

VANTAGE POINT

DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH KOREA

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COVER PHOTO : The Third Committee of the U.N. General Assembly votes on Nov. 18 on a resolution condemning North Korea for human rights violations and recommending the referral of top North Korean leaders to the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity. The historic resolution overwhelmingly passed in a 111-to-19 vote, with 55 abstentions. (AP-Yonhap)

U.N. Condemnation of N.K. Human Rights Violations

This year's U.N. accusation on the North carries special significance as it called for the formal human rights violation charges against the communist country.

■ By Lee Kwang-ho

North Korea's isolation from international community is deepening as a U.N. General Assembly committee on Nov. 18 passed with a majority vote a resolution that denounces North Korea's human rights violations. It seeks to refer Pyongyang's rights violation record to the International Criminal Court (ICC) and to hold the country's top leaders responsible for alleged crimes against humanity.

This year's resolution has pushed the communist country to make a more furious response as that would pose a setback to its recent efforts to improve ties with the outside world to lure foreign investment and aid and revive the country's troubled economy. The socialist country has been under stringent U.N. sanctions for its nuclear tests and missile launches.

Despite Pyongyang's vehement objections, the Third Committee of the U.N. General Assembly approved the highly symbolic resolution in a 111-19 vote, with 55 countries abstaining.

U.N. Panel's Passage of Resolution

The resolution's easy passage through the committee almost guaranteed its formal adoption at the plenary session of the full 193-member of the U.N. General Assembly to be held in December. It also represented a victory for the West in an intense diplomatic battle at the U.N. against North Korea and other authoritarian regimes sympathetic to Pyongyang.

Earlier in the day, the committee rejected a Cuban proposal to remove the call for referral of the North to the ICC from the resolution. In support of Pyongyang, Cuba put forward a revision that centered on removing the call for the North's referral to the ICC from the original resolution and replacing it with a clause calling for human rights dialogue between North Korea and other nations.

“The General Assembly decides ... to take appropriate action to ensure accountability, including through consideration of referral of the situation in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea to the International Criminal Court and consideration of the scope for effective targeted sanctions against those who appear to be most responsible,” the resolution said. The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea is the North’s official name.

The North reacted angrily to the resolution. Choe Myong-nam, one of the North’s diplomats at its mission to the United Nations, said after the vote that his country rejects the resolution and its passage showed that the North no longer needs to hold dialogue with the international community.

Before the vote, Choe also called the resolution an “outrageous and unreasonable human rights campaign staged by the United States and its followers,” and threatened that the move is “compelling us not to refrain any further from conducting nuclear tests.”

Referral to the ICC was one of the key recommendations that the U.N. Commission of Inquiry (COI) made in a February report released after a yearlong probe into Pyongyang’s human rights record. The report also said the ICC should handle the North’s violations as “crimes against humanity.”

The resolution was drafted by the European Union and Japan and co-sponsored by a record 60 nations, including the United States and South Korea. Should it be adopted at a plenary session, it will mark the 10th resolution that the U.N. General Assembly has adopted on North Korean human rights since 2005.

“The General Assembly condemns the longstanding and ongoing systematic, widespread and gross violations of human rights in the



North Korean representatives to the United Nations, including Choe Myong-nam (second from L, front row), deputy chief of the North Korean foreign ministry’s international organizations bureau, watch the outcome of a vote on a resolution on their country’s human rights abuses at the Third Committee of the U.N. General Assembly on Nov. 18. (AP-Yonhap)

Democratic People’s Republic of Korea,” the resolution said.

It also expressed its “very serious concern” at a long list of human rights abuses committed by the North, including torture, rape, public executions, extrajudicial and arbitrary detention, and political prison camps.

As a co-sponsor, the U.S. has expressed support for the resolution. “As we have said before, we support the Commission of Inquiry’s final report and its calls for accountability,” Jeff Rathke, a State Department spokesman, said at a regular press briefing a couple of hours before the resolution’s passage.

South Korea said Nov. 19 that the passage of the resolution reflects how seriously the international community regards North Korea’s human rights abuses. “The adoption of the resolution reflects the international community’s concerns and willingness that the recommendations by the COI should be thoroughly implemented to improve the dismal situation in North Korea,” the foreign ministry in

Seoul said in a statement.

Seoul's unification ministry handling inter-Korean issues said that the government plans to actively cooperate with the international community for the enhancement of the human rights situation in the North.

Chances of North's ICC Referral

The North has struggled to tone down the resolution, offering to invite the special U.N. human rights investigator to visit the country in exchange for dropping any mention of referring the country to the ICC. North Korean diplomats in New York have also stepped up public relations activities, including providing a rare briefing on the country's human rights situation for U.N. diplomats, attending a private seminar to make the country's case and speaking more frequently to reporters.

Despite the resolution's passage, chances of actual referral of the North to the ICC are slim because U.N. General Assembly resolutions are not legally binding, and the U.N. Security Council is unlikely to approve the resolution because China and Russia are sure to exercise their veto power against it.

North Korea has long been labeled as 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 and keeps tight control over outside information.

But Pyongyang has bristled at any talk of its human rights conditions, calling it a U.S.-led attempt to topple its regime. The North has also released its own human rights report, claiming the country has the world's most advantageous human rights system and policies.

This year's U.N. accusation on the North

Korean human rights situation carries special significance as the resolution includes calls to bring formal human rights violation charges against the communist country. The U.N. has annually adopted a resolution condemning North Korea's human rights violations since 2005 and the resolutions endorsed in 2012 and 2013 were adopted by consensus.

Also, the highly symbolic resolution will help press the U.N. Security Council to take concrete measures on North Korea's human rights violations. The ICC can only investigate crimes in its member states, but if the U.N. Security Council gives the ICC jurisdiction, it can pursue crimes in non-state parties as in the cases of Libya in 2011 and Sudan in 2005.

After the COI issued the landmark report in February, the U.N. Human Rights Council in Geneva endorsed in March a resolution condemning North Korea for "systemic, widespread and gross human rights violations," by an overwhelming majority.

In the wake of the COI report, the North has made diplomatic efforts to avoid international pressure. The North's mission to the U.N. held a briefing on Oct. 7 claiming that the country is trying to guarantee human rights for its people and is open to genuine human rights talks with all countries.

Pyongyang also accused Western countries of exaggerating the gravity of the issue in a scheme to undermine its communist regime.

For the first time as a South Korean leader, President Park Geun-hye raised the issue of the North's human rights conditions at the U.N. General Assembly on Sept. 24. In her speech, she urged North Korea to improve its human rights record, bringing attention to human rights abuses by the Pyongyang regime.

In its brisk diplomatic activities, North

Korea sent Foreign Minister Ri Su-yong to the U.N. and Kang Sok-ju, another secretary of the Workers' Party and veteran diplomat, to the European Union in September. On Sept. 27, the North's foreign minister said in an address to the U.N. General Assembly that his government is willing to discuss human rights with the international community. Ri was the first North Korean foreign minister to attend the U.N. meeting in 15 years.

North Korea warned the European Union on Oct. 30 not to press ahead with a U.N. resolution against the communist nation for its human rights record, saying otherwise there would be "unpredictable consequences." In a statement, the North's foreign ministry claimed the EU is "dancing to the tune of the United States" as it has drafted the U.N. resolution.

Still, China and Russia hold key as the Security Council members with veto powers oppose the U.N. action against North Korea. China urged the international community on Nov. 14 not to "politicize" the issue of North Korea's human rights record, again opposing a U.N. move to hold its young leader Kim Jong-un accountable for alleged rights violations. Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Hong Lei said that it would veto any U.N. move to condemn North Korea for its alleged dismal human rights record.

Asked about China's stance on the U.N. move, Hong replied, "Our attitude is very clear. We are opposed to politicizing the relevant issue or putting political pressure on other countries by making use of the relevant issue."

"We suggest that differences in the field of the human rights issue should be properly resolved through dialogue and cooperation," Hong told a daily press briefing. "We hope that relevant parties will enhance dialogue and

cooperation and stay committed to promoting and protecting human rights as well as safeguarding the peace and stability of the Korean Peninsula."

Position of China and Russia

Russia, the former ideological mentor of North Korea during the Cold War era, opposes U.N. action against the North. More recently, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un sent one of his closest aides to Russia. Choe Ryong-hae, director of the North Korean People's Army General Politburo, met with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Nov. 18 in Moscow, in Pyongyang's latest efforts to seek diplomatic and economic support from other countries as a possible counterbalance to China.

Choe "brought a message" from Kim, the Kremlin said in a press release, without providing further details. Their closed-door meeting in Moscow took place as North Korea's ties with China, its most important ally, have soured, especially since Pyongyang's third nuclear test in February 2013, and speculation is rife that Kim may pick Russia as the destination for his first overseas trip since taking office nearly three years ago.

The South Korean government believes Kim Jong-un seems to have sent Choe to Russia in pursuit of closer bilateral ties to counter international pressure over its nuclear program and human rights abuses. Recently, the Pyongyang-Moscow relations are warming in the face of tightened international sanctions and also as Pyongyang's traditional ties with Beijing are not as strong as before.

Experts say the deepening international isolation of the two countries seems to be the main reason for their improving relationship.



Robert King (L), the U.S. special envoy for the North Korean human rights issue, and Marzuki Darusman, U.N. special rapporteur on human rights in North Korea, attend the 4th Chaillot Human Rights Forum in Seoul on Nov. 13. (Yonhap)

The two countries have been isolated since they turned a deaf ear to mounting calls to play by the rules. Russia has faced bilateral and multilateral sanctions from the West after it annexed Crimea and supported rebels in eastern Ukraine. Despite multilayered international sanctions, North Korea has shown no signs of giving up its nuclear ambitions.

Before the U.N. action, key North Korean human rights envoys from the United Nations and Washington stressed the significance of passing a U.N. resolution at an international forum in Seoul on Nov. 13.

Marzuki Darusman, the U.N. special rapporteur on North Korea, urged the international community to “seize this unique opportunity and momentum to help make a difference in the life of the North Korean people and hold accountable those responsible for serious violations of human rights there.”

In late October, Pyongyang offered to allow Darusman to visit the North in exchange for dropping the clause on the referral of the North

human rights issue to the ICC. He was appointed as the U.N. special rapporteur in 2010 with the task of probing the North’s human rights conditions and reporting the results and recommendations to the U.N. Darusman was one of the three members to the COI.

Darusman emphasized that there should be enough evidence to hold North Korean leader Kim Jong-un accountable for human rights atrocities committed by the regime, in accordance with the report by the COI.

Darusman said that there are “long-standing and on-going” violations of North Korea’s human rights, saying that the ultimate goal of addressing the issue is to bring peace and stability to the Korean Peninsula.

U.S. Reaction

Days before the U.N. action, North Korea released its two remaining American detainees -- Kenneth Bae and Matthew Todd Miller -- on Nov. 8 after Director of U.S. National Intelligence James Clapper made a secret trip to the communist nation and conducted negotiations on their release.

The release of the two could be part of efforts to tone down the resolution. The decision could also be an olive branch aimed at restarting the stalled negotiations on its nuclear program. U.S. officials have cited the detention of American citizens as a big stumbling block to improved relations between the two countries.

The decision came three weeks after freeing Jeffrey Fowle, another U.S. citizen who had been detained for five months on charges of leaving a Bible at a club for sailors. Kenneth Bae, a Korean-American missionary, and Matthew Miller, who was accused of tearing

up his tourist visa, were freed on Nov. 8. The three Americans were sentenced on charges of trying to subvert the secretive state.

The U.S. government has underscored that the release is only a human rights issue, reaffirming that there will be no change in U.S. policy toward Pyongyang and that Washington will not agree to negotiations with the North until it proves its determination to disarm its nuclear weapons program.

Clapper's trip to the North also had briefly raised hopes for a breakthrough in U.S.-North Korea ties, including a possible resumption of the long-stalled negotiations on Pyongyang's nuclear program. But American officials were quick to reject such speculation, saying Clapper's trip does not mean an opening of nuclear or human rights negotiations with Pyongyang.

In Beijing, U.S. President Barack Obama also said the North's release of the two Americans is no solution to a "core problem" between the two countries, and urged Pyongyang to demonstrate seriousness about giving up its nuclear program.

Pyongyang's Verbal Attack

In another appeasement gesture, North Korea said Nov. 10 it has formally ratified a U.N. protocol on the protection of children, claiming it is committed to international cooperation in the human rights field. The Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly, the North's top legislative body, issued a decree ratifying the 2000 Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, according to the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA). The protocol calls for the prohibition of trafficking of children, child prostitution

and child pornography.

South and North Korea have long been confronted over the North's human rights issue, while inter-Korean relations remain tense for months. The two Koreas failed to hold their second high-level meeting amid the simmering conflict over South Korean activists' launching balloons containing anti-Pyongyang propaganda leaflets across the border.

North Korea warned South Korea on Nov. 2 against joining a U.S.-led campaign to condemn the communist state's human rights conditions, saying it would bring an end to inter-Korean relations. "If the South Korean authorities eagerly participate in the United States' anti-republic (North Korea) human rights scheme and continue to harm the people's interests, North-South relations will not be able to avoid a collapse," said an article carried by the Rodong Sinmun, the mouthpiece of the North's ruling Workers' Party.

The North's media ratcheted up threats. The North will use all of its "political and military deterrence including the nuclear capability" in a showdown with the U.S. eager to isolate and suppress Pyongyang, the Rodong Sinmun said in a commentary.

South Korea on Nov. 7 dismissed North Korea's threat of the breakdown of bilateral ties as retaliation for Seoul's cooperation in a campaign against the communist nation's human rights abuse.

"Our government's stance is that North Korea's human rights situation should be improved," unification ministry spokesman Lim said at a press briefing. The North's human rights problem is not only associated with universal value but also is an important task in preparation for reunification, Lim stressed. (Yonhap)

Launch of Seoul-Berlin Unification Advisory Group

The Korean-German advisory group is the first-ever bilateral consultative mechanism to address issues concerning unification diplomacy.

■ By Kim Tae-shik

South Korea launched a regular consultative mechanism with Germany to use the European country's experience to draw its diplomacy towards national unification at the end of October. A special advisory group composed of government officials and experts from the two countries held its inaugural meeting in Seoul on Oct. 31 to discuss ways to help set up a unification policy based on Germany's experience. German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier visited Seoul for the first meeting and held talks with his South Korean counterpart Yun Byung-se also on Oct. 31.

The Korean-German Advisory Group on the Foreign Policy towards Reunification has been established to analyze diplomatic policies of East and West Germany and surrounding countries in the course of the German unification and include the German experience in drawing up Seoul's foreign policies for unification.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall separating East and West Germany in 1989. Germany's reunification took place in 1990. Germany has long been regarded as a model for South Korea as it has historically achieved national reunification.

The results of the inaugural meeting were reported to the foreign ministers of the two countries on Nov. 1 during a briefing, which was also attended by 13 members of the advisory group.

The South Korean Foreign Ministry said in a press release the German side attributed the successful unification of Germany to the trust built between East and West Germany through "change through approach" and trust in Germany won from the international community; and to the Eastern Policy set under the Willy Brandt government consistently kept in place.

Outcome of Inaugural Meeting

In addition, the delegation characterized the German unification as an achievement through a complex process, where the Peaceful Revolution in East Germany had been followed by the 2+4 talks and the resolution of the border issues, according to the English-language press release.

The South Korean side mentioned that from Germany's unification process it learned the impor-

South Korean Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se (third from L) and his German counterpart Frank-Walter Steinmeier (third from R) and members of the Korean-German advisory group pose to mark the launch of the joint body at the Foreign Ministry in Seoul on Nov. 1. (Yonhap)



tance of winning trust and confidence; the usefulness of pursuing pragmatic cooperation for practical compromise, or *modus vivendi*; the need to maintain policy consistency; the need to prepare for unification with a mid- to long-term perspective; and the need to pursue unification with initiative as a party concerned with the unification.

The advisory group members shared the view that Germany's unification experience could serve as a useful reference model for the envisioned Korean unification, the press release said, adding that they brought attention to the fact that given the current situation where North Korea continues nuclear and missile development and various provocations while failing to respond positively to South Korea's efforts to build trust through dialogue, the lessons from Germany's unification experience per se cannot be applied to the unification of the Korean Peninsula.

The two sides had agreed to convene the advisory group on an annual basis but they later agreed to hold the next meeting in Berlin in the spring instead of the fall of 2015, to maintain the momentum of cooperation at the proposal of the German side of the group at the briefing session.

The advisory group will intensively study the so-called "2+4 process" employed by the two Germanys, the United States, the former Soviet Union, France and Britain, the victorious countries in World War II.

2+4 Process

Through the 2+4 process the two Germanys discussed thorny issues such as the retention of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in unified Germany and the fixing of a border with Poland, a Seoul government official explained.

Securing support from surrounding countries through diplomatic effort was indispensable in realizing the German unification, the official said. "The two Germanys used the 2+4 process as a road map for unification and implemented it after the Berlin Wall fell, and we need to study how the two Germanys created the process," he said.

Germany, as a defeated country, had to acquire the approval of the four winner countries in order

to make changes in its legal status and territory. When the Berlin Wall fell down in 1989, the four super powers tried to decide on the divided Berlin and Germanys, but the then West German government joined hands with the East German government and persuaded the four countries to allow them to initiate the unification issue, thus creating the 2+4 system.

The Foreign Ministries of South Korea and Germany will participate in the Group along with a former foreign minister of now extinct East Germany as well as experts in economy, law and other diverse fields who are related to foreign policy for unification and can share Germany's unification experience with South Korea. As such, the advisory group is expected to provide tangible aid in the envisioned unification and/or integration process on the Korean Peninsula, the press release said.

A South Korean foreign ministry official said former East German Foreign Minister Markus Meckel, a member of the advisory group, had led the unification talks along with his West German counterpart Hans Dietrich Genscher and that Meckel's advice will be very advantageous as he actually led diplomatic efforts with surrounding countries.

