border, is the last-remaining major joint venture between the two Koreas. It’s a fruit of the inter-Korean reconciliation that peaked in the early 2000s.

More than 100 South Korean small and mid-sized companies employ around 50,000 North Korean workers at the complex. (Yonhap)

S. Korea to establish genetic database for families separated by Korean War

South Korea will launch a project to build a database of genetic information for senior citizens whose loved ones are in North Korea after being separated by the 1950-53 Korean War, the unification ministry said on Aug. 22.

“Of the separated family members who filed for a gene test, the ministry will first select 1,200 people based upon their seniority, carry out the test starting Aug. 25 and preserve their genetic information,” spokesman Kim Ui-do said at a regular briefing.

The genetic data will allow for the chronicling and verification of separated families in the future and allow their offspring to meet their future relatives in the North.

According to government data, some 81 percent of 69,866 surviving South Koreans whose family members and relatives are living in the communist country are in their 70s. Since 1988 when the Seoul government began documenting the separated families, nearly half have died with unresolved grievances.

It will be the first time that the Seoul government has launched such a project, though it has long pushed to set up a genetic database.

The project is in accordance with the government’s ordinance on the confirmation of the separated family members and the promotion of their exchanges. The rule was revised and took effect in

November 2013.

The ministry said it will also begin filming 10-minute messages of the separated families for their loved ones in the North, while planning to send them to the North after a consultation with Pyongyang.

“The projects are meant to preserve information and records of the elderly people before it is too late and to get prepared step by step for inter-Korean exchange programs,” Kim added.

On Aug. 14, South Korea suggested that the two Koreas should hold high-level talks to discuss the reunions and other mutual issues, while the North remains mum on the proposal.

The last family reunion took place in February at the Mount Kumgang resort in North Korea, the first of its kind since 2010. (Yonhap)

N. Korean leader sends wreath to mark anniversary of former president's death

North Korea's leader sent a wreath marking the fifth anniversary of the death of former South Korean President Kim Dae-jung to a delegation visiting the communist country on Aug. 17.

The wreath presented by Kim Yang-gon, the head of the United Front Department of the ruling Workers' Party of Korea, was sent by Kim Jong-un, who also forwarded a telegram of condolences to the five-person delegation made up of the president's son and close aides.

The contents of the telegram are not known but the wreath was signed by Kim Jong-un and inscribed with the words “in memory of former President Kim.”

The handover took place at the Kaesong Industrial Complex, just north of the demilitarized zone that separates the two sides.

The joint industrial complex is viewed as one of the crowning achievements of inter-Korean rapprochement started by the former South Korean leader.

Among those who crossed into North Korea earlier in the day to receive the wreath were Kim Dae-jung's son Hong-up, a former lawmaker, Park Jie-won, a prominent lawmaker of the main opposition New Politics Alliance for Democracy (NPAD), and former Unification Minister Lim Dong-won. The former South Korean leader died in August 2009, while the North Korean dictator died in late 2011. (Yonhap)

Two N. Korean men swim across border to S. Korea

Two North Korean men swam across the Yellow Sea border to defect to South Korea, a rare way of fleeing the hunger-stricken communist nation, government sources here said on Aug. 14.

South Korean marines on guard duty spotted them reaching Gyodong Island, just south of the Northern Limit Line (NLL), at around 4 a.m., according to the sources. The island is about 2.5 kilometers away from the North's closest western coast.

The two, one in his 50s and his twenty-something son, immediately expressed their desire to defect to the South.

“The unarmed men in casual clothes are presumed to be civilians, though a further probe is needed to learn exactly who they are,” a source said, asking not to be named.

They were taken into custody for interrogation by the South's state intelligence authorities on their reasons for defection, he noted.

"It's unusual for North Koreans to swim across the heavily fortified border to reach South Korea, but it is just possible given the location of the Island of Gyodong. It in fact is the third consecutive year that North Koreans reached the island by swimming," the source added.

Over the past several years, South Korea has seen a series of defection cases in the western border regions. In the latest case, a man from the communist country defected to the South in a wooden boat in July.

