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COVER PHOTO : The composite photo shows major events involving the Korean Peninsula in 2014. From top left, first high-level inter-Korean talks in seven years, South Korean President Park Geun-hye's Dresden declaration on inter-Korean unification, North Korea's launch of more than 80 missiles, North Korea's first parliamentary meeting in five years, Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Seoul, North Korea's drone incursions against South Korea, trials of U.S. citizens detained in North Korea, North Korea's participation in the Asian Games, a North Korean envoy's courtesy call on Russian President Vladimir Putin and the passage of a U.N. resolution on North Korean human rights. (Yonhap)

Tough Challenges Facing Kim Jong-un in 2015

Confronted with domestic and external challenges, the young leader will continue to consolidate his own power base while focusing on rebuilding the moribund economy.

■ By Lee Kwang-ho

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un begins his fourth year in power in 2015 with unfavorable conditions confronting the socialist regime. The 31-year-old leader has inherited the autocratic power from his father, Kim Jong-il, who died on Dec. 17, 2011. It was the first third-generational succession of supreme power in communism's 100-year history.

Over the past three years, the inexperienced leader has consolidated his grip on power by ruthlessly removing potential rivals, including his uncle and one-time mentor, Jang Song-thaek, and replacing top military brass with people loyal to him.

As leader, Kim Jong-un has only exacerbated his country's international isolation, with troublesome domestic and external issues. The North Korean nuclear issue has only become worse, with the political climate on the Korean Peninsula remaining unstable without any signs of resolution. The international community is ramping up its powerful human rights pressures, with the adoption of a resolution on the issue by the U.N. General Assembly's Third Committee in November.

This year will mark the 70th founding anniversary of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK), and experts say the North Korean leader will utilize the party to the maximum extent in order to strengthen his political system and monolithic leadership.

Kim went all out to resuscitate the North's moribund economy by partially introducing a market system and opening it up more to foreign investors. There have been attempts to institute Kim's own brand of economic reforms, including special economic zones and various measures to introduce market economy elements, but no clear results have emerged.

Externally, its isolation has deepened ever more. Relations with China, the North's traditional ally, remain chilly. Beijing has appeared to distance itself from the wayward communist neighbor as it seeks to undertake a more responsible role as a regional power. Political exchanges between the two sides have notably decreased since the loss of Jang and major bilateral economic coopera-

tion projects have come to a halt.

At the center of the diplomatic setback is the North's adherence to its nuclear weapons program, as Kim Jong-un set the "paralleled promotion" of nuclear and economic capabilities as his national goal. In 2012, Pyongyang formalized a two-track approach of developing its nuclear program and economy together. Pyongyang is even threatening a fourth nuclear test as a reaction to stepped-up international pressure to improve the country's dismal human rights record.

In retrospect, the North caught the world by surprise when it executed Jang, who once served as a key patron of the young leader, in December 2013 on rebellion and corruption charges.

The Kim regime is still clearing the last vestiges of the Jang era, while continuing efforts to tighten Kim's grip through the frequent changes of top officials and idolization projects. He has appointed cronies to key positions within the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) and had state security agents ferret out potential opponents. Over the past year alone, he has replaced members of the top army brass several times.

Consolidation of Kim's Power

Pyongyang's state media said recently that Kim Jong-un has laid the groundwork for his stable and long-term leadership by purging his uncle Jang. The North's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) described the December 2013 execution of Jang as a major political accomplishment of Kim.

In its report on Dec. 15, the KCNA summarized the major accomplishments by Kim during his first three years. Kim's two-track policy of pursuing nuclear arms development and

economic growth, long-range missile firings, agricultural and educational reforms and the construction of the Masikryong Ski Resort were also named as accomplishments.

Since Kim seized power three years ago, the political unity of the North has strengthened, the KCNA said, adding that the purging of Jang and his aides have boosted ideological unity in the nation.

Observers in Seoul say Kim Jong-un seems to be gearing up for his full-fledged leadership as the three-year mourning period for his late father, Kim Jong-il, has passed. To tighten his grip on the military, he frequently promoted and demoted military leaders and personally checked on soldiers' readiness. According to the Unification Ministry in Seoul, the minister of the People's Armed Forces was replaced four times since April 2012. Over the past three years, he demoted 28 top military officers and reinstated 19 of them later.