The advisory group is the first-ever consultative mechanism between the two countries to be convened on a regular basis and address issues concerning unification diplomacy.

South Korea and Germany inked a preliminary deal in September to create the panel, an idea that Berlin first raised in February. South Korean Ambassador to Germany Kim Jae-shin and State Secretary of Germany's Federal Foreign Office Markus Ederer signed the memorandum of understanding on the establishment of the advisory group in Berlin on Sept. 18.

The foreign ministries of the two countries consulted on establishing the advisory group as a follow-up measure to the bilateral summit talks held in March in which the South Korean President Park Geun-hye and German Chancellor Angela Merkel agreed to set up a bilateral consultative mechanism on foreign policy and international cooperation toward unification.

In late March, Park unveiled her unification proposal, known as "the Dresden declaration," which calls for Seoul to increase humanitarian assistance to North Korea and build infrastructure in the North if trust increases between the two sides.

The members of the advisory group include former South Korean Foreign Minister Han Sung-ju, who acts as the Korean-side chairman; the German-side chairman Hartmut Koschyk, chairman of the German-Korean Parliamentarians' Friendship Association; former East German Foreign Minister Markus Meckel; Clemens von Goetze, director of the Third Department of the German Foreign Affairs Ministry; Claus Roland, a former World Bank official in charge of South Korea, China and Mongolia; Choi Jung-il, former South Korean ambassador to Berlin; Kwon Yong-woo, head of the Korean Peninsula Peace Regime at the foreign ministry; and some professors from both countries.

Meanwhile, at the end of the foreign ministers' meeting on Oct. 31 in Seoul, South Korea and Germany urged North Korea to give up its simultaneous pursuit of nuclear weapons and economic growth, stressing that the two countries will try to coax Pyongyang back to the negotiating table.

The inaugural meeting of the Korean-German Advisory Group on the Foreign Policy towards Reunification opens at the Foreign Ministry in Seoul on Oct. 31, co-chaired by former South Korean Foreign Minister Han Sung-ju (third from L) and on the German side by Hartmut Koschyk (third from R), chairman of the German-Korean Parliamentarians' Friendship Association. (Yonhap)



Foreign Ministers' Talks

South Korean Foreign Minister Yun and his German counterpart, Steinmeier, made the statement after having talks over the situation on the divided peninsula and cooperation in implementing Seoul's vision for unification.

"We shared the view that it is important for us to lead North Korea onto the path of dialogue and cooperation," Yun said at a press conference. "For sustainable peace on the Korean Peninsula, North Korea should abandon its dual policy goals of making nuclear weapons and developing its economy."

"I think that uncertainty over North Korea serves as the main difficulty in implementing a trust-building process on the Korean Peninsula," Steinmeier noted.

"Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program is the big stumbling block (to peace in the region). Germany is ready to support North Korea in making a decision of (denuclearization)," he said without elaborating.

When it comes to the unification advisory panel, Steinmeier said that Germany does not seek to provide information to Seoul like a teacher, but it wants to "share" its experience over how Germany won support from the public and its neighboring countries in the process of unification.

He stressed the importance of building confidence for inter-Korean unification.

"Confidence-building is the option that South Korea can use," he noted. "Seoul needs to adjust the pace of the unification process by watching how the North responds to the South's move."

Seoul's unification ministry also has been operating a similar consultative group on unification with its counterpart in Germany to learn lessons from the European nation's experience in its unification process and internal integration.

The Korean Peninsula has been divided since the end of World War II, with the communist North and capitalist South remaining technically at war as the 1950-53 Korean War ended in a cease-fire, not a peace treaty. (Yonhap)

Humanitarian Efforts for Inter-Korean Rapprochement

Former first lady Lee Hee-ho's trip to North Korea will send a signal to Pyongyang about Seoul's reconciliatory and humanitarian efforts.

While inter-Korean relations remain tense, Lee Hee-ho, widow of former President Kim Dae-jung, was to make a rare trip to North Korea soon, fueling speculation that frozen inter-Korean relations may see a thaw. This would be the first time the Park Geun-hye government has allowed a politically symbolic figure like the former first lady to visit the socialist country.

Five officials from the Kim Dae-jung Peace Center and the Friends of Love, a charity founded by Lee, were scheduled to travel to the North Korean border city of Kaesong on Nov. 21, together with two drivers.

They plan to hold working-level consultations with representatives from the North's Asia-Pacific Peace Committee on the date and logistics of Lee's trip to North Korea, unification ministry spokesman Lim Byeong-cheol said.

If Lee travels to North Korea, she would become one of the highest-profile South Korean figures to visit there amid a drawn-out lack of government-level dialogue between the two sides. Under the South's National Security Law, all of its nationals must report plans to contact North Koreans to the government in advance. Any trip to the North requires the government's approval as well.

Lee's visit is entirely for humanitarian pur-

poses. During a recent meeting with President Park Geun-hye, Lee spoke about her wish to visit the North. Park had replied that she would look for a convenient opportunity. Lee told Park that she knitted hats and mufflers for North Korean children, hoping it would be a small comfort to North Korean children in harsh living conditions during the winter.

Humanitarian Purposes

Lee, 92, last traveled to Pyongyang in December 2011 to attend the funeral of the former North Korean leader Kim Jong-il. At that time, she met with the current leader, Kim Jong-un. Lee's late husband, Kim Dae-jung, is respected both in South and North Korea for his efforts to improve inter-Korean relations in the early 2000s, for which he was awarded the year 2000 Nobel Peace Prize.

Earlier in November, the unification ministry confirmed that Lee had sought approval for communication with the North's Asia-Pacific Peace Committee.

The North's committee is headed by Kim Yang-gon, secretary of the ruling Workers' Party and director of the United Front Department. Kim visited the South in early October as a member of a delegation to attend the closing ceremony of the Asian Games held

in Incheon.

Kim Yang-gon already said Lee was welcome in Pyongyang anytime when he greeted aides of the late President Kim Dae-jung. The South Korean aides were invited to the North in August to receive a wreath from North Korean leader Kim Jong-un to mark the fifth anniversary of the death of the former South Korean president, who held the first-ever inter-Korean summit with Kim's father in 2000.

Lee met the younger Kim when she visited Pyongyang with Hyundai Group Chairwoman Hyun Jeong-eun as a diplomatic guest to pay condolences when Kim Jong-il died in 2011. If the North Korean leader approves and personally greets the senior guest from South Korea, he would be making an important gesture that could serve as a breakthrough in inter-Korean ties, according to observers. An aide to Lee said, however, it's uncertain whether she will be able to meet Kim even if she visits North Korea this time. The environment surrounding the Korean Peninsula has changed so much for the past several years.

The South Korean government's economic sanctions on the North remain unchanged, while the two Koreas' pledge to hold a high-level government dialogue recently fell through over South Korean civic groups' sending of anti-North Korean leaflets across the tense inter-Korean border.

Inter-Korean contact on the civilian level has been restricted to select international or religious bodies since the deadly North Korean attacks on a South Korean naval ship and an island in 2010. In May 2010, South Korea banned almost all economic exchange with North Korea to punish the communist country for its deadly sinking of the South Korean corvette Cheonan in March of the same year.



President Park Geun-hye (L) meets Lee Hee-ho, widow of former President Kim Dae-jung, at the presidential office Cheong Wa Dae in Seoul on Oct. 28. The 92-year-old Lee expressed her wish to visit North Korea to deliver knit hats and clothes in aid to North Korean kids. (Yonhap)

Seoul's Consistent Message

While hopes exist for a possible meeting between Lee and the North Korean leader, analysts said Pyongyang's situation is possibly too complicated for it to take place. Although the North sent its delegation to the South in early October, it also staged a series of armed provocations and has ratcheted up its rhetoric against the South in recent weeks.

But Seoul has sent a consistent message that it is open to dialogue, even as Pyongyang has reacted vehemently to an anti-North Korean leaflet campaign by South Korean civic groups and has acted unreliably, shifting back and forth between reconciliation and hostility.

Still, it is uncertain whether the rival Koreas will find common ground to resume their deadlocked government-level talks anytime soon. Meeting with Lee Hee-ho at Cheong Wa Dae in Seoul on Oct. 28, President Park courteously rejected a request made by the former first lady that the Seoul government stop the balloons being sent across the border, on the basis that there are no legal grounds to curb

the activists' right to freedom of expression.

A member of Lee's entourage informed Park that the government could prevent such activities based on the South-North Korean Exchange and Cooperation Law, but the president offered no response to this.

Observers also said that both Seoul and Pyongyang are not as eager to resume dialogue as they appear to be, at least for now. "We will not curry favor with North Korea just to reopen dialogue, which is degrading to the nation's dignity and status," said an official at the unification ministry.

North Korea watchers also said both sides should stop their shortsighted and narrow-minded war of nerves, suggesting that Seoul maintain a far broader point of view, while Pyongyang must drop its infantile adherence to the personality cult that perpetuates the dynastic leadership of the Kim family.

As inter-Korean relations remain deadlocked, South Korea expressed strong regret on Nov. 2 over North Korea's latest threat to cease all inter-Korean contact due to the scattering of anti-Pyongyang propaganda leaflets across the border.

In early October, North Korea sent a high-powered delegation to the South, agreeing to hold a second round of high-level talks between late October and early November. Seoul had offered to hold a fresh round of high-level talks on Oct. 30, which Pyongyang had spurned. The two Koreas held their first high-level talks in February since President Park took office in early 2013.

The inter-Korean tit-for-tat has thrown cold water on burgeoning signs of a thaw in relations between the archrivals, which remain technically in a state of war as the 1950-53 Korean War ended in an armistice, not a peace treaty.

Activists in the South often send balloons containing anti-Pyongyang propaganda leaflets as well as U.S. dollar bills across the border. The fliers mostly criticize the corruption and abysmal human rights conditions in the North.

North Korea claimed that the practice is part of the United States' attempts to topple its regime, saying the Seoul government supports the activists behind the scenes. On Nov. 6, North Korea strongly criticized the Park Geun-hye administration for working to create a new charter for the reunification of Korea.

In the inaugural meeting of the Presidential Committee for Unification Preparation in August, Park said her administration will declare the charter next year, the 70th anniversary of Korea's liberation from Japan's 35-year colonial rule. She said it will serve as a basis for the Constitution of a reunified Korea.

"It demonstrates the South's pursuit of unification by absorption," the North's Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea (CPRK) claimed in a statement. The committee accused the Park government of seeking confrontation while speaking publicly about the need for dialogue and mutual trust.

On Nov. 12, North Korea lashed out at South Korea for its large-scale annual military drills and vowed harsh retaliation, claiming that the exercises are aimed at launching a nuclear war against the communist country.

The South Korean military on Nov. 10 kicked off the Hoguk defense exercises involving some 330,000 troops with the aim of bolstering its defense posture against growing North Korean threats. The 12-day drill is the largest ever in terms of scale.

"The rehearsal is a preliminary war, nuclear test war for aggression on the DPRK (North

Korea) in light of its scale and content,” the North’s CPRK said in a statement carried by the North’s Korean Central News Agency (KCNA).

Despite the North’s angry reaction, South Korea said Nov. 19 that it is willing to hold talks with North Korea on all inter-Korean issues, but stressed that Pyongyang should first show seriousness in dialogue.

The unification ministry reaffirmed that the sensitive issue of resuming a suspended joint tour program to Mount Kumgang can be discussed if high-level talks are held. “To begin with, the government’s position is that the Mount Kumgang issue is a problem associated with all aspects of South-North relations,” Lim, the ministry’s spokesman, said.

What is needed is a comprehensive review of the safety of tourists and ways to resolve other concerns regarding the now-suspended tour project, he added. He was responding to a question about Unification Minister Ryoo Kihl-jae’s remarks on Nov. 18.

Mount Kumgang Tour

In a public speech, Ryoo said his government is willing to discuss the Mount Kumgang issue and all other pending inter-Korean issues once another round of high-level talks with Pyongyang opens.

Also on Nov. 18, Hyundai Group Chairwoman Hyun Jeong-eun traveled to the Mount Kumgang to celebrate the 16th anniversary of the start of the tour program.

Returning from the North, Hyun told reporters she and relevant North Korean officials agreed to the need for restarting the program. It was suspended in 2008 shortly after a South Korean tourist there was shot dead by a

North Korean coast guard.

“We and North Korean officials jointly held the commemorative event and vowed to make efforts to resume the tour program within this year,” Hyun told reporters upon her arrival in Goseong, an eastern gateway to the communist neighbor.

Tours to Mount Kumgang began in 1998 after an agreement between the deceased Hyundai Group founder, Chung Ju-yung, and the late North Korean leader Kim Jong-il. “The year 1998 is meaningful because the tours to Mount Kumgang first started. Unfortunately, tours have been suspended in the last six years, but I visited the mountain to commemorate the historic day,” Hyun said.

Hyun’s visit to the North was her second this year after she marked the 11th anniversary in August of the death of her husband, Chung Mong-hun. Chung is honored as a friend of the Pyongyang regime thanks to a number of lucrative cross-border projects he launched before committing suicide when a corruption investigation targeted him.

On Nov. 18, the North’s state media reported that Won Tong-yon, vice chairman of the Korea Asia-Pacific Peace Committee, and other senior officials attended the commemorative event held at the mountain resort.

The KCNA said in an English dispatch that the participants said Kim Jong-un is “paying deep attention to Hyundai Group and the tour of Mount Kumgang,” calling for efforts to resume the tour program “as soon as possible.” Tourists first started visiting the mountain in November 1998 and by 2008, more than 1.93 million people made the trip to the North. (Yonhap)

Release of U.S. Detainees and N. Korea-U.S. Relations

U.S. official's trip to Pyongyang raised hopes for a breakthrough in U.S.-North Korea ties. But Obama said the visit was focused on the detainee issue.

■ By Kim Tae-shik

North Korea released its two last-remaining American detainees upon a visit by Director of U.S. National Intelligence (DNI) James Clapper to Pyongyang, in what appears to have been a decision aimed at improving its image tarnished by human rights violations and offering an olive branch to Washington.

Clapper's office said on Nov. 8 that Kenneth Bae and Matthew Todd Miller had been allowed to depart North Korea and were on their way home to re-join their families.

Bae, a Korean-American missionary, had been serving a sentence of 15 years of hard labor after being detained in late 2012 for unspecified anti-state crimes. Miller was detained in April and had been sentenced to six years of hard labor for committing "hostile" acts. Their release came after the North freed a third American detainee, Jeffrey Fowle, in late October.

"We welcome the DPRK's (North Korea) decision to release both Mr. Bae and Mr. Miller. We want to thank our international partners, especially our Protecting Power, the Government of Sweden, for their tireless efforts to help secure their release," the DNI office said.

U.S. President Barack Obama hailed the release, saying it was a "wonderful day" for them and their families. He also said that the

U.S. was "very grateful for their safe return."

In a separate statement, the State Department welcomed the release.

"The safety and welfare of U.S. citizens abroad is the Department of State's highest priority, and the United States has long called on DPRK authorities to release these individuals on humanitarian grounds. We join their families and friends in welcoming them home," State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said.

Psaki praised Clapper, saying he engaged in discussions with North Korean authorities about the release of the two citizens on behalf of the U.S. government. She did not elaborate on the negotiations, including whether any concessions or rewards were offered to the North.

The South Korean government also welcomed the release of the Americans, and urged the North to free a South Korean missionary, Kim Jeong-wook, held there and take other positive steps to resolve humanitarian issues between the two divided states, such as reunions of families separated by the 1950-53 Korean War.

The North's decision came amid international efforts led by the European Union to adopt a U.N. General Assembly resolution that calls for the referral of the totalitarian regime to the International Criminal Court (ICC) for human rights violations.

Intention behind Release

North Korean diplomats have been scrambling to tone down the resolution, offering to invite the special U.N. human rights investigator to visit the country in exchange for the envisioned resolution dropping any mention of referral to the ICC.

They have also stepped up PR activities, including providing a rare briefing on the country's human rights situation for U.N. diplomats, attending a private seminar to make the country's case and speaking more frequently to reporters.

The chances of the North actually being referred to the ICC are slim because U.N. General Assembly resolutions are not legally binding, and the U.N. Security Council is unlikely to approve the resolution because China is sure to exercise its veto power against it.

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

But Pyongyang has bristled at any talk of its human rights conditions, calling it a U.S.-led attempt to topple its regime. In October, the North released its own human rights report, claiming the country has the world's most advantageous human rights system and policies. The North's release of the American detainees could also be an olive branch aimed at restarting the stalled negotiations on its nuclear program. U.S. officials have cited the detention of American citizens as a big stumbling block to improved relations between the two countries.



Seen here is Director of U.S. National Intelligence James Clapper, who made a secret trip to North Korea from Nov. 7-8 as U.S. President Barack Obama's envoy to win the release of two detained Americans there. This photo shows him attending a congressional hearing in Washington on Oct. 29. (AP-Yonhap)

The six-party denuclearization talks, which bring together the two Koreas, China, Japan, Russia and the U.S., have been stalled since late 2008. Pyongyang has called for the unconditional resumption of the talks, but the U.S. has demanded that the North first demonstrate its commitment to denuclearization if it wants to reopen the sessions.

Clapper's trip to the North raised hopes for a breakthrough in U.S.-North Korea ties. But Obama said the visit was focused on the detainee issue and "did not touch on some of the broader issues that have been the source of primary concern when it comes to North Korea, in particular, its development of nuclear capacity."

North Korea's official media have been silent on the release of the Americans but a pro-North Korean newspaper published in Japan said it was noteworthy that President Obama sent a personal letter to North Korean leader Kim Jong-un via Clapper and claimed that future

actions of the U.S. will be important.

“If the U.S. wants to make the delivery of the Obama letter to the supreme leader (Kim Jong-un) a fresh starting point for sincere dialogue (with the North), North Korea will respond to it,” the Choson Sinbo, the organ of the pro-Pyongyang Korean residents’ organization in Tokyo, said in its Nov. 11 edition. The paper is regarded as a mouthpiece of North Korea.