North Koreans usually cross the relatively porous border with China first and then try to head to South Korea, often through Southeast Asian nations.

A total of 1,514 North Koreans defected to the South in 2013 alone, according to official data. (Yonhap)

FOREIGN TIPS

U.S. man caught trying to swim to N. Korea

A young American man has been caught trying to swim across a river border into North Korea, a government source said on Sept. 17.

The man was arrested by Marine sentries at around 11:55 p.m. the previous day while he was swimming across the Han River, which borders with North Korea, the source said.

The river cuts through the South Korean capital of Seoul and its adjacent county of Gimpo into the Yellow Sea.

During an interrogation following the arrest, the U.S. citizen of Arabic descent said "I was trying to go to North Korea in order to meet with supreme leader Kim Jong-un," according to the source.

The U.S. citizen, in his late 20s or early 30s, was undergoing questioning by state intelligence agents over his motives, he added.

The latest incident marks the first case of a U.S. citizen trying to enter the North through the border area in Gimpo, according to the source. (Yonhap)

U.S. seeks talks on special envoy for N. Korea: report

The U.S. government has proposed consultations with North Korea over its desire to send a special envoy to Pyongyang for the release of three American citizens, a news report said on Sept. 16.

Washington seems to be more flexible on the issue as it places a top priority on persuading Pyongyang to free the three men -- Kenneth Bae, Matthew Todd Miller, and Jeffrey Fowle, according to the Voice of America (VOA), based in the U.S. capital.

“The State Department has proposed consultations with the North Korean authorities with regard to the release of the detained Americans,” the VOA quoted a source “well versed in North Korea-U.S. relations” as saying.

The U.S. said it would not necessarily stick to Robert King, special envoy for North Korean human rights issues, as an official to be sent to Pyongyang and it would like to know whom Pyongyang prefers, added the source.

In response, the North did not name a certain figure, only reiterating its determination to handle the “illegal acts” of the detained U.S. citizens by law, the source told the VOA.

The Obama administration earlier offered to send King but the North rejected it.

The State Department has reaffirmed that it would make every possible effort to get them freed but it refused to go into details.

Sydney Seiler, the U.S. special envoy for the six-way nuclear talks, recently confirmed that Washington is in contact with Pyongyang over the matter through the “New York channel,” which refers to the North’s mission to the United Nations.

A South Korean government official said the U.S. is expected to continue relevant consultations via the channel.

But the official said, requesting anonymity, it remains to be seen whether the U.S. will actually send a high-profile figure preferred by the North.

U.S. efforts to win the freedom of the three men have gained keen media attention again since reports that the North sentenced Miller to six years of “hard labor” on Sept. 14. He was arrested in April for tearing up his passport upon arriving at a Pyongyang airport. (Yonhap)

N. Korean defector named winner of human rights award

Shin Dong-hyuk, a North Korean defector born in a prison camp, has been selected as a winner of the Human Rights Watch’s annual award for his efforts to promote the awareness of the North’s horrific human rights situation, the group said on Sept. 16.

Shin was named one of four recipients of the Alison Des Forges Award for Extraordinary Activism, along with Father Bernard Kinvi from the Central African Republic, Arwa Othman from Yemen, and Dr. M.R. Rajagopal from India, the group said in a release.

Shin “experienced brutality and starvation growing up in one of North Korea’s forced labor camps and has worked tirelessly to alert the world to these horrors since his escape in 2005,” it said. “Human Rights Watch honors Shin Dong-hyuk for his efforts to expose and end atrocities in North Korea.”

The 31-year-old is the only known escapee of Camp 14, one of North Korea’s camps for political prisoners, and he witnessed numerous executions, including those of his mother and brother, and was beaten, tortured, and routinely starved.

North Korea has long been labeled one of the worst human rights violators in the world. The communist regime does not tolerate dissent, holds hundreds of thousands of people in political prison camps across the nation and keeps tight control over outside information.