After eliminating his political rivals, Kim Jong-un elevated the role and status of the ruling WPK with the appointment of Choe Ryong-hae and Hwang Pyong-so as the most trusted aides. In due course, the status of the military has been downgraded, although Kim Jong-un outwardly maintained his father's ruling ideology of the military-first politics.

Unlike his reclusive father, Kim Jong-un's leadership style is characterized by showmanship, in order to appear friendlier to the public, coupled with a reign of fear among officials. The younger Kim is frequently seen visiting the homes of ordinary North Koreans with gifts and shaking hands with them. He has built a water park, equestrian club and ski resort in the impoverished nation, aiming to win the hearts of the Pyongyang elite.

However, the Ministry of Unification in

Seoul said the Kim regime still has instability factors in the long term despite its various efforts to secure stability. The overgrown power of Pyongyang's inner circle, the alienation of the public due to the politics of fear, the radical and short-tempered personality of the young ruler and possible power struggles in the leadership will encourage centrifugal action and eventually work against the unity of the regime, the ministry said.

The yearlong process of erasing Jang's legacy appears to have left Kim Jong-un with more power than ever before. Jang's execution was a signal of the cold-blooded calculus of an unopposed leadership, a willingness to brutally remove any potential challenges to the third-generation power succession even when they came from within the family.

The mighty fall of Pyongyang's second-in-command touched off a firestorm of purges that continues even now in the name of "clearing away the vestiges." Jang's widow, WPK secretary Kim Kyong-hui, also lost her power. The last time she was seen publicly was at a military review on Sept. 9, 2013, the 65th anniversary of the North Korean government's founding. Her name was absent from the list of representatives elected for the 13th Supreme People's Assembly in March 2014. She is believed to be ill.

Erasing Jang's Legacy

Kim Kyong-hui herself is part of the ruling "Paektu bloodline," which refers to the descendants of Kim Il-sung, the founder of the North, who reportedly led guerrilla activities against the Japanese occupation from the northern mountain. As a part of the personality cult of the Kim dynasty, the North has stressed

the importance of keeping the country's leadership based on the "Mount Paektu bloodline."

The key figures of the "Jang system" were all removed around the time of his execution. His closest confidants, Ri Yong-ha, the WPK's first vice director of administration, and vice director Jang Su-gil, were both put to death before him. Other relatives and associates were summoned soon after, including his nephew, then ambassador to Malaysia Jang Yong-chol, and brother-in-law, Cuban ambassador Jon Yong-jin. The purge would later spread to other major figures in the system, including WPK international secretary Kim Yong-il and Pyongyang party secretary Mun Kyong-dok.

In 2014, purges resumed after an order from Kim Jong-un to fully re-evaluate matters executed by the "modern faction" and find and eliminate outside elements. "In October alone, around 10 central and local party officials associated with Jang Song-thaek were shot at Kanggun Military Academy for violating the North's system of monolithic leadership," reported senior fellow Hyun Sung-il of the Institute for National Security Strategy (INSS) in Seoul.

A Nov. 12 report in the Rodong Sinmun, the official newspaper of the WPK, discussed resolute purging of the modern factional group. "There is no place for survival for power-mongers who use the people's labors for their own personal pleasure," the article said. It was a sign that the internal ideological battle has continued to rage since Jang's execution.

Today, a new group of leaders is rapidly emerging to take the place vacated by Jang's death. Some of the new faces include the so-called "partisan group" -- among them WPK standing committee member Choe Ryong-hae,

WPK military department chief O Il-jong, and People's Army deputy chief of general staff O Kum-chol -- along with another member of the Paektu bloodline, Kim Jong-un's younger sister, Yo-jong.

As the only younger sister of the current leader, Yo-jong was often seen accompanying him on public activities. Since Kim Jong-un returned from his 40-day medical seclusion in October, his sister has joined him at various public events. Yo-jong was recently confirmed to have risen to the vice ministerial-level position of WPK vice director at the age of 27. Some are predicting she could take over Kim Kyong-hui's role in bolstering the legitimacy of her older brother's regime.

Choe Ryong-hae had appeared to take a step backward since Jang's execution, yielding his post as chief of the military's general politburo to Hwang Pyong-so to take a new position as party labor group secretary. Now he looks to have returned to a position of power, recently receiving the title of WPK politburo standing committee member and visiting Russia as a special envoy for Kim Jong-un. Some are suggesting he may have established as a new "second-in-command" with powers beyond even what Jang held in the past.