The U.S. government, however, made it clear that the release will not lead to the opening of dialogue between Washington and Pyongyang, calling for the North’s sincerity toward denuclearization.

Obama said in Beijing on Nov. 11 that North Korea’s release of the two Americans is not a solution to a “core problem” between the two countries, and urged Pyongyang to demonstrate seriousness about giving up its nuclear program. Obama was in Beijing for a summit of Asia-Pacific nations and a state visit.

The U.S. leader stressed that Clapper conducted no “high-level policy discussions” with North Korean officials when he visited the communist nation to win the release of the two U.S. citizens, according to a transcript provided by the White House.

Washington’s Stance

“We have been consistent in saying that when and if North Korea becomes serious about denuclearization on the peninsula and is prepared to have a conversation around that topic, then the United States is going to be very open to try to arrive at a solution that over the long term could lead to greater prosperity and security for North Korea,” Obama said.

“Until that time, there’s going to be a core problem between us,” he said.

It will take more than “small gestures” like the release of Bae and Miller for the two countries to resolve “a broader fundamental conflict,” he said, adding that the U.S. has so far not seen “serious engagement on the part of Pyongyang to deal with that problem.”

It is a matter of keen interest in Seoul what impact the release of the Americans will have on the political situation on the Korean Peninsula.

A ranking government official said future relations between North Korea and the U.S. will depend on the North’s future steps on its nuclear programs and it is Washington’s position that Clapper’s visit was for a humanitarian purpose only.

Another official also said Washington-Pyongyang relations will be decided on how North Korea acts on the nuclear, missile and human rights issues.

It is noteworthy that there is speculation about additional contact between the two countries following Clapper’s visit.

North Korea has a track record of attempting to use detained Americans as leverage in dialogue with Washington. The North’s eventual goal is direct high-level talks with the Obama administration.

Several American citizens were detained in North Korea on similar charges in the past, but all were freed, largely unharmed. In 2009, former U.S. President Bill Clinton flew to Pyongyang to bring home two American journalists.

Clinton then met with the North’s top leader Kim Jong-il and Kim Yong-nam, the North’s titular head and president of the Presidium of the Supreme People’s Assembly. The North’s

official media reported that pending issues between the North and the U.S. were discussed candidly and in depth and a consensus was reached on tackling the problems with dialogue.

The following year, former U.S. President Jimmy Carter won plaudits when he negotiated the release of American national Aijalon Mahli Gomes. Carter did not meet Kim Jong-il but had talks with Kim Yong-nam and top North Korean diplomats. The Pyongyang media also made similar reports as they did when Clinton visited Pyongyang.

Ko Yu-han, a professor of North Korea studies at Dongguk University in Seoul, said North Korea may have advanced the release (of the Americans) in order to directly approach the U.S. as improvement in inter-Korean relations has remained in the doldrums due to tension from the flying of anti-Pyongyang leaflets by South Korean activist groups. He speculated that there were some discussions on pending issues during Clapper's Pyongyang trip.

"It is difficult to believe that the top U.S. intelligence official discussed only the release of the detainees," he said. "The visit should be regarded as significant in that the two sides talked about pending issues behind closed doors."

There is a possibility for the resumption of the stalled six-party talks if the U.S.-North Korea relations have momentum for improvement, he said. If the estranged nature of South-North Korean relations is prolonged, South Korea may lose the initiative in affecting the political situation on the Korean Peninsula.

South Korea has repeatedly called on the North to respond to its proposal for high-level talks but the North has declined on the grounds that the South's government sits idle

on the flying of anti-North Korea leaflets by activists, including North Korean defectors, and even encourages it.

North Korea harshly denounced the leaflet scattering and warned of retaliation against what it called a grave provocation.

"Any psychological warfare studded with deceits and blackmail could bring about more destructive results," the North's main newspaper Rodong Sinmun has said. "The cross-border spread of leaflets is a more grave provocation than shooting and shelling."

Defying the North's warning and opposition from South Korean residents in border areas, some South Korean activist groups continued the campaign, including a leaflet launch at midnight on Oct. 31. The Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea, the North's organization in charge of inter-Korean affairs, accused the South Korean authorities on Nov. 1 of persistently shielding and encouraging another leaflet scattering operation in Pocheon, Gyeonggi Province, on Oct. 31.

On the North's demand that the South Korean authorities stop the activists flying anti-Pyongyang leaflets, the Seoul government has long maintained that it has no legal basis to stop civic groups' activities.

"The anti-Pyongyang leaflet issue is something private activists have to decide for themselves," the government has said.

The South Korean government has not renounced its hope for high-level contact with the North and maintains a position of continuing efforts to induce change in Pyongyang's attitude on such issues as the North's nuclear program and humanistic issues between the two Koreas. (Yonhap)

North Korea's Formidable Nuclear Capabilities

With its formidable nuclear capabilities ever more increasing, North Korea has recently launched a new submarine capable of firing ballistic missiles.

■ By Lee Kwang-ho

In yet another ominous sign of its nuclear capacity, North Korea has recently launched a new submarine capable of firing ballistic missiles. This menacing development raised further concerns over the evolving missile and nuclear threats posed by the communist country.

North Korea is believed to have the capability to deliver a small nuclear warhead on a missile, according to reports and experts. But no one outside of the inner circle of North Korea's nuclear program likely knows what advances the country has made.

But mastering the step of miniaturizing a nuclear warhead would put Pyongyang far closer to its long-stated goal of acquiring a nuclear deterrent and make a mockery of years of U.N. sanctions aimed at curbing such a program. North Korea has conducted three nuclear tests, and early this year it threatened to test a "new form" of device.

Gen. Curtis Scaparrotti, the commander of the U.S. forces in South Korea, said recently he believes that North Korea has the capability to miniaturize a nuclear device, and the technology to potentially deliver it. The country has also developed a launcher that could carry an intercontinental ballistic missile containing a nuclear warhead.

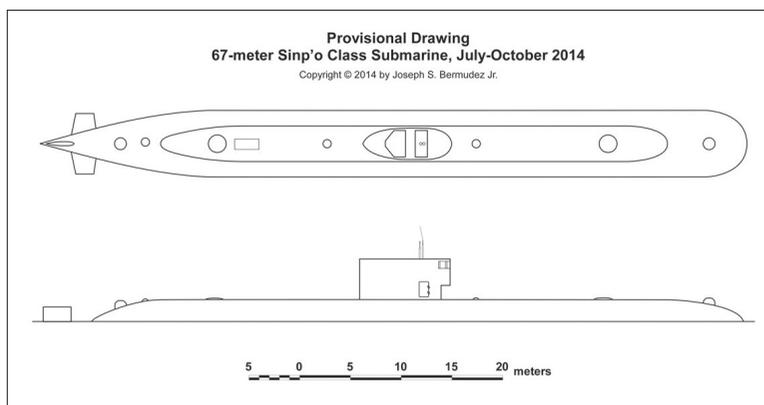
The North is believed to have completed construction of the new submarine after importing a Soviet-era Golf-class diesel submarine and reverse-engineering it. "The North has made an imitation based on the old Soviet model with the knowledge earned through reverse-engineering," said a military source in Seoul on Nov. 2.

The vessel is 67 meters long and 6.6 meters wide with a diving displacement of 2,500 to 3,000 tons. Golf-class submarines were built in 1958, and decommissioned in 1990. The Russian 3,500-ton Golf-class sub had three missile tubes that carried R-21 submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), a single-stage, liquid-propellant missile with a 1,180-kilogram warhead with a range of up to 1,420 kilometers.

Development of New Submarine

Despite a series of reports on Pyongyang's possible development of a new submarine, Seoul military officers have said Pyongyang has not yet acquired the technology to deploy SLBMs. "The North's new vessel is what the website 38 North reported in October as 'an unidentified submarine' moored in a boat basin at the Sinpo South Shipyard, citing its review of satellite imagery," the source said.

This is an artist's rendering of a new North Korean submarine capable of firing ballistic missiles that military expert Joseph S. Bermudez Jr. contributed to 38 North, the website of the U.S.-Korea Institute at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, on Oct. 19. (Photo courtesy of 38 North) (Yonhap)



The website is run by the U.S.-Korea Institute at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies.

As the North's primary submarine manufacturing facility, the Sinpo shipyard is home to the headquarters of its Maritime Research Institute of the Academy of National Defense Sciences.

In a move to mount a missile tube on the new vessel, the communist country has carried out dozens of tests both on the ground and at sea, another source said. "According to the analysis of satellite imagery revealed by 38 North, a ground test facility for the SLBM launch has been up and running at the Sinpo shipyard," he said, adding that a dozen more tests would be required to perfect the technology.

His comments are in line with what arms expert Joseph S. Bermudez Jr. said in his report in October that North Korea has built "a new test stand" at Sinpo to research and develop SLBMs. He said that the installation has a 35-by-30-meter concrete pad with an approximately 12-meter-high test stand.

The belligerent regime has more submarines than South Korea, although they are equipped with outdated weapons. It is believed to have some 70 submarines, including some 20 1,800-ton Romeo-class submarines, about 40

of which are the 325-ton Sango-class vessels.

Another source said, however, that the heavily militarized country has conducted multiple tests both on the ground and at sea to master the technology of mounting a missile tube on the new vessel. Experts consider strategic bombers, intercontinental ballistic missiles and SLBMs to be the components of a "nuclear triad" needed to ensure a nation's nuclear deterrence.

Seoul has been seeking to beef up its anti-submarine capabilities since a North Korean submarine torpedoed its corvette Cheonan in the West Sea in March 2010, killing 46 sailors. Pyongyang denies responsibility for the incident.

Seoul officials also said the military began analyzing the construction of the North's submarine in July, adding that the sub had yet to be deployed with its missile-launching capabilities still in question. It is believed that the vessel can deploy SLBMs with vertical launch systems.

Kim Dae-young, a senior research fellow of the Korea Defense and Security Forum, said security concerns would worsen if the North completed the test for the vertical launch of missiles from the sea, although it remains to

be seen how the situation will develop.

“If Pyongyang also succeeds in mounting a miniaturized nuclear warhead on a missile, the military power dynamics between the South and North will become unbalanced,” Kim said.

Miniaturized Nuclear Warhead

Meanwhile, North Korea seems to have the ability to miniaturize a nuclear warhead for its medium-range missiles, but does not appear technically ready to conduct necessary tests, a U.S. expert said on Oct. 30.

“My analysis is that North Korea could probably miniaturize a warhead that should fit for a Rodong missile,” Mark Fitzpatrick, director of the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Program at the U.S.-based International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), said in an interview with Yonhap News Agency.

Fitzpatrick was in South Korea to take part in the third Seoul Defense Dialogue for a three-day run. The multilateral vice ministerial-level forum gathered hundreds of officials and security experts from 24 countries and three international organizations.

Noting that it is “logical that they would be making progress in being able to produce the miniaturized warhead,” the expert said Pyongyang would need to test it “at least once more to perfect the process.” “Probably, the North knows how to do it based upon their technical abilities, but until they test the miniature warhead, they would not be sure. In the process of the warhead development, it takes several tests to get it right,” he said.

North Korea has carried out three nuclear tests since 2006, including its most powerful one in February 2013, and the bellicose state has threatened to carry out “a new form” of

underground test. So far this year, the North has test-fired missiles and rockets on 21 occasions, including Scud-class missiles with a range of 500 kilometers.

As Gen. Curtis Scaparrotti said, Pyongyang has the capabilities to build nuclear-tipped missiles, and the technology to potentially deliver them, although he has no evidence to confirm his assumption. It seems that South Korea shares the view of the U.S. general as it has not excluded the possibility that the North has the capability to launch a nuclear-tipped missile.

During a parliamentary audit on Oct. 27, South Korean Defense Minister Han Min-koo said that Seoul believes Pyongyang has achieved a significant level of technology in producing uranium-based nuclear weapons.

South Korean Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se made a similar remark during a parliamentary audit of the foreign ministry. He stated that North Korea in due time will be able to make nuclear bombs small enough to fit into missiles. He said that the possibility of North Korea possessing such weapons is growing.

These comments from U.S. and South Korean officials vividly indicate that military bases, including those of the U.S. forces, and cities in South Korea could be easy targets of a nuclear attack, which could be as swift as an assault by a short-range missile or rocket. Experts especially warn of the possibility of the North launching an attack from a submarine, against which even the “Kill Chain” preemptive strike system and the Korea Air Missile Defense would be useless.

Experts also said that uranium-based weapons can be used without conducting separate nuclear tests and are difficult to track and monitor because the centrifuges needed to enrich uranium for bombs can be easily hidden

from satellites.

But until September, the South's defense ministry said that the chances were slim that the North has succeeded in making nuclear weapons weighing less than one ton. It is unclear why Scarparotti decided to ramp up the rhetoric, though he may have had in mind his government's attempts to push South Korea into joining the U.S. missile-defense program.

Right after the North's third nuclear test in February 2013, the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency reported to Congress "with moderate confidence" that the North has nuclear weapons that can be delivered by ballistic missiles. If the North has succeeded in reducing the weight of a nuclear warhead to less than one ton, the most threatening weapons would be Scud and Rodong missiles. The Scud has a range of 300 to 800 kilometers, which is capable of hitting any target on the Korean Peninsula. The Rodong has a range of 1,300 kilometers, which would allow it to hit Japan. It can only carry a warhead weighing about 700 kilograms, but a shorter range could increase the payload.

But diplomatic sources in Seoul said Scarparotti was exaggerating. "Seoul and Washington generally share the view that it's still too early for the North to have succeeded in miniaturizing its nuclear warhead," a government source said. "It seems that at every opportunity, U.S. regional commanders have talked about this," probably to pressure South Korea to join the U.S. missile-defense shield. A former senior foreign and security official speculated, "Seoul may be looking for justification for the recent agreement with Washington to postpone the handover" of full operational control of South Korean troops.

In a related development, North Korea has

started operating a new plant to produce weapons-grade uranium, doubling its capability to make fuel for atomic bombs, according to a senior South Korean official. "In 2012, the North started building a new facility next to its old uranium plant, about 120 meters long and 15 meters wide," the official said.

The new plant to produce highly enriched uranium is in the Yongbyon nuclear complex, the center of the country's nuclear arms program. It was built next to a uranium facility that was shown to a visiting U.S. scientist in 2010. The North invited former Los Alamos National Laboratory director Siegfried S. Hecker to Yongbyon and showed him the facility with about 2,000 gas centrifuges to enrich uranium.

In August, the Institute for Science and International Security said construction materials inside the Yongbyon nuclear complex had disappeared while a train was detected on a railway linked to a building. It concluded that work was continuing to expand the centrifuges and reactor facilities.

The newly built facility is about the same size as the old one, according to the source, leading to the estimate that it is also equipped with about 2,000 centrifuges. "If the North operates all 4,000 centrifuges year-round, it can produce about 80 kilograms of highly enriched uranium annually," said a nuclear engineer from a state-run institute. "That is enough to build four to five nuclear bombs."

The North started its nuclear arms program by producing weapons-grade plutonium, but made a switch to producing weapons from highly enriched uranium. The first and second nuclear tests in 2006 and 2009 were believed to test plutonium-based devices, but the most recent one in February 2013 was believed to be a test of a uranium-based device. (Yonhap)

North Korea's Frenzy in Condemning Defectors

North Korea's unusually bitter condemnation of defectors seemed to be designed to gloss over their accusations on the North's human rights situation.

North Korea has recently been in a frenzy condemning some key defectors who have been aggressively engaging in anti-Pyongyang activities, especially in the flying of anti-North Korea leaflets across the border, by mobilizing their families remaining in the North.

Pyongyang's propaganda mouthpieces like the Internet site "Uriminzokkiri" as well as its official media are sending out articles almost daily denouncing the defectors as "human scums" and "parasites" who serve as the vanguard of anti-North Korea activities at the orders of South Korea's intelligence authorities.

Among the targets of the North Korean condemnation are Rep. Cho Myung-chul of the ruling Saenuri Party, a former professor of the Kim Il-sung University in Pyongyang; Park Sang-hak, head of the Fighters for a Free North Korea (FFNK); Chang Jin-sung, head of the New Focus International, an Internet site for North Korean defectors; and Shin Dong-hyuk, who has revealed the dire human rights situation in the North to the international community.

Cho has supported the flying of anti-Pyongyang leaflets by defectors and activist groups and asserted that a law on North Korea's human rights situation be legislated while Park's FFNK is spearheading the leaflet

flying campaign. Chang, a former member of North Korea's United Front Department, which handles anti-South Korea operations, exposed the reality of the North's power elites.

North Korea made distortions of the defectors' lives in the North depicting them as shameless lawbreakers and revealed their alleged personal records in detail. It was not rare that the North Korean regime makes personal attacks and threats on defectors, but it is noteworthy that it involved the families of the defectors in criticizing them this time.

Uriminzokkiri, the official website of the North's Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea (CPRK), carried a series of articles titled "Defectors, who are you?" since Nov. 4 to condemn the defector-turned activists in the South. In the past, the site was used to denounce defectors but in its recent articles, the degree of condemnation is much more bitter than the previous ones.

The site denounced Cho as a lecher and claimed he was at the front of the scheming confrontation against North Korea by being raving mad about having the National Assembly pass the North Korea human rights law and falsely criticizing North Korea's human rights conditions.

The website also aired video interviews with two brothers of Cho in the North on Oct.

30 and 31 to rebuke the defector-turned South Korean lawmaker's remarks on North Korea. Cho's brothers said Cho was making false assertions in the interviews. Cho defected to South Korea in 1994 and became a member of the South Korean parliament on proportional representation in 2012.

Commenting on the North's interviews, Cho said North Korea has been making it its business to intimidate and blackmail the families of defectors in order to cover up the truth about its human rights abuses and suggested having a face-to-face meeting of defectors and their families at the U.N. Human Rights Committee to reveal the truth.