The issue has drawn greater international attention after the U.N. Commission of Inquiry (COI) issued a report in February after a year-long probe, saying that North Korean leaders are responsible for “widespread, systematic and gross” violations of human rights.

The report also said the International Criminal Court should handle North Korea’s “crimes against humanity.”

But Pyongyang has bristled at any talk of its human rights conditions, calling it a U.S.-led attempt to topple its regime.

On Sept. 13, the North released its own human rights report, claiming the country has the world’s most advantageous human rights system and policies. (Yonhap)

Despite U.N. sanctions, N. Korean shipping firm operating in Chinese waters

A North Korean shipping company slapped with U.N. sanctions after its freighter was seized last year for smuggling weapons from Cuba is operating as normal in Chinese waters, a website that monitors events in the North said on Sept. 13, citing an analysis of shipping data.

The U.N. blacklisted the North Korean company, Ocean Maritime Management (OMM), about two months ago for operating the freighter, which was detained by Panamanian authorities in July last year while carrying Soviet-era MiG-21 fighter aircraft, surface-to-air missiles and other arms-related cargo hidden under sacks of sugar.

Under a U.N. Security Council resolution, all U.N. member states, including China, are required to freeze the North Korean firm’s assets and enhance inspections of OMM-owned ships.

“But analysis of ship inspection records shows that the frequency of inspection on OMM linked ships has not increased, indicating that Chinese inspection authorities have not upped the scrutiny on the company’s vessels despite recent resolutions,” the website NK News said.

Out of 14 vessels operated by the North Korean firm, 10 ships have broadcast location data since June in Chinese waters, indicating that they are still operating in Chinese ports, it said.

One of the vessels operating in Chinese waters is the Chong Chon Gang, the ship seized by the Panamanian government, according to the website.

In a traditional tactic to sidestep U.N. sanctions, the North Korean shipping firm appears to have also begun the process of renaming and re-assigning its vessels to other owners, it said.

Political ties between China and North Korea have appeared strained since Pyongyang apparently ignored Beijing and detonated its third nuclear device in February last year.

China has grown increasingly frustrated with North Korea’s wayward behavior, but many analysts believe that Beijing will not suspend all economic support for Pyongyang out of fears it could precipitate the collapse of the regime in the impoverished country. (Yonhap)

N. Korea signs U.N. protocol protecting children from trafficking: report

North Korea has signed a United Nations protocol that protects children from trafficking and sexual exploitation, a U.S.-based media report said on Sept. 11.

According to the report by Voice of America, Ja Song-nam, the North Korean ambassador to the U.N., signed the optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child at the U.N. headquarters in New York on Sept. 9.

The protocol, comprised of 17 articles, calls for the prohibition of trafficking of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

The North previously signed and ratified the convention in 1990 after it was signed by the U.N. a year earlier. The optional protocol to the convention has been ratified by more than 160 countries.

More recently, the North signed a separate U.N. convention on the rights of people with disabilities in July 2013 in a possible move to quell international condemnation over its poor human rights records.

The North's latest move also comes after the U.N. Human Rights Council urged the communist state to ratify the optional protocol at a periodic review of its rights record in May, to which the North replied favorably.

If the North ratifies the protocol, it will have to submit a report outlining its progress to the U.N. Children's Fund every two years. (Yonhap)

N. Korea bans use of wireless Internet by all foreigners: report

North Korea has banned all foreigners from using high-speed wireless, or Wi-Fi, Internet access in the country, China's state media reported on Sept. 10, in an apparent move to make it impossible for North Koreans to gain unrestricted access to the global Internet.

In a dispatch from Pyongyang, China's Xinhua news agency said "nearly all foreign embassies, international organizations and other foreigners working in the country" were notified of the ban the previous week.

North Korean authorities also ordered Wi-Fi installments by the aforementioned foreigners to be "dismantled before Sept. 11," according to the report.

North Korea "warned that those who violate the regulation would be severely fined if the wireless connection signal is detected in the examinations, but no explanations or reasons were given by the officials," the report said.