Rising Figures

Other rising figures in the regime come from the WPK organizational department that directed the Jang purge: first vice director for the party's organization and guidance department, Jo Yon-jun, Hwang Pyong-so, and minister of state security Kim Won-hong.

Meanwhile, interests and projects that Jang had been directing, including foreign exchange acquisition efforts and construction



This file photo shows a handcuffed Jang Song-thaek, the once-powerful uncle of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, with his hands and face bruised. He was executed for treason on Dec. 12, 2013. (KCNA-Yonhap)

in Pyongyang, have been totally overhauled. The foreign exchange efforts of Jang's Section 54 (Sungri Trading Company) have been split among the party, military, and Cabinet. Operation of the Chollima Tile Factory, which the Jang group had managed, is now in military hands. A project under Jang to build 100,000 housing units in Pyongyang has turned into a bid to add a new feather in the Kim regime's cap.

The yearlong process of erasing Jang's legacy appears to have left Kim with more power than ever before, commanding oaths of loyalty from various party, government, and military officials. There is also a growing push to make him into a figure of veneration, with the words "the great" added in front of his name in reports and propaganda.

As this year will mark the 70th founding anniversary of the Workers' Party, experts say the North Korean leader will utilize the party in order to strengthen his political system and monolithic leadership. In March and April, the ruling party held an expanded meeting of the Central Military Commission to discuss the

organizational issue of the military -- which means that the personnel affairs of the military is decided by the Workers' Party.

In March 2013, the WPK Central Committee held a plenary session, in which it adopted the policy of the simultaneous pursuit of nuclear weapons and economic construction.

Emphasis on Economic Rehabilitation

But there are a number of hurdles ahead of the Kim regime this year. Above all, the Pyongyang regime is expected to put more emphasis on economic development to improve the livelihoods of the poor North Korean residents. To this end, the North will likely expand its burgeoning market economy to induce as much foreign capital as possible to boost its sluggish economy.

The Kim Jong-un regime's economic policy is still in its test period and has yet to reach the point of the North Korean version of reform and opening. Nevertheless, Pyongyang's push for an economic overhaul to adapt to the market economy will continue this year, according to experts.

In agriculture, Kim stressed his push for the operation of small-scale farms, alluding to the unproductive and inefficient nature of collective farms. This is an indication that the North Korean leader is moving to eschew the equal distribution of farmers' harvests and expand incentives for productive workers.

Kim indicated his intention to accelerate the overhaul of the farming sector, a core element of the "June 28 economic reform measures," which the North introduced in 2012 to shore up its moribund economy. The reform package reportedly seeks to give greater autonomy to state corporations in terms of their production

items, prices and amounts, while allowing farmers to take in a greater portion of their harvest. The package was aimed at improving economic conditions to keep the loyalty of a people growing disgruntled over an ever-worsening food crisis.

In this regard, the Kim Jong-un regime may announce a new policy vision for politics and the economy this year as the country intensifies efforts to open up a new era under the new leader, a report by a local institute showed on Nov. 30. On the economic front, the North is expected to push to legalize a set of new economic measures the country has experimented with in recent years, the report said, adding that homegrown market forces have been pressing for economic reform.

North Korea designated 13 locations across the country as "special districts for economic development" in 2013 and said it would welcome South Korean participation in developing an international tourism area between Wonsan and Mount Kumgang.

Even though the North could introduce elements of a market economy, it also should equip its macroeconomic environment comprising the finance and labor sectors so that the market could play its role properly. To that effect, the North should solve such poor infrastructure problems as electricity shortages, obsolete transportation networks and communications facilities to make its economy grow fast and be more effective.

Tough Road for Diplomacy

Yet, tough roads lie ahead for Kim when it comes to diplomacy. North Korea is expected to continue a tug-of-war with the United States and Western countries while exaggerating its

war deterrence capabilities. On the other hand, it will strive to improve relations with its traditional allies of China and Russia. It will also work to restore deteriorated ties with Beijing, while continuing negotiations with Japan for political and economic gains, the unification ministry said.