Use of Families

On Oct. 25, Uriminzokkiri broadcast an interview with Shin Dong-hyuk's father, his uncle and other acquaintances and claimed that Shin's assertion that he was born in a political prison camp in the North was a lie. Shin has been regarded as a symbolical figure who had been detained in a North Korean concentration camp. He made a testimony on the North's human rights abuses at an international conference in Prague on Oct. 1.

The North's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) also slammed North Korean defectors in a report of the publication of a white paper by the National Reunification Institute, accusing the defectors of being "raiders and trumpeters of plotting anti-North Korea schemes."

The North's unusually bitter condemnation of defectors seemed to be designed to shift the responsibilities of the stalled inter-Korean relations to defectors and gloss over their accusations on the North's human rights situa-



Heads of North Korean defectors' groups, who have been sending anti-Pyongyang leaflets across the inter-Korean border for years, criticize North Korea's recent death threats against them during a news conference at the Korea Press Club in Seoul on Nov. 3. (Yonhap)

tion amid the international efforts to refer North Korean leadership to the International Criminal Court (ICC) for human rights abuses.

The Rodong Sinmun, the organ of the North's ruling Workers' Party of Korea, made similar arguments and accused the South Korean government of conniving and encouraging the scattering of anti-North Korea leaflets. In an editorial titled "Anti-national Criminal acts that bring forth confrontation and war," the daily said the South Korean government instigates the defectors to fly the leaflets.

In a statement on Nov. 1, the CPRK accused the South Korean government of "persistently shielding and encouraging" the leaflet scattering operation, threatening to cease all inter-Korean contact with the South Korean government and to "punish" those involved in the operations.

"The South Korean authorities should not even dream of sitting at the negotiating table with us as long as a reckless leaflet scattering operation goes on," the statement said and warned that the North Korean army would strike the forces commanding their operations

behind the scene if the leaflet scattering goes on.

“The Korean People’s Army will sternly punish and finish off those criminals involved in those operations in the name of all Koreans. We have the right to punish the criminals who fled to the South after committing crimes against their social system and law and the South Korean authorities are obliged to extradite the criminals to the North side in the light of international law and practice.” it said.

North Korea even used Chinese media to condemn its defectors. The Global Times, the sister paper of China Communist Party organ People’s Daily, carried videos blaming the defectors on its Internet homepage on Nov. 6. The North Korean embassy in Beijing had provided the Chinese newspaper with the videos.

The Chinese website also broadcast a condemnation statement given by a North Korean embassy spokesman. Moon Song-hyok, the embassy’s public relations official, said defectors Shin Dong-hyok and Cho Myung-chul are parasites who are working as a loudspeaker of the South Korea’s National Intelligence Service (NIS) and their statements were the product of sheer fabrication by the NIS.

Reports in Chinese Media

Moon further said the defectors are neither “political refugees” as hostile forces describe nor “human rights advocates.” “They are just criminals who should be punished by the North Korean law and hideous betrayers who have no conscience or morality.”

North Korea watchers say China’s news media have maintained a neutral attitude in North Korean affairs in recent years. But the broadcasting of videos provided by North

Korea and relaying of North Korean officials’ defector denunciations seemed to suggest the Chinese Communist Party’s objection to the international move to refer North Korean leadership to the ICC, they said.

The Chinese Party has shown sharp repulsion against international efforts, led by the U.S. and the European Union, to pass a resolution for the referral of North Korea to ICC at the U.N. General Assembly.

Reflecting the party’s view, China’s Ambassador to the United States, Cui Tiankai, has recently expressed opposition to the referral of North Korea to the ICC for its human rights violations.

“Other countries, including the United States and China, should not try to interfere in North Korea’s domestic issues,” Ambassador Cui said in an interview with Foreign Policy Magazine, published on Nov. 4.

China’s opposition to sending Pyongyang to the ICC has long been established, but it is very unusual that China’s top diplomat in Washington expressed such criticism just prior to U.S. President Barack Obama’s scheduled trip to Beijing.

“While the United States has its own opinion, ultimately, the situation is up to the North Korean people to decide,” Ambassador Chui stated. “I don’t think that actions further complicating this matter, in the ICC or anywhere else, are helpful or constructive.”

Meanwhile, the defectors have taken a firm stance not to succumb to the North’s threats for retaliation and pledged to continue their leaflet campaign in a low-key manner for the time being.

A number of activist groups, including the key player FFNK, have often launched balloons carrying propaganda leaflets across the

border to spread anti-Pyongyang messages targeting the North Korean leader and the country's dictatorship.

The propaganda campaign, often announced in advance and widely covered by local and overseas media, has recently been at the center of the inter-Korean row, with North Korea threatening not to hold dialogue with the South unless it is stopped.

"In the future, the spreading of anti-North leaflets by defector groups will be conducted behind the scenes, taking into consideration more effective methods (of campaigns) as well as the safety of residents (at the border area) and direction of the wind," the activist groups said in a statement on Nov. 3.

The change among the hard-line activist group, which has long defied the North and the local government's calls to cease and desist, came amid growing criticism over the security risks their campaigns pose on front-line border residents as well as inter-Korean diplomatic feuds over the issue.

North Korea has spurned high-level inter-Korean talks in protest of Seoul's inaction over the propaganda campaign, dampening fence-mending hopes raised following the North's surprising dispatch of a top-notch delegation to the closing ceremony of the Incheon Asian Games in early October.

Defectors' Pledge

"If North Korea does not make (further) provocations, we will take a step back and send the leaflets behind the scenes," FFNK head Park Sang-hak said. "We may also suspend anti-Pyongyang leaflet spreading entirely for a while for the two Koreas to engage in talks," Park noted.

The activist groups asserted that their latest decision was not meant to succumb to the North's military threat, vowing to continue their "movement to democratize North Korea" down the road even at the cost of the activists' lives.

Shin Dong-hyuk, who asserted he had witnessed the execution of his mother and older brother, said North Korea is using his father in the North as a hostage.

South Korea expressed strong regret on Nov. 2 over North Korea's latest threat to cease all inter-Korean contact due to the scattering of the anti-Pyongyang leaflets across the border, saying the possibility of fresh high-level talks has effectively come to naught.

In early October, North Korea sent a high-powered delegation to the South, agreeing to hold a second round of high-level talks between late October and early November. Seoul had offered to hold a fresh round of high-level talks on Oct. 30, which Pyongyang has spurned.

The two Koreas had held their first high-level talks in February this year since President Park Geun-hye took office in early 2013.

"It is very regretful that North Korea has expressed its intention to scupper inter-Korean dialogue by falsely claiming the leaflet campaign is backed by our government," Lim Byeong-cheol, a spokesman for the unification ministry, said in a statement.

"North Korea should clearly realize that it cannot obtain anything with unilateral and threatening allegations," Lim said. "Pyongyang should take corresponding action if it truly wants peace on the Korean Peninsula and improvement in inter-Korean ties." (Yonhap)

Golden Opportunity for N.K. to End Energy Crisis

If North Korea joins hands with Russia, China and South Korea in the energy sector, it could resolve its chronic energy shortages.

■ By Lee Jong-heon. *senior researcher at Asia Future Institute in Seoul*

Wood-burning Vehicles

Trucks that run on firewood or coal have re-emerged on roads in North Korea at a time when consumers elsewhere are benefiting from the shale revolution that sharply lowered prices of auto fuels. The use of wood gas to run auto engines was invented in the mid-1800s and was popular during the fuel shortages of World War II. The wood-burning vehicles, called “moktan-cha” in North Korea, literally means “wood-coal car,” were widely used in the country more than seven decades ago but disappeared with the rise of fossil fuel-driven vehicles.

In the face of the great economic and energy crisis in the mid-1990s, North Koreans turned many diesel-powered trucks into moktan-cha by retrofitting the vehicles with wood gasifiers. At that time, the country launched a nationwide campaign to build more wood-burning vehicles, including trucks, tractors and buses, as part of efforts to reduce consumption of precious liquid auto fuels.

Burning wood or coal produces carbon monoxide and hydrogen gas that is pumped into an engine to run moktan-cha. As more and more wood stuff was used to fuel autos, mountains were increasingly deforested, causing massive floods and landslides, which were attributable to the country’s chronic food shortages. The wood-burning trucks have been recently spotted again in North Korea’s rural area, showing a new energy crisis unfolding in the secretive nation.

No Crude Supplies from China?

The North's energy shortage worsened after its biggest benefactor, China, has seemingly reduced crude oil supplies in an apparent show of its displeasure with Pyongyang's third nuclear test last year. China exported no crude oil to North Korea for the first nine months of this year, according to South Korea's government trade agency that cited data from China's customs authorities. It was the first time that official crude oil shipments from China to North Korea marked zero for nine straight months.

China shipped 578,000 metric tons, or 4.24 million barrels, of crude oil to North Korea in 2013, 523,000 tons in 2012, 526,000 tons in 2011 and 528,000 tons in 2010, which met most of the North's demand. The North's payments for Chinese crude oil have increased rapidly to reach US\$598 million last year, compared with \$577 million in 2012, \$518 million in 2011 and \$326 million in 2010.

The suspension of crude oil exports seems to be more caused by China's domestic oil supply conditions. China had supplied North Korea crude oil pumped at its northeastern field of Daqing via a pipeline that runs to the Ponghwa Refinery close to the border with China. But crude reserves at the Daqing field are at near depletion. Furthermore, oil product stocks in China are increasing due to its slowing economy and expansion of Chinese refining capacity, which prompted China to send refined products instead of crude oil.

According to sources, China has been sending crude oil to North Korea through Russia's Eastern Siberia Pacific Ocean (ESPO) pipeline that connects to the Sungri Refinery on the North's border with Russia. The Sungri

Refinery with a capacity of 2 million tons a year went offline in 2009 due to the suspension of Russia's crude supplies, but it has been recently renovated apparently with Russia's assistance, an indication that the North is receiving crude from the ESPO. But it is unknown how much crude the North gets from the Russian pipeline.

What's clear at this moment is that North Korea's energy shortage is worsening as shown by the return of the wood-burning vehicles. The fuel shortage has reportedly forced the North's powerful military and ruling elite to park their vehicles. According to South Korea's state-run Korea Energy Economics Institute (KEEI), North Korea's total energy supplies shrank to 12.28 million tons of oil equivalents (TOE) in 2012, compared with 23.95 million TOEs in 1990, after slumping 3 percent annually.

The decrease in energy supplies was attributable to the shortage of hard currency and diplomatic isolation due to its nuclear and missile development programs. Under the decades-long ruling idea of self-reliance and economic autarky, the North has been struggling to meet local demand with no major supplies from the outside. But the country with no oil field has to depend on imports of crude. With many factories remaining idle due to fuel shortages, the North has few products to export, which leads to chronic shortages of hard currency and energy sources in a vicious circle.

Less Coal Supplies

Oil accounts for just 6 percent of North Korea's total energy supplies, with coal 57 percent and hydraulic power 27 percent, with

no nuclear power and natural gas. Still worse, supplies of the main source of coal have been declining in recent years, shrinking to 52 percent of what it had in 1990. The decrease was caused by increased shipments to China. The North exported 16.5 million tons of coal to China in 2013, up 39.8 percent from 11.8 million tons in 2012, according to the Seoul-based Korea International Trade Association. But income from the coal exports increased just 15.5 percent to \$1.37 billion due to lower prices. The North's coal exports that remained around 2 to 3 million tons a year in the 2000s jumped to 11.2 million tons in 2011, 11.9 million tons in 2012 and 16.5 million tons in 2013.

Due largely to reduced coal supplies, North Korea's electricity generation has been on the decrease. The country generated 21.5 billion kWh of electricity in 2012, down 22.4 percent from 27.7 billion kWh produced in 1990. Coal has met 43.7 percent of the country's total power production in 1990 and 47.4 percent in 2000, but the portion slipped to 37 percent in 2011 and 37.2 percent in 2012, with hydraulic power climbing to 63 percent in 2012 from 56 percent in 1990, according to the KEEL.

The North used 6.8 million TOEs of sources for electricity generation in 2012, down from 9.7 million TOEs in 1990, mainly because of decreased input of coal. The North has relied on hydraulic power stations to produce electricity, but the plants produce less electricity during winter because of a lack of water in the rivers. North Korea's young leader Kim Jong-un has described hydraulic power stations as the sole way for the country to address its power shortages without outside intervention.

North Korea had built about 7,000 small hydraulic power plants until the mid-2000, but

most of them were torn down or remain idle. The country currently has a total of 29 hydraulic power plants across the country, with a combined capacity of 5,290 megawatt. But plants with a combined capacity of 2,993 MW, or 56.6 percent of the total, were built 30 years ago or before the 1945 liberation from the Japanese colonial rule, which was attributable to troubles in the plants. About 30 hydraulic plants are under construction, including on Kumya river, Yesong river, Arang stream, Wonsan and Hungju, among others.

North Korea has eight coal-fired power plants with a combined capacity of 2,950 MW, but four of them with 2,500 MW, or 85 percent of the total capacity, were built in the 1960s or 1970s, largely with the help of the Soviet Union. Two plants with a combined capacity of 350 MW were put online in the mid-1980s, and the other two plants with 100 MW combined in the mid-1990s. With the lacks of experiences and components of the facilities, the North could not undertake necessary regular maintenances, which led to malfunctions of the plants.

Due to dwindling power supplies, North Korea's per capita electricity consumption dipped to 616 kWh in 2012, compared with 1,095 kWh in 1990, which means a 2.6% decline annually, according to the KEEL.

Growth without Energy?

What's interesting is that despite less energy supplies, North Korea's economy has expanded in recent years, a rare case of decoupling of economic growth and energy supplies. Its economy expanded 1.1 percent in 2013, marking the third consecutive year of positive

growth -- 1.3 percent in 2012 and 0.8 percent in 2011. This means that North Koreans are engaged in activities that can grow the economy without energy supplies, such as commercial activities in markets and exports of natural resources and human workforces. According to a survey of North Korean defectors in South Korea, energy sources in the destitute nation were mostly powdered coal and wood, with a very small portion of oil.

But such non-industrial activities alone cannot ensure sustainable economic growth. More energy supplies are necessary for its leader Kim to achieve his much-touted goal of economic development. Kim, who came to power following his father Kim Jong-il's death in December 2011, adopted a national strategy in April 2013, following the North's third nuclear test, of pursuing a nuclear arsenal and economic growth "in parallel," a strong determination that he would revive the shattered economy.

Geographical Leverage

The current conditions outside North Korea provide golden opportunity to resolve its chronic energy shortages. Russia is looking to boost ties with East Asia as new crude oil and natural gas markets in the face of harsh sanctions from the EU and the U.S. over its role in the Ukraine crisis and seeking closer economic relations with North Korea, evidenced by the write-off of Pyongyang's \$11 billion debts. China wants to maintain its leverage over Pyongyang with continued economic assistance. For its part, South Korea is pushing for the "Eurasia Initiative" that calls for binding logistics and transportation networks between South Korea and Europe via North Korea.

The two nations' plus Europe's policies make it possible for North Korea to maximize its geographical leverage. North Korea, which occupies the northern half of the Korean Peninsula, blocks all land routes to South Korea. Without passing through the North's territory, the South cannot reach the Trans-Siberian railway through which it could deliver products to Europe, the second-biggest market for Seoul after China, a route that avoids the piracy-plagued straits.

Russia has much interest in the South Korean market, especially when it comes to the sale of natural resources, but it has no way but to use a costly and time-consuming sea route unless the North opens a land route. China, which is launching a massive project to turn the vast northeastern inland region into a major industrial and logistics center, desperately needs a maritime outlet. That's why China has bought the right for exclusive use of a pier in the North's east port of Rajin, which gives China access to the Pacific.

North Korea can offer its geographic location in a much broader and lucrative project for Russia to supply natural gas to the South through an overland pipeline. Only if the North allows construction of the cross-border pipeline, gas-fired electricity generators can be built on the border with Russia, which can power industrial sites in its Rason Special Economic Zone and elsewhere. If North Korea joins hands with Russia, China and South Korea in the energy sector, it could resolve its chronic energy shortages and build what it calls a "prosperous" nation. But it should do this before the window of opportunity closes.

The Development of Economic Zones in North Korea and Inter-Korean Economic Cooperation

I. Introduction

In April, North Korea marked the second anniversary of its new regime led by Kim Jong-un, the third and youngest son of the late North Korean leader, Kim Jong-il. In a move to consolidate his leadership, the junior Kim has purged his political rivals, including Jang Song-thaek, his uncle. At the same time, the new North Korean leadership adopted a new strategic line of “carrying out economic construction and building nuclear armed forces simultaneously” in a plenary session of the Central Committee of the Workers’ Party of Korea (WPK), the North Korean version of the Communist Party, held in March 2013. This was also meant as a policy change in a way to attach importance to the economy from the military-first policy pursued by the Kim Jong-il regime.

The North has taken an array of new measures aimed at improving its economic management, called “June 28 guidelines,” since the latter half of 2012, while developing new special economic zones in a move to attract more foreign investment. It has designated 19 local-level “economic development zones” throughout the country while pushing ahead with the development of additional central-level “special economic zones,” including one in Sinuiju, a northernmost city bordering China.

In a move to demonstrate its economic achievements, the Kim Jong-un regime will likely put more of an emphasis on the development of special economic zones to bring in as much foreign capital as possible. But it is uncertain whether or not the North’s efforts in that direction will pay off in the near future because the North has insufficient financial and other resources and lacks the manpower needed to push ahead with it. Of course, there probably will be some progress, albeit slow, in establishing several local-level economic development zones and cen-

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tral-level special economic zones.

The results of the North's ambitious programs for the special economic zones will most likely determine the future of the North's moribund economy. The pursuit of the development of special economic zones will naturally entail the spread of market functions throughout the country, and the North will have no options but to take more active measures for reforms and open up. South Korea is required to not discount the North's plan for special economic zones but to utilize it strategically. The South needs to seek ways to support the plan should it bridge the enormous inter-Korean economic gap, which will be ultimately conducive to preparing for their unification.