So far, foreigners visiting North Korea have been known to gain relatively free access to social media sites, such as Twitter and Facebook, using the Wi-Fi network operated by the country's mobile operator Koryolink.

Media reports have said home prices near foreign embassies in Pyongyang jumped as North Koreans seek to live near such areas to gain an illicit access to the embassies' Wi-Fi systems.

Flow of information is tightly controlled in North Korea.

Koryolink, a joint venture between Egypt's Orascom Telecom and North Korea, is estimated to have about 2.5 million subscribers. (Yonhap)

S. Korean lawmakers seek visit to Russia, N. Korea over logistics project

A group of South Korean lawmakers have been planning a visit to Russia and North Korea to

look into a joint logistics project South Korean firms have shown interest in, officials here said on Sept. 4.

The lawmakers of the parliamentary foreign affairs and unification committee have begun to make preparations to visit North Korea's Rajin port near the country's northeastern border with Russia and Russia's eastern border city of Khasan from Sept. 18-20, according to government officials and officials of the ruling Saenuri Party.

The Rajin-Khasan logistics project is aimed at linking the North Korean port city to Russia's Trans-Siberian railway. During their summit meeting in Seoul in November, South Korean President Park Geun-hye and her Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin agreed to help a consortium of South Korean firms join the project and invest indirectly in the North.

The consortium, comprised of rail operator KORAIL, steelmaker POSCO and shipping company Hyundai Merchant Marine Co., is reportedly planning to test-run a transportation route within this year to move Russian coal to the North Korean port and then to ship it to South Korea's southeastern port of Pohang.

The lawmakers' planned visit, however, is subject to approval from the North Korean government.

"We are trying to determine the North's thoughts through various routes, including Russia," a South Korean government official said, speaking on condition of anonymity. "Only when we have verified the North's will can our government decide whether to allow the visit."

All trips by South Koreans to North Korea are subject to prior approval from the South Korean government as well as the North's consent as the two countries technically remain in a state of war following the 1950-53 Korean War that ended in a truce, not a peace treaty. (Yonhap)

German gov't offers US\$600,000 in N. Korea aid

The German government has provided North Korea with US\$600,000 in medical aid via a non-governmental organization, a U.S. media reported on Aug. 26.

The Roman Catholic group Caritas International, which was launched in Germany in 1897, has been campaigning to help the needy in the impoverished communist nation, especially those infected with tuberculosis (TB) and hepatitis.

"The German government is providing 450,000 euros to be used for the TB patients in the DPRK," Reinhard A. Wurfner, a Caritas official in charge of Asia, was quoted as telling the Voice of America. DPRK is the acronym for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, North Korea's official name.

Caritas began its North Korea project in 1996. It has since offered medical and nutritional assistance to TB and hepatitis patients in the country. (Yonhap)

China ships no crude oil to N. Korea for 7th month

China's customs data has shown no exports of crude oil to North Korea in the first seven months of 2014, according to the data compiled by South Korea's government trade agency on Aug. 23,

even though bilateral trade was little changed.

China, North Korea's last-remaining patron, supplies nearly all of the North's energy needs such as crude oil, diesel and jet fuel, but deliveries of crude oil to Pyongyang have been officially absent since January.

According to the Chinese data analyzed by the Beijing unit of the Korea Trade and Investment Promotion Agency, there were no shipments of crude oil from China to North Korea from January to July.

Despite the seven-month absence of oil shipments, there have been no reports of a serious fuel shortage in North Korea.

Diplomatic sources with knowledge of the matter cautioned against reading too much into the official trade figures because China has been providing crude oil to North Korea in the form of grant aid and such shipments have not been recorded on paper.

In the first seven months of this year, China's exports to North Korea rose 1.8 percent from a year ago to US\$1.95 billion, while imports fell 4.3 percent to \$1.57 billion, according to the data.

While political ties between North Korea and China have remained strained since the North defiantly conducted its third nuclear test in February 2013, few analysts believe that Beijing will cut off its economic lifeline for Pyongyang.