During the first three years of Kim's rule, Pyongyang tried to diversify its diplomatic support, a change from his father's time when the North heavily relied on its alliance with China.

Despite the need for negotiation and compromise, North Korea's wrangling with the U.S. over outstanding issues, including its nuclear weapons program, will continue this year. The North has strongly criticized the missile-defense system and the annual Korea-U.S. joint military exercises taking place on and around the Korean Peninsula. Last year, aware of international criticism, North Korea released three Americans who had been detained in the North.

A North Korea watcher said the two Cold War enemies would not get back to negotiations easily because Washington is utilizing the North's nuclear threats for political purposes, while Pyongyang is utilizing Western countries' pressure as an excuse for its continued provocations, as seen in recent years.

During 2014, the North struggled to expand its diplomatic horizon to resolve the long-stalled issue of its nuclear weapons program. But such efforts dampened due to the international condemnation of its human rights abuses. The Third Committee of the U.N. General Assembly passed a resolution in November calling for Pyongyang's human rights violation record to be referred to the International Criminal Court and to hold the country's top leaders responsible for crimes against humanity.



A massive rally to criticize the U.N. resolution against North Korea's human rights violations and the United States is held in Pyongyang on Nov. 25. (KCNA-Yonhap)

Before the U.N. action, North Korea made all-out efforts to counter the international pressure. It sent Foreign Minister Ri Su-yong to the U.N. General Assembly to defend the country's human rights conditions and the nuclear issue. Ri's presence in the U.N. General Assembly was the first by a North Korean foreign minister in 15 years.

Veteran North Korean diplomat Kang Sok-ju, international affairs secretary of the Workers' Party, engaged in diplomatic activities through his trip to the European Union and Mongolia. Kang played a key role in the Geneva Agreed Framework reached between the U.S. and North Korea in October 1994.

Russia as Key Diplomatic Partner?

North Korea has accused the United States of trying to topple its regime and also accused Western countries of exaggerating the gravity of the human rights issue in a scheme to undermine its communist regime. In this regard, the North's human rights record and nuclear program will be the main issues for the North's



Choe Ryong-hae (C), a special envoy of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, and his group pose at the Sunan Airport in Pyongyang before departing for Russia on Dec. 17. (KCNA-Yonhap)

diplomatic battle in the coming year.

Under the situation, Russia emerged as the North's new key diplomatic partner. The recent visit to Russia by Choe Ryong-hae as Kim Jong-un's special envoy underscores Pyongyang's shift toward Moscow. Local news reports said that the North Korean leader expressed to Putin his wish to develop the bilateral relationship into an alliance. Analysts said that if the alliance is formed, it would have a significant impact on the security landscape in Northeast Asia. During Choe's trip, North Korea also secured economic cooperation projects with Russia.

Russia and North Korea recently completed a 54-kilometer railroad from the Russian town of Khasan to Rajin, North Korea's free trade port. The Khasan-Rajin railroad could be connected with the Trans-Siberia Railway system. If it links up with the Trans-Korean Peninsula Railway, the gigantic railroad would become a modern Silk Road linking Northeast Asia and Europe.

Moreover, Russia recently offered US\$25 billion to modernize 3,200 kilometers of North

Korea's railroads over the next 20 years in return for access to the North's mineral resources. Pyongyang's overtures for enhanced cooperation with Moscow were apparently welcomed by Russia, which has been under criticism from the U.S. and Europe for its annexation earlier in 2014 of the Crimean Peninsula, an unprecedented event that critics argue hurt Ukraine's sovereignty and broke the stability that had been established since the end of World War II.

In the long term, North Korea is likely to seek new diplomatic breakthroughs in relations with China and Japan. Although relations between Pyongyang and Beijing showed some cracks after the execution of Jang, their strained relations are showing signs of relaxing as China opposed the U.N. resolution on the North's human rights abuses, and moreover, China needs North Korea's alliance and cooperation to stop the U.S. plan of deploying a missile-defense program in Northeast Asia that would comprise South Korea and Japan.

Japan and North Korea last year reached an agreement to reinvestigate the cases of Japanese nationals it kidnapped in the 1970s and 1980s. In return, Japan eased some of the sanctions it imposed on the North unilaterally after the North conducted missile and nuclear weapons tests. The sanctions include restrictions on bilateral exchanges, limits on remittances and a ban on port calls by North Korea-registered vessels.