For this reason, this essay will first review recent developments in the North regarding the economic zones and then will search for ways to promote inter-Korean economic cooperation in connection with the development of the zones.

II. Background of Kim Jong-un's Policy to Launch Economic Zones

Since shortly after its inauguration the Kim Jong-un regime has actively sought solutions to the North's economic problems in an effort to establish its legitimacy and win popular support. The new North Korean leadership might have judged that its legitimacy could be in danger if many of its people face a famine and have to make another "painful march under trials," and if it fails to make substantial economic achievements on a mid- to long-term basis, or to show its practical vision of a bright future for the North Korean economy.¹⁾

Kim Jong-un told a group of responsible officials from the WPK Central Committee on April 6, 2012, as follows:²⁾

"We should make decisive progress in our programs to improve our people's living conditions and turn our country into a kangsong taeguk (a great country which is strong ideologically and militarily and prosperous economically). We should resolve the questions of feeding the people and producing more food grain in a proper way. We can vitalize the national economy and improve people's living conditions if and when we put policy priority on such economic sectors as electric power, the metals industry and railway transportation. All economic sectors and units should solve economic problems strictly in consultations and agreements with the Cabinet and implement decisions and instructions of the Cabinet without fail, which are aimed at accomplishing the Party's economic policies...."

In his work regarding national territory management, Kim Jong-un asserted that the country should exert its strenuous efforts on building new cities and residences, the rezoning of cultivated land, water management and afforestation.³⁾ Thereafter, Kim turned enthusiastic in his attempt to make economic achievements, even proposing the "speed war of Masikryong," a new version of a work-harder campaign in his era. (The slogan originated in the Masikryong Ski Resort in North Korea built at the summit of the 1,360-meter Taehwa Peak, some 20 kilometers outside the eastern coastal city of Wonsan.)

Economic projects in the Kim Jong-un era are based on the "10-Year State Strategy Plan for Economic Development" adopted by the North Korean Cabinet in January 2011. The plan calls for an investment of US\$100 billion

into programs for developing natural resources, building infrastructure and basic industrial complexes, and developing agro-fishery and livestock industries, plus national territory.⁴⁾ It covers 12 arenas, including agriculture, industrial bases, energy resources and underground natural resources. It calls for, among other things, the formation of eight industrial districts,⁵⁾ the launch of a state-run development bank, the development of petroleum energy, the annual refining of 20 million tons of crude oil, the power generation of 30 million kilowatts, the annual production of 20 million tons of steel products, the construction of highways whose combined length runs 3,000 kilometers, and the modernization of 2,600 kilometers of railways.

In active moves to further attract foreign investment, the North has formed a favorable environment for foreign investors by guaranteeing security for their investments, tax preferences, free entries and departures and free remittances of foreign currency. The North has also exempted foreign investors from the duty to pay income taxes for 20 years if their income is related to their investment while allowing them to freely make decisions on imports and exports, production, management, finance and personnel administration. It also has set up an arbitrary organization to help settle disputes accruing from their trade business.

In particular, the North is endeavoring to make a breakthrough in its difficult economy through new special economic zones, a policy that was initiated by the Kim Jong-il regime. In November 2010, one year before the death of Kim Jong-il, the North Korean and Chinese governments signed an agreement on the joint development and management of the Rason Economic and Trade Zone

and Hwanggumphyong-Wihwado Economic Zone, and launched a joint guidance committee for the projects.

In an interview with the Associated Press in January 2012, Yang Hyong-sop, who is a member of the powerful WPK Politburo and vice president of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly (SPA), the North's parliament, said that new North Korean leader Kim Jong-un placed his focus on a "knowledge-based" economy while looking at economic reforms carried out by other nations, including China.⁶⁾ Reviewing the economic achievements in 2011 and mentioning economic projects in 2012 in the fifth session of the 12th SPA held on April 13, 2012, then North Korean Premier Choe Yong-rim said: "Expanding and developing external economic projects are an important task to accelerate the construction of an economic power. The Cabinet will establish and maintain production bases for export goods while pushing ahead with the development of economic and trade zones, plus joint ventures with foreign concerns, and strengthening economic and technological cooperation with foreign countries."⁷⁾

Economic zones in the North comprise central-level special economic zones and local-level economic development zones. The former zones are large in scale, while the latter ones, whose development began in the Kim Jong-un era, are small. The Kim Jong-un regime began to build local-level economic development zones in an effort to produce economic achievements in a short period of time, probably because it can hardly attract large-scale foreign investment in the special economic zones and the special economic zones can hardly produce tangible achieve-

ments in a short period.

Regarding the development of special economic zones, the North has placed top priority on the one in the northwestern city of Rason, and another one in Hwanggumphyong, an islet in the lower reaches of the Amnok (Yalu) River bordering China. While visiting Rason in December 2009, Kim Jong-il said: “We should vigorously pursue external activities, and widen our external market incessantly.”⁸⁾ And in a meeting with foreign reporters touring Rason and Mount Kumgang, which borders South Korea, nearly two years later, Hwang Chol-nam, vice chairman of the People’s Committee in Rason, quoted the late North Korean leader as having said during his visit to Rason that the North should develop the economy in the city through three core industries. Under Kim’s instructions, the authorities concerned in the special economic zone have put their focus on developing manufacturing, logistics and transportation, plus tourism.⁹⁾

Kim Jong-il visited China in May 2010 and again in August that year to promote economic cooperation between the North and China. At that time, China actively discussed North Korean issues regarding the ambition of its three northeastern provinces of Liaoning, Jilin and Heilongjiang to find inroads to the East Sea through the Rason area and develop a special economic zone. Then North Korea reportedly allowed Chinese access to the East Sea while asking for China’s active role in developing Hwanggumphyong. In November 2010, the North Korean Commission for Joint Venture and Investment and the Chinese Ministry of Commerce under the State Council initialed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on the joint development and management of the Rason Economic and

Trade Zone and Hwanggumphyong-Wihwado Economic Zone.

Shortly thereafter, the two countries organized the DPRK-China Joint Guidance Committee, which is responsible for development and management of the two North Korean special economic zones, while drawing up guidelines for the joint development of the two special economic zones in February of the next year. DPRK stands for Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, the North’s official name.

North Korea decided to establish local-level economic development zones in a plenary session of the WPK Central Committee held in March 2013. The decision calls on each province to establish at least one economic development zone proper to its conditions in a move to diversify goods and partners in foreign trade. It also decided to set up tourism zones.

The North’s decision was closely followed by its enactment of the Economic Zone Development Act in late May that year. The law calls for the protection of investors’ property and income, plus intellectual properties, and for the allowance of land leases to foreign investors for up to 50 years. Under the law, investors are free from tariffs when they import goods necessary for their business in the North, and can freely remit their profits and properties in foreign currency at their will. Foreign investors in infrastructure are given preferential rights to choose property they will use with no payment. Noteworthy is that the law calls on every economic development zone to develop tourism resources in its area while giving businesses participating in the development of the zone preferential rights when they apply for tourism and hotel business.¹⁰⁾

In a report on an international economic symposium held under the sponsorship of the

newly established Korea Economic Development Association in Pyongyang in October 2013, China's Xinhua News Agency introduced a briefing by Yun Yong-sok, who heads the association, on the North's campaign to develop special economic zones and economic development zones.¹¹⁾ In the conference, Kim Jong-nam, a professor of the Law College of Kim Il-sung University in Pyongyang, said that 14 economic development zones have emerged already throughout his country.¹²⁾

On Nov. 21, 2013, North Korea announced a plan to establish an economic development zone in each of its provinces in detail for the purpose of attracting foreign investment and developing the national economy. The KCNA carried a decree of the SPA Presidium on the decision to set up economic development zones. The decree also said a special economic zone, which is under the North's sovereignty, will be established in Sinuiju, North Phyongan Province.¹³⁾

The North announced the establishment of six additional economic development zones in local areas on July 23 this year. The KCNA carried a decree of the SPA Presidium on the construction of economic development zones in Pyongyang, South Hwanghae Province, Nampho City and North and South Phyongan Provinces. The decree also renamed the Sinuiju Special Economic Zone as the Sinuiju International Economic Zone.

Earlier, the North announced an SPA decree on a decision to raise the status of the General Bureau for State Economic Development to the State Economic Development Commission on Oct. 16, 2013.¹⁴⁾ The Commission is responsible for guiding the economic development zones, and brings under its control the Commission for Joint Venture and Investment

that has played a leading role in attracting foreign investment. In 2010, the commission and the Chinese Commerce Ministry signed an MOU for a joint investment worth \$3.5 billion in Rason to modernize the port, and construct roads and crude oil refining facilities.

In June this year, the North reorganized the Ministry of Foreign Trade as the Ministry of External Economic Affairs. The KCNA reported on July 18 an SPA decree, which said, "The Joint Venture and Investment Commission and the State Economic Development Committee have been combined with the Ministry of Foreign Trade, renamed as the Ministry of External Economic Affairs."

III. Development of Economic Zones in North Korea

1. Central-Level Special Economic Zones

1) Overview

The number of special economic zones, whose designation has so far been officially announced by the North, is five. They are the Rason Economic and Trade Zone (1991), the Kaesong Industrial Complex (2002), the Mount Kumgang Tourist Region (2002), the Sinuiju Special Administrative Region (2002), which was renamed as the Sinuiju Special Economic Zone in 2013 and again as the Sinuiju International Economic Zone in July 2014, and the Hwanggumphyong-Wihwado Special Economic Zone (2010).

The North is reportedly planning the launch of a special economic zone in Wonsan, an eastern port city in Kangwon Province, and a special tourist zone each in Mount Chilbo of

North Hamgyong Province and Mount Paektu of Ryanggang Province.

2) Rason Special Economic Zone

The Rason Special Economic Zone has recently emerged as a hub of the North's northeastern economic sphere although it was established in December 1991 under the name of the Rajin-Sonbong Free Trade and Economic Zone. For unknown reasons, it was renamed as the Rajin-Sonbong Trade and Economic Zone in 1998 and finally as the Rason Special Economic Zone in 2010. The North is reportedly staging various projects there with an aim to turn it into an international city fully open to the international market.

In a Jan. 4, 2010 decree, North Korea raised the status of Rason to a special city by placing it under the direct control of the central government, not under the control of a provincial government as in the past. And the SPA Presidium adopted a decree on Jan. 27 that year calling for an amendment to the Law on the Rason Trade and Economic Zone to allow Koreans residing in foreign countries to invest in the zone. The purpose of the revised law was to "develop the zone and improve its management," compared with that of the law before the revision to "effectively manage" it. Noteworthy is an article in the revised law, which provides investors with a right to choose the formula of their investment and business management at their will, and articles calling for the launch of a guidance organization for the zone in the central government and the establishment of sub-zones of industries, agriculture, science-technology and processing trade.

According to the guidelines for developing the special economic zones in Rason and

Hwanggumphyong drawn up jointly by the North and China and announced in May 2011, the two countries will develop Rason into an advanced manufacturing base for six industrial sectors and a Northeast Asian center for international logistics and tourism.

In recent years, China has made brisk investment in the Rason Special Economic Zone, which is in close connection with Chinese development projects in the Changchun-Jilin-Tumen Pilot Zone. The success of the Chinese projects will eventually depend on securing a route to the Pacific Ocean, namely, the Rason port in an eastern area of the North. In other words, the development of the Rason Special Economic Zone is made jointly by the North and China because their interests are in harmony between the Chinese strategy to develop the three northeastern provinces of Liaoning, Jilin and Heilongjiang and the North's efforts to introduce foreign investment in the Rason Special Economic Zone

The development of the Rason zone is a project being pushed ahead jointly by the Chinese and North Korean governments. Their total investment for the project is estimated at about \$10 billion. So far, they have agreed on investments worth \$2 billion, with \$50 million having been already invested. Projects include the construction of roads and railways leading to the economic zone, in particular, to the Rajin port, plus additional facilities for the ports in Rajin, Sonbong, Chongjin and Ungsang, the formation of seven industrial districts and a logistics center, the modernization of Rason and the development of underground resources.

The repair work for the Quanhe-Wonjong bridge over the Tumen River, a border bridge

linking the two countries that was built in the 1930s, was completed in 2012 at a cost of \$10 million. Also constructed were 53-kilometer-long highway-level roads from the bridge to the Rajin port, and a warehouse in the port in 2010 with a \$1 million investment. Also repaired were the berths in the first wharf in the Rajin port at a cost \$50 million, followed by an agreement in December 2010 to build the fourth, fifth and sixth wharfs there by investing \$500 million. The construction of the wharfs have been under way since early 2013 under a contract stating that China will have a right to use them for 50 years.

China plans to construct highways linking Hunchun, a Chinese county-level city in the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture of the far eastern Jilin Province, and the Rajin port via Wonjong by spending \$1 billion, with an aim to transport products from its north-eastern provinces to its southern areas as well as exporting them to foreign countries. North Korean army construction workers are being mobilized to make preparations to repair a railway line linking Rajin and Hunchun by way of Nanyang, a Chinese city in Henan Province, and to double-track it. Also planned is the construction of a new railroad linking the Rajin port with Quanhe, where a Chinese customs house is located.

The project to build the Rason Special Economic Zone is very ambitious. Starting with a project to attract foreign tourists, the North plans to gradually construct infrastructure there on a large scale and eventually turn it into an industrial hub of Northeast Asia within a decade. In order to supply power to the zone, the North plans to first use electricity from the Chinese city of Hunchun and to build a thermoelectric power station near the Rajin

port. A wharf exclusively for oil tankers, a crude oil refinery and a steel mill will be built. Also being pushed for is the construction of a steam power station in Musan Mine with an investment of \$300 million. It will form a financial complex to introduce as much foreign capital as possible.

China's aggressive investment in the Rason Special Economic Zone has apparently stimulated Russia to hastily deepen its relations with the North. Moscow has even courted Pyongyang, with a surprising measure in April this year to write off 90 percent of \$10.96 billion that the North borrowed from the former Soviet Union. Their relationship is rapidly getting closer, and rumors circulated that the sixth economic cooperation meeting between the two countries held in Vladivostok in June this year discussed the stationing of a Russian auxiliary naval fleet in the Rajin port.

In September 2013, train operation began on the 54-kilometer-long railway linking the Russian city of Khasan and the Rajin port, whose repair work has been conducted since 2008 by a North Korea-Russian joint venture, Rasonkon Trans, 70 percent of whose stake is held by Russian Railways (RZD). And the freight terminal at Wharf No. 3 in the Rajin port, which has been repaired jointly by Russia and the North, resumed its commercial operation in July this year.

South Korea is also making preparations to join the Rajin-Khasan project after a summit in Seoul in November 2013 between South Korean President Park Geun-hye and Russian President Vladimir Putin. To that end, three Korean business giants -- POSCO, Hyundai Merchant Marine (HMM) and KORAIL -- have formed a consortium. An on-site inspection team of the consortium visited Rajin for a

feasibility study in February this year.

3) Hwanggumphyong-Wihwado Special Economic Zone

North Korea and China are also pushing for the creation of a special economic zone on the islets of Hwanggumphyong and Wihwa in the lower parts of the Amnok River. The two sides have yet to make tangible outcomes, but established a legal base for the zone.

In Decree No. 2006 adopted on Dec. 3, 2011, the SPA Presidium enacted the Law on the Hwanggumphyong-Wihwado Special Economic Zone.

The North began preparations for the enactment of the law in the latter half of 2010, with the participation of Chinese officials and experts. Moreover, officials of the North's Joint Venture and Investment Commission had visited China several times to consult with Chinese experts on their draft law. Hence, the law is the first North Korean law enacted through close consultation with China.

On June 8, 2011, a groundbreaking ceremony was held in the Chinese border city of Dandong facing the Hwanggumphyong islet for projects to be developed and managed jointly by China and the North. They plan to construct wharfs for passengers and freight linking the islet and Sinuiju, a road network in the islet, roads linking the islet and Dandong, networks to supply electric power and mobile communications, plus the Internet.

China has organized the DPRK-China Joint Guidance Committee for the joint development of the special economic zones in Rason and the two islets, and drew up development guidelines in February 2011. The guidelines comprise 11 chapters.

The North plans to develop a combined area of 16 square kilometers on the two islets into four industrial bases specializing in information technology, tourism, modern agriculture and light industry. Construction projects for these bases will be undertaken jointly by the North Korean and Chinese central and local governments, plus enterprises of the two countries, in three phases. In a move to attain these goals, they opened a working-level office in Hwanggumphyong in August 2011.

4) Sinuiju International Economic Zone

On Nov. 21, 2013, the KCNA reported on a decree of the SPA Presidium: "The DPRK decided to set up a special economic zone in some part of Sinuiju, North Phyongan Province. It added, "The sovereignty of the DPRK will be exercised in the zone." Earlier in 2002, Sinuiju had been declared a special administrative region to be developed into a special economic and trade zone, but the development came to a halt when Chinese-Dutch businessman Yang Bin, who was appointed to be the first governor of the region, was arrested for tax evasion and other economic crimes before he assumed the post.

On July 23, 2014, North Korea announced an additional plan for establishing six economic development zones aimed at attracting foreign capital and developing the North Korean economy. The KCNA reported on a decree of the SPA Presidium to "establish economic development zones in Pyongyang City, South Hwanghae Province, Nampho City, South Phyongan Province and North Phyongan Province," and to "rename the Special Economic Zone in some parts of Sinuiju City, North Phyongan Province, as Sinuiju

International Economic Zone.”¹⁵⁾

North Korea began work to revive a 10-year-old plan for the development of Sinuiju into a special economic zone in 2012 when it made an investment contract with a Hong Kong business group. Under the plan, an area of 82 square kilometers will be turned into an extraordinary economic zone specializing in hi-tech, finance, trade and tourism at a cost of \$100 billion. China has built a new 3-kilometer-long bridge over the Amnok River to replace an old one built in the 1930s, but the new bridge has yet to be open to traffic because the North has yet to construct roads and related facilities leading to the bridge.