Last year, China officially supplied about 578,000 metric tons of crude oil to North Korea, up from some 523,000 metric tons in 2012, according to China's General Administration of Customs. (Yonhap)

N. Korea to complete rocket site expansion soon: report

North Korea is expected to complete the expansion of a long-range rocket launch site on the country's west coast by this fall, a report said on Aug. 2, in a move that will allow the regime to fire bigger rockets with heavier payloads.

The website 38 North, run by the U.S.-Korea Institute at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, made the assessment based on recent satellite imagery of what the North calls the Sohae Satellite Launching Station, according to an Associated Press report.

In December 2012, the North succeeded in putting a satellite into orbit on a long-range rocket fired from the launch pad in a surprise move that demonstrated to the world that it has moved closer to developing a nuclear missile that can reach the U.S. mainland.

Pyongyang has been working to upgrade the launch site to make it handle bigger rockets.

According to the report, the North has worked rapidly to expand the launch tower and has progressed on a railway to access it. It also has completed external work on two prominent, domed buildings at the site, whose function is uncertain. (Yonhap)

Unification no answer to S. Korea's low birth rate

Unification is no answer to South Korea's problem of low birthrates because the event will rather

bring down the fertility rate in North Korea than increasing the South's, a U.S. demographic scholar said on Aug. 18.

Elizabeth Hervey Stephen, a Georgetown University professor, made the prediction during a presentation on South Korea's demographic dividend at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), citing what happened to Germany after unification.

South Korea is known for its low birthrate, with last year's number standing at 1.19.

"If there is reunification, I can't see that fertility is going to increase in South Korea. If anything, I think it will bring down (that of) North Korea," she said in response to a question about how Korean unification would affect demographics.

She cited as an example the "birth shock" that East Germany went through after unification.

Before the 1990 reunification, the professor said, fertility in East Germany had been quite high because there were excellent facilities for children, an important factor that allowed mothers to go back to work when children were very young.

That kept fertility quite high in East Germany, whereas fertility in West Germany had been pretty low at around 1.5 babies per woman. But once there was reunification, the total fertility rate in East Germany dropped below that of West Germany, she said.

"In fact, it was down to historic lows about 0.9 children per woman," Stephen said. "During times of uncertainties, the last thing people do is to have children. So I don't think it's going to be the answer to the demographic restructuring in the long term." (Yonhap)

U.S. movie 'The Interview' to undergo editing after N.K. protests: reports

A U.S. comedy film about a plot to assassinate North Korean leader Kim Jong-un is expected to undergo some editing and its release will be pushed back after strong protests from the communist nation, according to local media reports.

North Korea has angrily reacted after the release in June of a trailer for the Columbia Pictures film, "The Interview," which tells the story of two Americans journalists who land an interview with Kim in Pyongyang but are then recruited by the CIA to kill him.

Pyongyang's foreign ministry denounced the movie as "the most undisguised terrorism" and "a war action" and warned of "a strong and merciless countermeasure" if the "U.S. administration connives at and patronizes the screening of the film."

On Aug. 14, Firstshowing.net and other media outlets reported that Sony Pictures, the film's distributor, has decided to push back the film's release, which had been set for October, and make alterations, including removing the faces of the North's leader and his late father from thousands of badges on the uniforms of extras.

Another change under consideration is to cut out a scene where the face of the North's leader is melted off, according to the reports.

Firstshowing.net said that there is reportedly no pressure coming from Sony Japan to change the scene, and the filmmakers are trying to determine if the scene is funny. (Yonhap)

PEOPLE

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

- August 17 guides the test-fire of an "ultra-precision high-performance tactical rocket of Korean style" developed on his initiative.
 18 gives field guidance at the construction site of the Yonphung Rest Home for Scientists.
 24 receives a floral basket and a congratulatory letter from the military attache corps in Pyongyang on the occasion of the 54th Day of the Songun (military-first) leadership.
 28 guides a parachuting and striking drill of KPA's paratrooper units.
 30 has a photo session with service personnel who participated in the parachuting and striking drills of paratrooper units of the KPA.
 31 provides field guidance at the October 8 Factory built as an icon of North Korea's industrial achievements.
- September 3 enjoys a concert of new music pieces given by the Moranbong Band at the Mansudae Art Theater together with his wife Ri Sol-ju.