The surprise deal put Seoul and Washington in an awkward position, as there is concern that the closer relationship between Pyongyang and Tokyo will negatively affect the united stance among South Korea, the U. S. and Japan against the North's nuclear weapons program. But the two countries have

failed to make progress due to conflicting stances. Furthermore, Japan led the U.N.'s condemnation of the North's human rights violations, together with the European Union.

Over the past year, inter-Korean relations remained frigid. At once, a rapprochement seemed to be forged early last year when a meeting of high-ranking officials from the two countries took place, followed by an inter-Korean reunion of separated families between the divided countries.

Prospect for Inter-Korean Thaw

In October, there seemed to be another sign of a thaw when three key North Korean officials suddenly visited Incheon. The officials, Hwang Pyong-so, Choe Ryong-hae and Kim Yang-gon, made a surprise one-day visit to South Korea on Oct. 4 to attend the closing ceremony for the Incheon Asian Games. The two Koreas had agreed to hold a high-level meeting in early November at the latest, but the meeting was not held as the communist country said it would not hold any dialogue with the South until it blocks activists from sending anti-Pyongyang leaflets across the border.

By most accounts, 2015 will likely be the year that determines the course of inter-Korean relations for a considerable period. If the two Koreas fail to reach a breakthrough this year, they may have to brace for their longest diplomatic freeze ever, making the division of this peninsula appear all but permanent, according to observers.

In this regard, there is a possibility the rival Koreas could reach a breakthrough as Korea celebrates its liberation from the 35-year-long Japanese colonial rule. But the North's propaganda machine recently lambasted Seoul's

various inter-Korean initiatives, such as a "trust-building process" and a "world peace park" project in the Demilitarized Zone, as a "silly dream" that can never be realized.

Nevertheless, a high-ranking Seoul official expressed the need to improve strained relations between the two Koreas, and said there needs to be dialogue to discuss bilateral issues, including family reunions and the lifting of the May 24 measures.

Imposed after the North's 2010 deadly attack on a South Korean warship, the Cheonan, the so-called May 24 measures have put all inter-Korean economic projects on hold except for the Kaesong Industrial Complex. The South also views the sanctions as a key obstacle to efforts to improve its relations with the North, although it maintains the basic stance that Pyongyang should first acknowledge its responsibility for the Cheonan sinking and offer an apology.

President Park Geun-hye has tried to realize her professed goal of accomplishing peaceful unification of the divided nation. She has put forth such grand slogans as "trustpolitik" on the Korean Peninsula, a Northeast Asian Peace Initiative, and a Eurasian Initiative. But none of these could go forward without improving inter-Korean relations first.

North Korea is standing at a crossroads, facing a choice between deeper international isolation or a new relationship with the world -- including a new start to discussions on denuclearization. The first test lies in its relationship with Seoul. If North Korea insists on continuing on with its antagonism toward the South, the international community is going to doubt whether it's even capable of change. (Yonhap)

Seoul's Efforts to Engage with Pyongyang

“We (South Korea and the U.S.) will need to show Pyongyang clearly what it can earn by giving up the path of provocation and isolation and choosing the path of dialogue and cooperation,” Minister Ryoo Kihl-jae said.

■ By Kim Tae-shik

South Korean Unification Minister Ryoo Kihl-jae said on Dec. 10 that Seoul and Washington should make greater efforts to engage North Korea, saying that dialogues would make pressure on the communist regime more effective.

Ryoo made the suggestion during a keynote speech at a forum on Korean unification in Washington, stressing that the two allies should now explore “more creative and diverse approaches” to resolving Pyongyang’s nuclear and human rights problems.

“Until now, Seoul and Washington focused on inducing Pyongyang to change by cooperatively putting pressure upon it. However, to make the pressure more effective, dialogue and cooperation are also necessary,” Ryoo said during the forum at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

“Our two countries should therefore strengthen our coordination for engagement as well. We will need to show Pyongyang clearly what it can earn by giving up the path of provocation and isolation and choosing the path of dialogue and cooperation,” he said.

Ryoo also said that it is important to help North Korea actually see the benefits of cooperation with the outside world. That will be a way to “pragmatically improve the quality of life and the human rights situation of the North Korean people,” he said.