The North is also developing a special economic zone in Wonsan, an eastern coastal city, although it has yet to make an official announcement about it. It has already constructed the Masikryong Ski Resort at the summit of the 1,360-meter Taehwa Peak, some 20 kilometers outside Wonsan, an eastern coastal city of Kangwon Province. The North plans to develop an area of 414.8 square kilometers into a special tourist zone by investing \$7.8 billion. The development plan comprises the first phase (2013-17) and the second one (2018-25).

2. Local-level Economic Development Zones

North Korea originally planned to develop 13 areas into local-level economic development zones when it enacted a law on the zones in late May 2013. On Nov. 29, 2013, the Choson Sinbo, a pro-North Korean newspaper based in Japan, reported details of North Korea's proposed 13 economic development zones. As aforementioned, however, the North announced in July this year the designation of six addition-

al economic development zones. They include three in North Hamgyong Province, two each in South Hamgyong Province, North Hwanghae Province, Jagang Province, North Phyongan Province and South Phyongan Province, and one each in South Hwanghae Province, Kangwon Province, Ryanggang Province, Nampho City and Pyongyang.

According to the North Korean plan, an area of 6.6 square kilometers of Sinuiju in the Amnok River basin will be formed into an economic development zone at a cost of \$240 million, focusing on agriculture, tourism and trade. The plan calls for China to supply electric power and gas to the zone. The economic development zones will also be built in an area of 3 square kilometers in Manpho City in Jagang Province with \$120 million, an area of 3 square kilometers in Wiwon County with \$150 million, and in an area of 1.7 square kilometers on Onsong islet over the Tumen River with \$90 million.

Others are set to be built in an area of 2 square kilometers in Hyesan City of Ryanggang Province, an area of 2 square kilometers in Songrim City of North Hwanghae Province, an area of 1.5 square kilometers on Wau islet in Nampho City, an area of 8.1 square kilometers in Sinphyong County of North Hwanghae Province, an area of 2 square kilometers in Hamhung City of South Hamgyong Province, an area of 3 square kilometers in Pukchong County of South Hamgyong Province, an area of 5.4 square kilometers in Chongjin City of North Hamgyong Province, an area of 4 square kilometers in Orang County of North Hamgyong Province, and an area in Kangryong County of South Hwanghae Province.

The KCNA said in a report on Oct. 17,

2013: “A consortium consisting of Jurong Consultants and OKP Holdings of Singapore, P&T Architects & Engineers Ltd. of Hong Kong, China, and other well-known companies in East Asia and the Middle East is taking part in developing projects in the DPRK. The consortium agreed with the DPRK’s related organs on collaboration in building the Kaesong Hi-Tech Industrial Park and Highway Toll Road from Capital Airport to Pyongyang City.” It also said on Nov. 11 that year that a groundbreaking ceremony was held for a high-tech industrial park in Kaesong, where more than 100 South Korean businesses are operating.

IV. Idea for Linking the North’s Economic Zones and Inter-Korean Economic Cooperation

South Korea needs to take a step-by-step approach to the North’s short- and long-term plans for the special economic zones and economic development zones should it lead the North’s economic zones to inter-Korean cooperation. The South’s participation in the project for the Rason Special Economic Zone is possible right now because the South has held talks with Russia for a long period on its participation in the project for building railways linking Khasan and Rajin.

Tripartite cooperation involving the two Koreas and Russia can be a way for connecting the North’s special economic zones with inter-Korean economic cooperation.

Desirable is the linking of the Trans-Siberia Railway (TSR) and a trans-Korea railway, which will undoubtedly touch off a logistics revolution in Eurasia, the combined continental

landmass of Europe and Asia. An initial measure for this ambitious project is the construction of a railway linking Khasan and Rajin. Imagine a situation in which trains carrying goods run on the railways from Busan, South Korea’s southernmost port city, to Europe.

Also possible is South Korean businesses’ participation in the development project for the Sinuiju International Economic Zone, whose success will likely lead to the establishment of a North Korean industrial park similar to the one in Kaesong jointly operated by South Korea and China. The South can find its other business chances in the Wonsan Special Tourist Zone in connection with the PyeongChang Winter Olympics in 2018.

Also desirable for the South is its participation in the projects for the Amnok River Economic Development Zone and the Onsong Islet Tourist Zone as well as the Kaesong Hi-Tech Industrial Park for the expansion of the Kaesong Industrial Complex. The South also needs to participate in the North Korean project to develop an area of 2 square kilometers in Wonsan into an industrial zone at cost of \$100 million in consideration of inter-Korean economic cooperation along the east coast of the Korean Peninsula.

The planned industrial town in Hyondong-ri of Wonsan is located just 6 kilometers from the Wonsan port, 12 kilometers from the entrance to the Wonsan-Hamhung highway, 10 kilometers from the Wonsan-Mount Kumgang tourist way and 6 kilometers from the Kalma airport in Wonsan. The International Pilot Green Zone that the North plans to establish in Kangryong County of South Hwanghae Province can be among the candidates for a project subject to inter-Korean cooperation. It can be developed in connection with Haeju City

near Kaesong City in case the Kaesong industrial park is expanded.

We can project closer inter-Korean economic cooperation in connection with the North Korean plan for developing tens of central-level special economic zones and local-level economic development zones, as aforementioned. But the success of this projection will require the resolution of various issues, including international sanctions against the North caused by the North's nuclear aspirations and South Korea's May 24, 2010 punitive measures against the North, which were taken after the North's deadly torpedoing of a South Korean warship in March that year.

The South, however, needs to exert strenuous efforts to push for inter-Korean economic cooperation, starting with an easy area, seeking chances for fueling market functions in the North through the North's economic zone development projects, along with China and Russia.

The joint construction of a logistics center in Dandong, aimed at supplying daily necessities to North Korean citizens, can be a practical idea in this direction. Also necessary is the establishment of a training center to bring up North Korean technicians and economic experts, plus a general trading house jointly by South Korea, China and Russia to help the North activate its foreign trade.

Recommendable is the establishment of a Northeast Asian forum under the initiative of the South Korean government, aimed at discussing these and other measures conducive to the North Korean economy.

(This is an excerpt from the Korean paper carried in the September 2014 edition of the KDI Review of the North Korean Economy, a journal published by the Korea Development Institute (KDI) in Seoul.)

Notes:

- 1) Park Hyeong-jung, Cho Han-bum, Jang Yong-seok, *The Re-evaluation of the North's Change and Recommendations for South Korea's North Korea Policies* (Seoul, the Korea Institute for National Unification, 2009), 00. 180-181; Lee Kyo-deok, "The Kim Jong-un Regime and 2012," *The KDI Review of the North Korean Economy*, January 2012, (Seoul, The Korea Development Institute, 2012), p. 34.
- 2) *The Rodong Sinmun*, April 19, 2012.
- 3) *The Rodong Sinmun*, May 9, 2012, "About the Task to Bring about a Revolutionary Change in National Territory Management Proper for the Demand for the Construction of a Socialist Kangsong Taeguk," Kim Jong-un's Remarks Made before a Group of Responsible Officials from the State and Government Economic Organizations and the Working People's Institutions.
- 4) *The Yonhap News Agency*, Jan. 15, 2011.
- 5) Rason, Sinuiju, Wonsan, Chongjin, Kimchaek, Hamhung, Nampho, and Pyongyang.
- 6) *The Associated Press*, Jan. 17, 2012.
- 7) *The Rodong Sinmun*, April 14, 2012, "On the work of the Cabinet of the DPRK for juche 100 (2011) and tasks for juche 101 (2012)."
- 8) *The Korean Central News Agency (KCNA)*, Dec. 16, 2009.
- 9) *The Yonhap News Agency*, Sept. 6, 2011.
- 10) *The Yonhap News Agency*, Nov. 13, 2013.
- 11) *The Yonhap News Agency*, Oct. 17, 2013.
- 12) *The Rodong Sinmun*, Oct. 23, 2013.
- 13) *The Yonhap News Agency*, Nov. 21, 2013.
- 14) *The KCNA*, Oct. 16, 2013.
- 15) *The Yonhap News Agency*, July 23, 2014.

Internal Affairs**Kim Jong-un seen limping slightly in N. Korean TV footage**

In his first video footage since returning to public view following a conspicuous absence, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un on Nov. 6 was seen slightly limping on the communist country's state television.

The Korean Central Television showed Kim walking without a cane as he held a meeting of battalion commanders and political instructors of the country's troops in Pyongyang on Nov. 3 and 4.

This was the first moving image of Kim since he returned to the public eye on Oct. 14, ending a six-week absence that fueled speculation about his health or a possible military coup in North Korea. A photo of Kim published on Nov. 5 at the meeting also showed the young leader without a walking stick.

Kim's health is of great interest in Seoul and Washington, since he has his hand on the switch of Pyongyang's nuclear and missile programs.

In the video footage, Kim entered the meeting hall and walked up to the podium without a cane, but showed a slight limp as he was favoring his left leg.

On Oct. 28, two South Korean legislators said Kim was recovering from an operation to remove a cyst from his left ankle, and that the condition could recur because of his obesity and frequent inspection trips.

The lawmakers cited a report presented by the National Intelligence Service in a closed-door parliamentary audit. (Yonhap)

N. Korea steps up quarantine efforts to prevent Ebola

North Korea has been ramping up quarantine efforts on foreigners coming from Ebola-hit regions to prevent an outbreak of the deadly virus, a pro-North Korea newspaper said on Nov. 6.

The communist country is isolating travelers coming from Ebola-stricken areas at separate hotels, including one in the western border city of Sinuiju, for 21 days because of potential Ebola infection risks, the Choson Sinbo newspaper, the mouthpiece of the communist country in Japan, reported.

The country has recently set up an emergency prevention center to ward off Ebola, the news outlet noted.

Those subject to the quarantine include foreign diplomats, international organization workers who are required to stay put for 21 days at their offices in the North and Korean residents in Japan visiting the country, according to the report.

During the required quarantine period, they are not allowed to go outside or be in contact with other people, it said.

“These measures were introduced as the Ebola virus is spreading outside of Africa to the U.S. and

West Europe,” Pak Myong-su, North Korea’s high-ranking health official, said in the report. “The national emergency disease preventive committee is making utmost efforts to fight the penetration of Ebola, which has not reached the country yet,” he also said.

Since the spread of the virus from Africa earlier this year, the North has stepped up preventive efforts and public campaigns, according to the country’s main news outlets. (Yonhap)

N. Korean leader inspects construction site of airport terminal

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un has given field guidance to the construction site of the second airport terminal in Pyongyang and instructed officials to modify the finished project to highlight national identity, the country’s state news agency said on Nov. 1.

The official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported Kim guided the construction site of Terminal 2 of Pyongyang International Airport, where he instructed officials to halt work on the interior for the time being, and examine layout designs and complete modifications.

The dispatch did not give details about the date of his visit, as it has often done in a country shrouded in secret.

Kim pointed out that during his last inspection, he had given workers the task to finish the project in a way that ensures the Juche philosophy of self-reliance and national identity are preserved, but it has not been carried out.

“When we build even a single structure, we should do in such a way as to ensure that our style, our characteristic feature and national identity are preserved,” Kim was quoted as saying.

He also laid out his idea of building a new terminal and runway in the future opposite the airport that’s under construction as well as railways for express trains and highways that can connect the airport to the heart of Pyongyang.

North Korea began the project to build the second terminal for the international airport, the main gateway to Pyongyang, in 2012, according to the KCNA. The construction seems to be in the final stages, according to a recent report by the Associated Press. (Yonhap)

N. Korean leader inspects flight drill

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un has inspected a flight drill by fighter pilots, the North’s state media said on Oct. 30, his third drill guidance since he resumed public appearances after a 40-day hiatus.

The official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported Kim guided a flight exercise by pilots of the Korean People’s Army (KPA) Air and Anti-Air Force.

As is customary, the KCNA didn’t disclose the location of the flight guidance and the date of his inspection.

Saying that the North’s pilots are very good at flying, Kim personally boarded a fighter plane to talk with its pilot, according to the KCNA.

It marked his third drill guidance since Oct. 14 when Kim returned into public view after a six-

week break, using a walking stick. His return ended speculation that he was seriously ill or that a military coup had taken place.

The KCNA said that Kim was accompanied by Choe Ryong-hae, secretary of the Central Committee of the North's ruling Workers' Party, KPA Vice Marshal Hwang Pyong-so and others.

It is the second time that the KCNA mentioned the name of Choe before Hwang, indicating that Choe's status is resumed to become higher than that of Hwang, who was believed to be the second-most powerful man in the communist regime, outside analysts said. (Yonhap)

N. Korean leader visits lake resort for scientists

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un continued his brisk public activity with a tour of a lake resort for scientists, according to the country's state media on Oct. 22.

Kim gave "field guidance" at the newly built Yonphung Scientists Rest Home north of Pyongyang, the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported.

"The rest home is one more gift provided by Kim Jong Un (Jong-un) to the scientists with loving care," the KCNA said in its English-version dispatch.

In August last year, Kim instructed the construction of a "world-level" resort for scientists at the scenic lakeside area in South Phyongan Province.

Kim was quoted as telling officials to "let scientists enjoy luxury and wealth under socialism while getting relieved of pent-up fatigue through good rest there."

Kim's visit to the facilities showed his interest in the welfare of the communist nation's satellite and nuclear scientists. (Yonhap)

N.K. leader inspects air force drill, encourages athletes

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un inspected a drill by fighter pilots, state-run media said on Oct. 19, in his first military-related appearance after a long absence from the public eye.

Kim also met the country's gold medalists in the Incheon Asian Games and the World Championships, both held recently, and their coaches, the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said in a separate dispatch.

As usual, the KCNA did not clarify the dates and exact locations of Kim's latest inspection tours.

The KCNA said he guided a takeoff and landing drill by fighter pilots of the Korean People's Army Air and Anti-Air Force Units 1017 and 458.

Hours later, the Rodong Sinmun, the newspaper of the North's ruling party, released several photos of Kim inspecting the military exercise and meeting with athletes. Kim was pictured using a walking stick, as in other recent appearances.

Praising the pilots "for their excellent piloting and displaying a mastery of the art of aviation," Kim called for the thorough preparation of the airmen equipped to wage modern warfare, the media said. (Yonhap)

N. Korea calls for self-sufficiency in food

Marking the United Nations-designated World Food Day on Oct. 17, North Korea called for self-sufficiency in food as it pledged efforts to enhance food security.

“If (we) put expectations on others, the food problem will never be solved,” the Rodong Sinmun, an organ of the North’s governing party, said.

The country should pursue an agricultural policy that relies on its own technology and mobilizes people’s labor, the newspaper said, highlighting self-sufficiency in feeding its people.

The newspaper attributed the country’s food shortage to land degradation caused by civil wars and conflicts in the world and military activities led by “imperialist” countries as well as sharp population growth.

The North is making efforts to embrace advanced agricultural technology and expand investment in the sector, the Rodong Sinmun added, vowing further measures to better feed North Koreans.

“Our republic will continue efforts to put more resources into developing the agricultural sector in order to produce more grains for the people as well as guarantee food security,” it said.

The North’s stress on food self-sufficiency comes amid a murky outlook for the outside world’s food assistance to the impoverished nation.

Fractured inter-Korean relations have shut out Seoul’s rice and other food aid to Pyongyang for years while thorny issues between North Korea and China have cast a cloud over Beijing’s continued assistance to the North. (Yonhap)

External Affairs

N. Korea slams U.S. for overstating Pyongyang’s missile capacity

North Korea lambasted the United States on Nov. 14 for trying to exaggerate Pyongyang’s missile capacity, a tactic which the North said is aimed at stepping up the U.S. military presence on the Korean Peninsula.

The criticism from Pyongyang came after a U.S.-based media website, the Washington Free Beacon, reported in August that North Korea was developing a submarine capable of launching ballistic missiles.

The U.S. news triggered similar media reports on the new submarine development by the North in the U.S. and South Korea.

Calling such reports “a sneaky plot” by the U.S. government, the North’s official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said in a commentary, monitored in Seoul, that the U.S. media campaign aims to exaggerate North Korean threats in order to boost its military presence on the peninsula.

“This is a sneaky plot in which the U.S. is trying to legalize the delay in the (planned) return of its

wartime operational control of the South Korean (military) on the pretext of threats from ours as well as to build up the THAAD system (on the peninsula),” the KCNA report said, referring to the U.S. moves to deploy the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile-defense system.

“The South Korean and Western media are exaggerating with a keen interest that the North is developing underwater missile technology and planning to build and deploy a missile-equipped submarine in a near future,” it noted.

It will be a big mistake for the U.S. to drum up pressure on the North by spreading media reports on our submarine-launched missiles, the North said, also warning that “it will lead to powerful counteraction from us.” (Yonhap)

North’s defense minister meets Putin in Russia visit

North Korean Defense Minister Hyon Yong-chol recently met Russian President Vladimir Putin, the North’s state media reported on Nov. 9, a move that is seen as bolstering military ties between the two countries.

The Nov. 8 visit was held on the sidelines of Hyon’s visit to Russia to celebrate the 90th birthday of former Soviet Union defense minister Dmitry Yazov, according to the North’s Korean Central Television.

The state television reported that Hyon sent North Korean leader Kim Jong-un’s greetings to the Russian president, which was responded with “deep gratitude.”

“President Putin and comrade Hyon Yong-chol talked in an amicable atmosphere,” the state media said, without elaborating.

The visit is the latest in growing signs of closer ties between North Korea and Russia. The former communist allies recently launched a joint venture to modernize the North’s railway network.

Pyongyang’s move is viewed as reaching out to Moscow as its ties with Beijing are not as good as before. Seoul has also suspended most of its economic cooperation with Pyongyang. (Yonhap)

11 N. Korean defectors arrested in China

Eleven North Korean defectors were arrested by Chinese police while seeking to cross the border with Myanmar, a source said on Oct. 31.

Local police rounded up the defectors -- 10 adults and a seven-year-old child -- at around 3-4 a.m. on the day, shortly before they were to head towards the border in the southern region of Yunnan Province, according to the source.