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

- August 20 sends a message of greeting to Janos Ader, president of Hungary, on the occasion of the country's national day.
 29 has talks with Antonio Razzi, secretary general of the Commission for Foreign Affairs of the Italian Senate, and his party at the Mansudae Assembly Hall.
 30 has talks with Kanji Inoki, a member of the House of Councilors of Japan and his party, at the Mansudae Assembly Hall.
- September 11 has talks with Alexandr Torshyn, first vice-chairman of the Federation Council of Russia, at the Mansudae Assembly Hall.
 15 visits the lodging quarters of the participants of the 4th meeting of primary organization cadres of the Kim Il-sung Socialist Youth League with other senior party and state officials

Pak Pong-ju: Premier

- August 20 makes a field survey of the Taean Friendship Glass Factory.
 30 makes a field survey of the technical updating of the Posan Iron Works of the Chollima Steel Complex.
 31 sends a message of greeting to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Mohamad Najib Bin Tun Haji Abdul Razak of Malaysia on its national day.
- September 11 makes a field survey of the Pyongyang Thermal Power Complex.

CHRONOLOGICAL REVIEW

(Local Events)

- August
- 21 The 4th Rason International Trade Exhibition takes place in Rason City from Aug. 18-21.
 - 21 A forum on investment in the Rason economic and trade zone took place on Aug. 19 with companies from Russia, China, Italy, Thailand and other countries in attendance, the (North) Korea Central News Agency (KCNA) says.
 - 22 The military attache corps in Pyongyang visit the January 8 Fishery Station of the Korean People's Army (KPA) on the occasion of the 54th anniversary of the late leader Kim Jong-il's start of the Songun revolutionary leadership.
 - 22 Youth and students in Pyongyang hold a Taedong River crossing competition on the occasion of the Day of Songun.
 - 22 A seminar of officials of the Union of Agricultural Workers of Korea and agricultural workers takes place at the People's Palace of Culture on the occasion of the Day of Songun.
 - 22 A four-day FIFA Fitness Course closes in Pyongyang with coaches and instructors from sports teams and juvenile sports schools across the country in attendance.
 - 24 A national meeting takes place at the April 25 House of Culture to mark the 54th Day of Songun.
 - 30 The Pyongyang International Pro-Wrestling Contest under the title "For Peace, Friendship" opens at the Ryugyong Jong Ju Yong Gymnasium.
 - 31 A spokesman for the Policy Department of the National Defense Commission denounces a British TV channel's plan to produce and air what he called a movie slandering the North.
- September
- 1 A national educational experimental apparatus and teaching aids exhibition opens at the Three-Revolution Exhibition House in Pyongyang on the occasion of the 13th National Educational Workers' Meeting.
 - 2 The KCNA says the Saegisul (new technology) Trading Company has developed natural nano water disinfectant.
 - 2 SPA Chairman Choe Thae-Bok meets with Alexandr Torshyn, first vice-chairman of the Federation Council of Russia, and his party at the Mansudae Assembly Hall.
 - 3 A meeting is held at the Pyongyang Grand Theater to mark the 40th anniversary of leader Kim Jong-il's work "On the Art of Opera."
 - 12 The KCNA says a new kind of health product, bone-reinforced protein, was developed by the Bioindustry Institute under Kimilsung University.
 - 13 The Hydro-meteorological Engineering Institute develops an electronic heliograph.
 - 15 An exhibition of relics, jointly surveyed and discovered by the DPRK and France in Kaesong Walls, opens at the Korean Folklore Museum under the co-sponsorship of the Guidance Bureau for the Preservation of National Heritages and the French Far-east School.
 - 15 The State Stamp Bureau issues a stamp showing 'Tok Islet' (Dokdo) of Korea.