They were immediately put in custody in a police station there, added the source.

A South Korean foreign ministry official said the government is still trying to determine the exact details of the situation. (Yonhap)

N. Korea's ceremonial head of state in Beijing ahead of African trips

North Korea's ceremonial head of state, Kim Yong-nam, arrived in Beijing on Oct. 21, en route to rare foreign trips to some nations in Africa and the Middle East in the latest sign of active diplomacy by the ed North.

The 86-year-old Kim, president of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly, was greeted by the North's ambassador to China, Ji Jae-ryong, as he arrived at Beijing Capital International Airport. He made no remarks before he was whisked away by car.

The North's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) also reported that Kim left for Africa but did not specify his itinerary.

He is accompanied by Kang Ha-guk, minister of public health; Kung So-ung, vice foreign minister; and So Kil-bok, vice minister of external economic relations, added the KCNA.

In the previous week, the KCNA reported that Kim, formally the number two leader in the communist regime's hierarchy, will pay "official goodwill visits" to some African countries, including Ethiopia, Sudan and Congo.

A South Korean diplomatic source in Beijing said Kim is also expected to visit some countries in the Middle East, but no meeting with senior Chinese officials has been scheduled.

The overseas trips by Kim follow visits to some European nations and Mongolia in September by Kang Sok-ju, the secretary handling international relations for the North's ruling Workers' Party.

North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Su-yong traveled recently to the U.N. General Assembly, Iran and Russia as part of apparent attempts to ease the country's diplomatic isolation. (Yonhap)

Inter-Korean Affairs

Pyongyang condemns S. Korea's warning shots at MDL

North Korea on Nov. 15 condemned South Korea for firing warning shots at its soldiers as they approached the military demarcation line (MDL), warning that such "provocations" will "lead to a great war of justice."

"Recently the South Korean puppet military...have gone extremely reckless in making provocations in the area of the military demarcation line," the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported a statement from the Korean People's Army (KPA).

"If they continue the military provocation despite our warning, they will have to pay at the cost of their blood," it controlled, adding that "patrolling in the north's area of the MDL belongs to our legitimate right."

The warning came after South Korean troops fired warning shots on Nov. 10 after a North Korean patrol approached the tensely guarded land border that separates the rival countries. The North

Korean soldiers moved away from the MDL without firing back.

“They were taking pictures of the signposts set up there to mark the demilitarized zone,” the Joint Chiefs of Staff said earlier.

In October, South and North Korea also exchanged fire after troops from the communist country drew near the MDL. No casualties were reported. (Yonhap)

N. Korea bashes S. Korea for massive military drills

North Korea lashed out at South Korea on Nov. 12 for its large-scale annual military drills and vowed harsh retaliation, claiming that the exercises are aimed at launching a nuclear war against the communist country.

The South Korean military on Nov. 10 kicked off the Hoguk defense exercises involving some 330,000 troops with the aim of bolstering its defense posture against growing North Korean threats. The 12-day drill is the largest ever in terms of scale.

“The rehearsal is a preliminary war, nuclear test war for aggression on the DPRK in light of its scale and content,” the North’s Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland said in a statement carried by the North’s Korean Central News Agency.

DPRK is the acronym for the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, the North’s official name.

Saying that some of the programs will be carried out jointly with the U.S. forces, the committee claimed the South has been “bent on strengthening its military ties with the U.S. to complete its preparation for a nuclear war” against the North.

“The army and people of the DPRK will mercilessly wipe out the South Korean puppet forces if they provoke the DPRK even a bit,” the committee said.

It further criticized South Korea for not having the will to hold dialogue with the North, saying Seoul has unilaterally scuppered high-level, inter-Korean contact.

“The Hoguk rehearsal clearly proved the South Korean authorities do not hope for dialogue but have attempted to use it as a camouflage in order to escalate confrontation and war moves,” the committee noted. North Korea has long blamed the Hoguk exercises, while the Seoul government has said the annual drills are to boost joint posture and coordination between the different branches of the military. (Yonhap)

N. Korea requests Ebola detection device at Kaesong complex

North Korea has requested the installation of Ebola detection devices at the Kaesong Industrial Complex, a joint venture with South Korea, informed sources here said on Nov. 11.

The South’s unification ministry is considering installing three thermal scanners at the North’s side of the zone, they added. Each device is priced at around 40 million won (US\$36,000).

A daily average of 300-400 South Koreans commute to the industrial park, where more than 120 South Korean firms employ around 52,000 North Korean workers.

The South’s government lent the North similar equipment to use at the Kaesong facilities in 2009,

when fears of avian flu gripped the world.

The reclusive communist nation has taken tough measures to prevent the outbreak of Ebola epidemic in its territory. It announced plans to put all foreign visitors under medical observation for 21 days. (Yonhap)

Two Koreas to hold joint Buddhist service in N. Korea

A South Korean Buddhist order said on Nov. 8 it will hold a joint memorial service in North Korea late in the month to mark the anniversary of its founder's death.

The Cheontae Order said it agreed during a meeting with officials from the North's Korea Buddhist Federation on Nov. 6 to hold the joint memorial service to mark the 912th anniversary of the passing of Uicheon on Nov. 26.

Founded by Uicheon, a Goryeo Dynasty (918-1392) monk, the Cheontae school has since become the second-largest Buddhist sect in South Korea.

The service will take place at Ryongtong Temple in Kaesong, just north of the inter-Korean border, with some South Korean Buddhists attending, it said. The North has yet to decide how many of its Buddhists will attend. (Yonhap)

N. Korea says OPCON transfer delay is a crime, vows to take decisive action

North Korea on Oct. 29 blasted Seoul for delaying the taking back of wartime control (OPCON) of its troops from the United States, claiming the decision is a crime against the Korean people.

In a press release made by the Secretariat of the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea (CPRK), Pyongyang claimed the move is a shameful act that cannot be tolerated.

It argued that delaying the transfer effectively perpetuates the military control of the United States over South Korea and will heighten nuclear war threats on the Korean Peninsula.

"By delaying the OPCON transfer, Seoul showed its intent to fuel inter-Korean hostilities and play along with Washington's ploy to start a war with the North and control the Peninsula forever," the committee said.

The CPRK, which handles all inter-Korean relations, added that those who signed off on the latest OPCON delay will forever be remembered as criminals who sold out the Korean people.

It then said that Koreans will not allow the delay and that firm action would be taken to counter such a step, although it did not elaborate on what actual measures would be taken.

The North, despite rapping the South for the move, did not personally attack President Park Geun-hye by name. The presidential office had confirmed that Park had ordered the pushing back of the OPCON transfer.

The latest verbal attack comes after Seoul and Washington concurred in the previous week that the OPCON transfer should be postponed until the mid-2020s in light of threats coming out of North Korea. Originally, the transfer was slated for late 2015.

South Korea exercises peacetime control of its 639,000 troops, but control would be handed over

to a U.S. general in the case of full-fledged hostilities breaking out with North Korea. (Yonhap)

N. Korea slams South over smartphone hacking accusation

North Korea lambasted South Korea on Nov. 3 for its latest claim of the communist country's hacking attempts, denouncing the accusation as a plot to stir up anti-Pyongyang sentiment.

The National Intelligence Service (NIS), the South Korean spy agency, said in a parliamentary report in the previous week that North Korea had attempted to hack into South Koreans' smartphones by spreading malicious applications online, possibly infecting more than 20,000 phones from May to September.

Denouncing the latest hacking accusation, North Korea's key propaganda website, Uriminzokkiri, said that the claim was made to counter rising indignation among South Korean citizens over Seoul's destruction of the recent conciliatory mode between the two rival Koreas.

"It is not accidental that some local and overseas media accused (Seoul) of fabricating the hacking attempts in order to defend (Seoul's) crime of destroying the fence-mending mood and to arouse anti-North Korea sentiment," the website said in an on-line article.

The South Korean government has customarily resorted to anti-Pyongyang sentiment whenever it was faced with a big political crisis, the propaganda website claimed, adding that NIS has always been in the forefront of such plots.

The NIS accusation also "aims to cover up the South Korean government's anti-human crimes against (local) progressive groups including wiretapping and hacking," it also noted.

North Korea has previously launched several hacking attempts in cyber warfare against Seoul on South Korean government websites and other personal PCs.

Pyongyang's surprise dispatch of a top-notch delegation to the closing ceremony of the Incheon Asian Games in October widely spawned hopes for better inter-Korean relations, but their recent feuds over South Korean activists' anti-Pyongyang leaflet campaigns have recently cast a cloud over such hopes. (Yonhap)

N. Korea's football players arrive in S. Korea for U-15 games

North Korean teenage football players arrived in South Korea on Nov. 2 for an inaugural U-15 football competition to be held in a border town amid tensions on the Korean Peninsula.

The North Korean delegation -- 22 athletes and 10 officials -- did not make any comments to South Korean reporters as they got on a bus at the Incheon International Airport.

The North Korean players will compete against five other teams from South Korea, Uzbekistan and China during a three-day event set to open Oct. 31 in Yeoncheon, about 60 kilometers north of Seoul, according to an organizer.

It is the first time in seven years that North Korean teenage football players have come to South Korea. (Yonhap)

S. Korean firm at Kaesong park faces biz failure

One of South Korea's small and mid-sized manufacturing companies (SME) at the inter-Korean industrial complex has applied for business closure due to falling sales, officials said on Oct. 30.

Around 120 South Korean firms, mostly SMEs, have been operating at the Kaesong Industrial Complex, employing around 53,000 North Korean workers.

The North abruptly suspended operation of the industrial part in April last year, citing tensions on the divided peninsula before resuming it in September that year.

An unidentified small manufacturer for watch and mobile phones cases on Wednesday submitted an application for dissolution to the committee handling affairs at the joint park, according to officials from Seoul's unification ministry.

It marked the second case since June 2009 that South Korean firms operating at the Kaesong Complex have closed their businesses. It also marked the first time since the operation of the park had been halted briefly last year.

The company, which had employed about 100 North Korean workers, has been suffering from business setbacks since 2012 as its annual sales fell to US\$300,000 from its peak of some \$700,000.

The industrial complex opened in the early 2000s in the North's border city of Kaesong, the last remaining symbol of inter-Korean reconciliation. It has served as a major revenue source for the cash-strapped communist country. (Yonhap)

Gov't to let Korean dictionary board visit N. Korea

The government said on Oct. 29 it is allowing a group of scholars and writers who are trying to compile a dictionary that can be used by all Koreans to visit North Korea.

The unification ministry said 28 people belonging to the Joint Board of South and North Korea for the Compilation of Gyeoremal-keunsajeon will arrive in Pyongyang on Oct. 30 and return on Nov. 8 after consultation with their North Korean counterparts.

The visit will mark the first time in five years that South Korean members of the joint board will go to the communist country. The last visit took place in October 2009 in the city of Kaesong, just north of the demilitarized zone that separates the two Koreas.

All visits had been halted after Seoul banned most South-North interaction in reprisal for the March 2010 sinking of one of its warships near the sea border with North Korea that left 46 sailors dead.

According to the board, 330,000 words will be listed in the dictionary, with 55,000 having been examined so far.

The group plans to meet every quarter so that it can screen words. The compilation of the entire dictionary should be completed by April 2019.

The ministry said it is permitting the visit because the meeting is nonpolitical in nature and it aims to overcome differences that have cropped up in the Korean language over the years.

"The meeting is a worthwhile endeavor since it wants to preserve and advance joint Korean heritage," the ministry in charge of authorizing all contact with the North said.

The project was officially launched on February 20, 2005, with the first session attended by members from both sides on Mount Kumgang in North Korea. (Yonhap)

N. Korea asks Korean Red Cross to offer medical supplies

North Korea has asked the Korean Red Cross to provide medical goods to be used for containing contagious diseases, the new head of the agency said on Oct. 27.

“North Korea has requested the Korean Red Cross to support medical products to prevent the spread of contagious diseases,” Kim Sung-joo told lawmakers at a parliamentary audit of the agency.

Although Pyongyang has banned foreign tourists from entering the communist country since the late previous week as part of its stepped-up efforts to prevent an outbreak of Ebola in the nation, Kim said the medical supplies in request were not specifically targeted for Ebola.

The Korean Red Cross’ role includes arranging inter-Korean reunions of families separated by the 1950-53 Korean War as well as resolving other human rights issues with North Korea. (Yonhap)

No N. Korea’s infiltration tunnels found in S. Korean capital: Seoul

No signs have been detected that North Korea dug underground tunnels into the South’s capital areas, Seoul’s defense ministry said on Oct. 27, dismissing recent claims of the government’s cover-up of such penetration attempts as “groundless.”

Hahn Sung-chu, a former two-star general in South Korea, has argued that North Korea carved out at least 84 underground tunnels that lead to the presidential office in central Seoul and a dozen others that connect with each other across the nation.

Hahn has long made such claims and raised aggressive campaigns in recent weeks by appearing on television programs at home and abroad. Videos carrying his argument during seminars have also been circulating online, stoking public security anxiety.

“Not a single sign was detected with regard to the claims about long underground tunnels by North Korea into Seoul and the surrounding capital areas,” the defense ministry said in a statement after lawmakers raised such concerns during the regular parliamentary audit into the government.

Building one 60-kilometer tunnel that stretches from the border region to Seoul is supposed to leave 700,000 tons of rocks, but no such waste has been found by the military’s reconnaissance assets, it noted.

As for the claims that the communist country employed tunnel boring machines (TBMs) for infiltration, the ministry said the former general appears to simply have mistaken Pyongyang’s decades-old mining devices for big-ticket items.

“Chances are slim for North Korea to have 300 TBMs (as Hahan says), which cost 8 billion won (US\$7.6 million) per unit,” the ministry said, adding that no drainage and ventilation facilities required for tunnel construction have been found so far.

“Such false claims cause public anxiety and hinder the military’s normal operations. We will react

sternly in accordance with the law,” it noted.

Stressing that the government does see possibilities of the existence of such infiltration tunnels by the communist country, the military has launched operations to find them in 27 suspicious spots near the demilitarized zone, according to the ministry.

“Since 1982, our military has spent 2 billion won for drilling and exploring 21 areas near the border towns but has not spotted even one,” the ministry said.

Between 1974 and 1990, South Korea discovered four secret tunnels from North Korea believed to be aimed at launching a surprise attack on Seoul. But none have been found since 1990. (Yonhap)

N. Korea threatens retaliation on S. Korea

North Korea has threatened to retaliate against South Korea if the South continues to make a military response against its patrol activities around the heavily armed inter-Korean border, the defense minister said on Oct. 20.

In a telephone message, the North denounced the South firing shots against its soldiers after warning broadcasts, claiming its activity around the military demarcation line (MDL) was just patrols, the ministry said.

The North also said it will continue to patrol around the MDL in the future.

The North’s response came after its second straight provocation around the border between Oct. 18-19.

On Oct. 18, about 10 North Korean soldiers who were approaching the MDL near Cheolwon, a central border city of the South, returned to their side after warning shots were fired by the South’s soldiers. The following day, other North Korean soldiers advanced toward the MDL near Paju, a city located about 40 kilometers northwest of Seoul to cause warning shots from South Korean soldiers. The North’s soldiers exchanged fire with the South’s soldiers before going back.

In response to the North’s telephone message, the ministry said the South has fired warning shots according to a normal procedure after sending warnings against the North’s military provocation on Sept. 18 and 19.

The ministry showed disappointment over the North’s move to put the responsibility of the latest border clash on the South.

The ministry urged the North to establish measures to prevent the recurrence of similar incidents in the future and to cease provocations of any kind around the border. (Yonhap)

S. Korea to pay 550 mil won for N. Korea’s Asiad participation

South Korea said on Oct. 16 it has decided to pay 550 million won (US\$520,000) in financial support for North Korea’s participation in the Incheon Asian Games.

The decision was made in anticipation of positive effects to inter-Korean ties, the unification ministry said.

The taxpayers’ money will be used to cover the transportation costs of the North’s 273-member

delegation, rental of broadcasting equipment and other expenditures, a ministry official told reporters.

“We have maintained a position to provide relevant support to North Korea in consideration of positive effects expected to the South-North relations, as well as international practice and Asian Games-related regulations,” he said on background.

The government originally earmarked 938 million won for sharing the North’s financial burden for its participation into the games held from Sept. 19 through Oct. 4. But the actual bill came less than the estimated amount, said the official.

The North also voluntarily paid a total of US\$191,682 to the organizing committee of the games for the costs of its delegation’s stay in the athletes’ village, media crew and local airport use, he added.

The North’s payment was quite unusual. In 2002, the South paid all of the costs for the North’s team to join the Busan Asian games.

At the 2014 Incheon Asiad, North Korea won 11 gold, 11 silver and 14 bronze medals, placing seventh in the medal rankings. It was the communist country’s first finish in the top 10 since it finished ninth in the 2002 Busan Asian Games. (Yonhap)

FOREIGN TIPS

U.S. says it works closely with Russia over N. Korea

The United States said on Nov. 14 it is working closely with Russia to address North Korea’s nuclear and missile threats as a top aide to North Korean leader Kim Jong-un is set to visit Moscow in a sign of strengthening ties between the two countries.

Choe Ryong-hae, a secretary with the North’s Workers’ Party, plans to make a weeklong trip to Russia the following week for talks on ways to upgrade political and economic relations between the two countries. Choe is expected to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The trip was seen as a sign that Pyongyang is reaching out to Moscow amid strained relations with China. Russia has also been at odds with the United States over the situation in Ukraine. The visit could also be a prelude to leader Kim’s trip to Moscow.

“We have seen those reports,” State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said. “We, of course, maintain regular contact and have consultations with Russia on issues related to North Korea. We closely coordinate with Russia as well as many partners to address the global threat posed by North Korea’s nuclear and ballistic missile programs.”

China’s crude exports to N. Korea seem to continue: officials

China appears to be continuing to provide North Korea with crude oil, contrary to its customs

data, officials in Seoul said on Nov. 14.