(Foreign Events)

- August 16 The Korean Committee on Measures for the Sexual Slavery for the Japanese Army and Drafting Victims urges Japan in a statement to fulfill its legal and moral obligations and responsibility for its past crimes.
- 17 A spokesman for KPA's General Staff in a statement again denounces the U.S. and South Korean forces for their Ulchi Freedom Guardian joint military exercises.
- 18 A Foreign Ministry spokesman denounces U.S. State Secretary John Kerry's remarks, which he claims revealed a U.S. attempt to stifle the DPRK under the pretext of the "human rights issue."
- 18 A North Korean Foreign Ministry spokesman denounces the Ulchi Freedom Guardian.
- 19 The Rodong Sinmun claims in an article that U.S. and South Korean forces are to blame for pushing relations to a catastrophic situation.
- 19 The Minju Joson denounces South Korean President Park Geun-hye's Liberation Day speech as "mockery and an insult to our nation."
- 20 A spokesman for the Policy Department of the National Defense Commission slams John Kerry's recent remarks as sophism.
- 21 A solidarity meeting takes place at the North Korea-Cuba Friendship Pyongyang Textile Machine Factory on the occasion of the month of solidarity with the Cuban people.
- 24 The Rodong Sinmun claims the South Korea-U.S. joint Ulchi Freedom Guardian exercises are pushing the situation on the Korean Peninsula to an extreme state of tension once again.
- 26 An Italian parliamentary delegation led by Antonio Razzi, secretary general of the Commission for Foreign Affairs of the Senate and chairman of the Italy-Korea Friendship Parliamentary Group, arrives in Pyongyang.
- 26 An SPA delegation led by Pak Myong-chol leaves Pyongyang to visit Russia.
- 28 Kim Hyong-jun is appointed as North Korean ambassador to Russia.
- 28 Kanji Inoki, a member of the House of Councilors of Japan and co-chairman of the organizing committee of the Pyongyang International Pro-Wrestling Contest, arrives in Pyongyang.
- 28 Foreign Minister Ri Su-yong talks with diplomatic envoys of the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Poland, the U.K., Germany, Romania and Sweden, at the Mansudae Assembly Hall.
- September 3 The KCNA says Kim Jong-un on Sept. 2 received a message of greeting from Laotian President Choummaly Sayasone, on the occasion of the 66th anniversary of the founding of North Korea, which falls on Sept. 9.
- 11 An MOU on scientific and technological cooperation between the State Science and Technology Commission of North Korea and the Ministry of Education and Science of Mongolia is inked in Pyongyang.
- 11 Foreign Minister Ri Su-yong leaves Pyongyang to take part in the 53rd meeting of the Asian-African Legal Consultative Organization to be held in Iran and pay an official goodwill visit to Iran.
- 11 The KCNA says the DPRK (North Korea) Red Cross Society handed over a South Korean

- resident who illegally entered the North to the South Korean Red Cross via Panmunjom.
- September 12 The KCNA calls for the withdrawal of U.S. forces from South Korea in a commentary.
- 13 The Minju Josen, the North's Cabinet newspaper, blasts the U.S. moves to deploy a Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) battery in South Korea as "a dangerous military nexus to render the situation in and around the Korean Peninsula extremely tense and push the North-South relations to a catastrophe."
- 13 A report of the DPRK Association for Human Rights Studies is released. The KCNA says it reflects the characteristics of the socialist system, human rights policy pursued in the North and the actual human rights performance in the country.
- 14 The Supreme Court gives a sentence of six years of hard labor to U.S. citizen Matthew Todd Miller for committing acts hostile to North Korea.
- 14 The Secretariat of the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea (CPRK) denounces the South Korean authorities for supposedly kicking off an anti-DPRK campaign.
- 15 An agreement on air services between the DPRK and Jordan is signed in Beijing.
- 15 The KCNA says talks between North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Su-yong and his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif were held at the Iranian Foreign Ministry on Sept. 14.

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