China exported not a single drop of crude oil to North Korea in the first nine months this year, according to formal data.

If true, it might reflect widespread speculation that the relations between the communist allies have been strained to some extent due to Pyongyang's repeated provocative acts.

South Korean officials, however, believe China is continuing to send crude oil to North Korea either in hidden trade or in the form of aid.

"Without China's provision of crude oil, the operation of many of North Korea's industrial facilities and vehicles would be suspended. But there has been no such indication yet," an intelligence official said.

Beijing may be deliberately excluding its crude oil shipments to Pyongyang from the customs data in a bid to give the world the impression that it is joining the international community's efforts to put pressure on it, another government official said.

He dismissed the view that the North has replaced China with Russia as its main source of crude oil imports.

"North Korea has brought in more crude oil from Russia this year, but the total amount is still less than 100,000 tons," he said. North Korea used to import an annual average of half a million tons of crude oil from China. (Yonhap)

U.S. charity group to expand medical aid program in N. Korea

A U.S. charity group said on Nov. 11 it has agreed with North Korea to expand its medical aid program in the impoverished nation.

Under the deal, the Washington-based Eugene Bell Foundation will construct three new wards at tuberculosis (TB) treatment centers in Pyongyang.

It is the fruit of a three-week trip to the communist nation by a group of 13 officials from the foundation.

"The number of patients at those treatment centers has grown as the activity of our foundation is increasingly known," a foundation official said. "Every treatment center suffers a severe lack of wards."

The foundation has long provided medical humanitarian assistance to North Korea, especially for multidrug-resistant tuberculosis.

In a new program, it is sending 770 million won (US\$750,000) worth of TB medication to the North. (Yonhap)

U.S. Amb. Kim named U.S. policy chief on N. Korea

Former U.S. Ambassador to South Korea Sung Kim has been named the special representative for North Korea policy, a job that makes him the chief delegate to the six-party talks on Pyongyang's nuclear program.

Kim will coordinate and oversee policy related to the North, including denuclearization efforts and the promotion of human rights in the communist nation in collaboration with envoy Robert King, State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said in a statement on Nov. 7.

Kim will also double as deputy assistant secretary for Korea and Japan, Psaki said.

Kim succeeds Amb. Glyn Davies as North Korea policy chief. Kim's deputy in the six-party talks is Sydney Seiler, a former director for Korea at the White House's National Security Council, who took over in September as the special envoy for the nuclear talks.

Psaki did not say what position Davies will be taking up.

Kim served as the top U.S. envoy to Seoul from 2011 until recently. His prior experience includes serving as special envoy to the six-party talks, director of the office of Korean affairs, and assignments to the embassy in Tokyo and the office of Chinese and Mongolian affairs.

The six-party talks, which bring together the two Koreas, China, Japan, Russia and the U.S., have been stalled since late 2008. The U.S. has demanded the North demonstrate its denuclearization commitment if it wants to reopen the sessions, a demand Pyongyang has rejected. (Yonhap)

China's jet fuel exports to N. Korea rebound: ministry

North Korea's jet fuel imports from China have begun to rebound this year unlike what U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry publicly said, a South Korean official said on Nov. 4.

North Korea imported 13,000 tons of jet fuel from China between January and September, a sharp rise from 359 tons in the same period last year, the unification ministry official told reporters.

But the amount is still far short of past tallies: 38,000 tons in the same period of 2011 and 39,000 tons in that of 2012, he noted, citing formal data from China's customs authorities

In a media interview in the previous week, the U.S. secretary said Beijing has ratcheted up economic pressure on Pyongyang.

"They've actually reduced the amount of jet fuel going into the country. They've put limitations on trade going into the country," he said. The South Korean ministry official said it's unclear what data Kerry used for the assessment. (Yonhap)

N. Korea's alleged executions another example of 'extreme brutality'

North Korea's alleged execution of dozens of people this year, if confirmed, would represent yet another example of the communist regime's "extreme brutality," the U.S. State Department said on Oct. 29.

South Korea's main intelligence agency reported to lawmakers earlier in the week that the North is believed to have executed some 50 people by shooting for various reasons, including as part of efforts to purge any remaining loyalists to Jang Song-thaek, the executed uncle of leader Kim Jong-un.

"We've seen the press reports regarding the execution of North Korean officials. We don't have independent confirmation from here," State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said at a regular briefing. "But if confirmed, this is another example of the extreme brutality of the North Korean

regime.”

The executions of North Koreans are the latest sign that Kim is instituting a reign of terror in North Korea to help consolidate his grip on power he inherited upon the death of his father and long-time leader, Kim Jong-il, in 2011.

The report of executions also came as the European Union and other countries are trying to adopt a U.N. General Assembly resolution that calls for referring the totalitarian nation to the International Criminal Court for its human rights abuses. (Yonhap)

N. Korean visitors to China drop 6.5 pct in 2014

The number of North Korean visitors to China fell more than 6 percent on-year in the first nine months of this year, a U.S. news report said on Oct. 30, in an apparent sign of chilled relations between the two ideological neighbors.

Some 139,800 North Koreans traveled to China between January and September this year, down 6.5 percent from the same period last year, Radio Free Asia reported, citing China's National Tourism Administration.

It marked the first decline in three years, possibly due to frayed ties between the two countries.

The figure rose 18.6 percent in 2012 and continued to grow 14.4 percent last year.

Employment was the most common reason to travel to China this year with 47 percent, followed by conferences and business with 19 percent. Less than 1 percent went there for tourism.

The vast majority, or 113,000, of them were men, compared with just 26,800 women, according to the report.

China is the North's last-remaining ally and its largest economic benefactor, and their alliance was often described as being “forged in blood” as China fought alongside the North in the 1950-53 Korean War.

But bilateral ties became strained over the North's third nuclear test in February 2003 and the execution of Kim's once-powerful uncle Jang Song-thaek, who had close ties with Beijing, in December last year. (Yonhap)

U.N. aid program normal despite Ebola fear: report

The U.N. aid program in North Korea remains unaffected by the country's aggressive anti-Ebola efforts, a news report said on Oct. 28.

The North has temporarily prohibited the entry of foreign tourists in a measure to prevent the spread of the Ebola endemic into its territory, according to tour agencies doing business there.

But there is no report of any problem with immigration services for staff at the World Food Program (WFP) office in Pyongyang, WFP officials were quoted as saying by Radio Free Asia (RFA).

The U.N. agency is carrying out its humanitarian activity in North Korea as usual, WFP spokeswoman Frances Kennedy told the Washington-based news outlet.

In the previous week, the British foreign ministry said the North's authorities informed it of plans to put any official visitor such as diplomats into quarantine for a period of 21 days from the date of departure from areas where there has been an outbreak of the Ebola virus.

There have been no suspected cases of Ebola in the communist nation, the ministry noted. (Yonhap)

N. Korea's labor productivity 30 years behind S. Korea: think tank

North Korea lags more than 30 years behind South Korea in terms of labor productivity due mainly to the reclusive country's decades of stunted economic growth, a private think tank said on Oct. 26.

According to a report by the Hyundai Research Institute (HRI), the average North Korean worker was estimated to have produced 2.7 million won (US\$2,552) worth of goods or services annually as of the end of 2012. The average South Korean laborer reached that level of productivity in 1980.

In 1990, North Korea's worker productivity was estimated at 1.6 million won, while South Korea's workers produced 7 times more than their northern counterparts.

Labor productivity measures the amount of goods and services that a worker produces in a given amount of time.

"North Korea's labor productivity rose only 69 percent in the past 22 years," the HRI report said. "The so-called 'Arduous March' retarded the country's economic growth in the 1990s."

Over the cited period, the North-South gap in labor productivity widened to 21-fold in 2012 from 7-fold in 1990.

The Arduous March, or the March of Suffering, was a failed state propaganda campaign in 1993 to overcome the famine stemming from floods and droughts in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The report said North Korea needs 55 trillion won to raise its per-capita gross domestic production (GDP) to \$5,000 in the next nine years from \$1,800 in 2011.

From then, an additional 85 trillion won will be necessary to reach \$10,000 in per-capita GDP, it said

"It will be important to expand inter-Korean economic cooperation to support the North's economic growth in preparation for future reunification," the HRI report said.

Ex-U.S. President Bush meets N. Korean defectors

Former U.S. President George W. Bush hosted a forum on North Korean human rights in Texas on Oct. 24, his institute said.

The George W. Bush Presidential Center said he met with leaders from the public and private sectors to discuss ways to address the North Korean human rights problem.

"Five North Korean refugees also shared their stories of escape and their experiences building new lives in the United States as a result of the 2004 North Korean Human Rights Act, which

President Bush signed into law 10 years ago,” it said in an emailed news release.

The session was part of the Bush Institute’s effort to enhance global awareness of the suffering of North Koreans and seek what the U.S. and other nations can do to help them more, according to the institute.

Both in office and after retirement, Bush has paid keen attention to human rights abuse prevalent in the communist nation.

Last year, he invited Shin Dong-hyuk, a North Korean defector who authored a book on the country’s political prisoner camp, to his institute in Dallas, Texas.

In 2005, he also met with another defector, Kang Cheol-hwan, co-author of a book on the North’s human rights abuse, at the White House. (Yonhap)

N. Korean defectors to testify at U.N. on gulags

Two North Korean defectors said on Oct. 21 they will visit the United Nations to join a forum on political prison camps in the communist nation.

The forum to be hosted by the Washington-based Committee for Human Rights in North Korea (HRNK) comes as the U.N. General Assembly is scheduled to discuss the North Korean human rights issue next week.

In the event on October 22 (local time), the two defectors -- Jung Gwang-il and Kim Yong-soon -- plan to introduce their experiences of the Yodok concentration camp in South Hamgyeong Province.

Jung, 51, has said he was held in Yodok from 2000-2003 after being falsely accused of spying while working at a trade firm.

Kim, 77, claims she was sent there due to her friendship with Sung Hye-rim, the first wife of late North Korean leader Kim Jong-il. She has said the regime rounded up everyone close to Sung, and that she spent a decade in the camp from 1970.

In a February report, the U.N. Commission of Inquiry (COI) said 80,000 to 120,000 people are estimated to be held in the North’s political prison camps, where they face systematic torture and other atrocities.

The North, however, has dismissed the report’s accusations.

In early October a senior North Korean diplomat publicly said his country operates “reform through labor camps.”

“Both in law and practice, we do have reform through labor detention camps -- no, detention centers -- where people are improved through their mentality and look on their wrongdoings,” Choe Myong-nam, a North Korean foreign ministry official in charge of U.N. affairs, said at a U.N. briefing. (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)

- Oct. 17 provides field guidance to the completed apartment houses for educators of Kim Chaek University of Technology.
- 19 guides the takeoff and landing drill on a highway-airfield conducted by fighter pilots of the KPA Air and Anti-Air Force Units 1017 and 458.
- 19 provides the scientists of the State Academy of Sciences with new flats in the Wisong Scientists Residential Quarter.
- 24 guides a drill between the KPA Large Combined Unit 526 and KPA Combined Unit 478.
- Nov. 1 provides field guidance to the construction site of Pyongyang International Airport.
- 8 provides field guidance to the Jongsong Pharmaceutical General Factory.
- 9 sends a personal letter, gift and floral basket to Marshal Dmitry Yazov, former Soviet minister of defense, on his 90th birthday.
- 11 gives field guidance to the Central Tree Nursery and sets forth vital tasks for turning the whole country into a thick woodland and greenery.
- 15 inspects February 20 Factory of the KPA, which has turned into a model of foodstuff factories in the country.

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

- Oct. 23 holds talks with Omar Hassan Ahmad Al-Bashir, president of the Republic of Sudan, at the Sudanese presidential palace.
- 26 sends a message of greeting to Heinz Fischer, president of Austria, on its national day.
- 26 makes a congratulatory speech at the closing ceremony of the 4th Congress of the Sudanese National Congress.
- 28 holds talks with Denis Sassou Nguesso, president of Congo, in Pointe Noire, Congo.
- 30 holds talks with Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, president of Uganda, at the presidential palace.
- Nov. 1 sends a congratulatory message to Filipe Nwussi for being elected as Mozambican president.
- 8 sends a message of greeting to Norodom Sihamoni, king of Cambodia, on the occasion of the 61st anniversary of its independence.
- 10 sends a message of greeting to Jose Eduardo Dos Santos, president of Angola, on the occasion of the 39th anniversary of its independence.

Pak Pong-ju: Premier

- Oct. 28 sends a message of greeting to Bohuslav Sobotka, prime minister of the Czech Republic, on the occasion of its national day.
- 29 makes a field survey of the construction of the stockbreeding base in the area of Sepho, Kangwon Province.
- Nov. 4 makes a field survey of the remodeling site of the Mangyongdae Schoolchildren's Palace.
- 6 makes a field survey of threshing in Ongjin, Kangryong, Sinchon and Unryul counties in South Hwanghae Province.
- 8 sends a message of greeting to Hun Sen, prime minister of Cambodia, on the occasion of the 61st anniversary of its independence.

CHRONOLOGICAL REVIEW**(Local Events)**

- Oct. 17 A ceremony marking the completion of the modern Wisong Scientists Residential Quarter in the Unjong science area is held on the occasion of the 69th founding anniversary of the WPK.
- 28 The 54th enlarged plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the Kim Il-sung Socialist Youth League takes place in Pyongyang.
- 30 Renovations of the Ryongwon-ri railway station in South Phyongan Province and the Paesanjom railway stations in Pyongyang are completed.
- 30 The Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) says the Kanggye Winery in Jagang Province has been renovated to make it possible to triple the production capacity and remarkably raise the quality of products.
- Nov. 1 The KCNA says a ceremony took place Oct. 30 to open the Chongsu Tourist Zone in the DPRK (North Korea) to visitors.
- 4 A natural energy institute is established at the State Academy of Sciences in the North.
- 5 The KCNA says the third meeting of the KPA battalion commanders and political instructors was held in Pyongyang on Nov. 3 and 4 with the attendance of Kim Jong-un.
- 6 The KCNA says a project has been pushed ahead in the DPRK (North Korea) to develop the Wonsan-Mount Kumgang area into a tourist destination with increased investment in building its infrastructure.
- 7 The KCNA says the State Emergency Anti-epidemic Committee is scrupulously organizing its anti-epidemic work to bar the Ebola virus from spreading in the country.
- 7 The KCNA says the Academy of Agricultural Science developed a new method of manufacturing insam (ginseng) tea.
- 8 Participants in the third meeting of battalion commanders and political instructors of the

Korean People's Army pledge to thoroughly implement the important tasks set forth by Kim Jong-un in his speech at the meeting.

(Foreign Events)

- Oct. 16 The KCNA says the North and South Korea's emergency contact in Panmunjom ended without any fruit.
- 16 Nasri Gustaman, Indonesian ambassador to North Korea, and his embassy officials do friendship labor at the North Korea-Indonesia Friendship Yaksu Cooperative Farm in Kangso District, Nampho City.
- 16 Kang Sok-ju, a member of the Political Bureau and secretary of the Central Committee of WPK, meets the delegation of the Maritime Territorial branch of the United Russia Party.
- 17 The KCNA says the third North Korea-China economy, trade, culture and tourism expo opened in Dandong, China on Oct. 16.
- 17 The KCNA says the North Korean consulate general in Nakhodka, Russia, hosted a reception on Oct. 10 on the occasion of the 66th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between North Korea and Russia.
- 20 North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Su-yong meets Minister of Development of Far East of Russia Alexander Galushka at the Mansudae Assembly Hall.
- 21 Jean-Jacques de Dardel, Swiss ambassador to North Korea, gives a reception to mark the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the North and the Swiss Confederation.
- 23 Talks between North Korea's Minister of External Economic Relations Ri Ryong-nam and Alexander Galushka are held in Pyongyang.
- 23 The Secretariat of the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea accuses the South Korean authorities of fostering anti-DPRK leaflet-scattering campaigns.
- 24 Ghulam M. Isaczai, U.N. resident coordinator and resident representative of the UNDP to DPRK, gives a reception on the occasion of United Nations Day.
- 27 The Rodong Sinmun condemns Japanese ruling politicians for visiting the Yasukuni Shrine.
- 27 Talks between Ri Jong-hyok, chairman of the DPRK-Germany Friendship Parliamentary Group, and Hartmut Koschyk, chairman of the German-Korean Parliamentary Group, are held at the Mansudae Assembly Hall.
- 28 Hartmut Koschyk, chairman of the German-Korean Parliamentary Group, visits the Ryugyong Dental Hospital, Masikryong Ski Resort and other facilities.
- 29 Foreign Minister Ri Su-yong has a talk with Krzysztof Ciebien, the new Polish ambassador to the DPRK, who paid a courtesy call on him.
- 31 North Korean papers in commentaries ridicule the South Korean authorities for indefinitely extending the transfer of the U.S.' wartime operational control of the South Korean army.
- 31 Inter-sector talks between North Korea and Uganda take place in Kampala.
- Nov. 1 The Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea condemns the South Korean authorities for persistently shielding and encouraging another leaflet scattering operation in Pochon, Gyeonggi Province.

- Nov. 4 A Foreign Ministry spokesman says no to U.S. dialogue on human rights and nuclear dialogue aimed at bringing down North Korea.
- 9 The KCNA says Russian President Vladimir Putin on Oct. 8 met Hyon Yong-chol, North Korea's minister of the People's Armed Forces, who participated in the event celebrating Marshal Yazov's 90th birthday.
- 10 The Rodong Sinmun urges South Korean authorities to stop enlarging the border tower on Aegi Hill.
- 11 The Rodong Sinmun says the U.S. Navy staged an action of destroying supersonic and subsonic targets flying at low altitude with SM-6 interceptor missiles and urges the U.S. to stop its arms buildup.
- 12 The Polish Embassy in Pyongyang gives a reception on the occasion of Poland's Independence Day.
- 15 The KPA Front Command warns the South Korean military to "stop the reckless military provocations in the Military Demarcation Line."

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