Ryoo arrived in Washington on Dec. 4 on a trip aimed at broadening the U.S. understanding of South Korean President Park Geun-hye’s trademark push for preparations for unification with North Korea. He is the first South Korean unification minister to visit the U.S. since 2011.

Ryoo called for U.S. support for the South’s unification initiative.

“I believe that only when the international community, including the United States, supports our goal and works together with us for it, the people’s dreams of unification will finally come true,” he said, adding that the benefits of unification will not be confined to the Korean Peninsula.

Unification of the Korean Peninsula would also make tremendous contributions to the peace and prosperity of the Northeast Asian region and the world as a whole, and provide a new growth

South Korean Unification Minister Ryoo Kihl-jae (L) poses with Rep. Steve Chabot (R-OH), chairman of the U.S. House Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, during a meeting in Washington on Dec. 12. Ryoo visited the U.S. to get U.S. government and congressional leaders to better understand South Korean President Park Geun-hye's initiative to bring about inter-Korean unification. (Photo courtesy of Unification Ministry) (Yonhap)



momentum for not only the economies of Northeast Asia, but also the global economy, he said.

German unification was possible thanks to the support from the international community including the United States, he said.

“If Washington strongly supports and assists Korean unification, I believe that we will be able to make the dreams of both of our countries -- dreams of a unified Korea, peace in Northeast Asia, and shared prosperity of the whole world -- all come true,” he said.

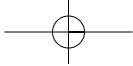
U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Daniel Russel expressed staunch support for Park's unification vision, saying it provides a vivid picture of the benefits the North could reap from reconciliation and denuclearization, as well as the benefits that reunification will bring to South Korea and the region as a whole.

“The U.S. firmly supports this vision. We will never accept a permanent division of the Korean peninsula,” he said. “The ROK (South Korea) and the U.S. will continue to do everything we need to do to keep the peace on the peninsula through a combination of deterrence and a strong allied defense.”

He also urged the North to give up its nuclear program, stressing that Pyongyang won't be able to achieve security and prosperity it wants while pursuing nuclear weapons. The North's “byeongjin” policy of simultaneously seeking economic and nuclear development will never succeed.

“It's not a policy. It's a pipe dream. It will not happen. North Korea can't have its cake and eat it too,” Russel said of the North's policy. “Our strategy raises the cost of continued defiance and ultimately leaves the DPRK (North Korea) no viable alternative but to honor its commitments and to come into compliance with its international obligations, first and foremost, with its obligations to irreversibly and verifiably denuclearize.”

In a related move, a bipartisan committee of South Korea's National Assembly passed a resolution on Dec. 3 calling for the resumption of talks between the two Koreas.



The special committee for the development of inter-Korean ties pointed out that bilateral relations remain frosty amid the North's repeated military provocations, for nearly two years after the launch of the Park Geun-hye administration in the South.

It emphasized that Seoul and Pyongyang should restart talks without attaching any preconditions to discuss a number of pending issues such as the regularization of family reunions, repatriation of prisoners of war and abducted people, the North's human rights conditions and humanitarian food aid.

Seoul Lawmakers' Call

"The National Assembly will also make various efforts, including a push for South-North parliamentary dialogue, to help promote government-level talks, exchanges and cooperation," read the resolution.

The inter-Korean issue is a bipartisan problem, said the committee, chaired by Rep. Won Hye-young of the main opposition New Politics Alliance for Democracy (NPAD).

Meanwhile, the unification ministry predicted North Korea could launch a peace overture toward South Korea next year in a move to come out of diplomatic deadlock, while continuing its small-scale provocations.

Inter-Korean relations have been at an impasse since the North refused to hold an agreed-upon second round of high-level talks in November, bashing Seoul for what it claimed were anti-Pyongyang campaigns. The breakdown dashed hopes for a thaw in the bilateral ties that were raised after senior officials from the two sides had a surprise meeting the previous month.

North Korea has further been isolated from the international community after the United Nations adopted a highly symbolic resolution on the North's dire human rights situation in November, calling for the referral of its leader, Kim Jong-un, to the International Criminal Court.

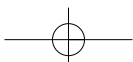
"Chances are that North Korea could take the inter-Korean cooperation as a way out of its isolation should it fail to make progress in improving relations with major countries such as China, Russia and the United States," South Korea's Ministry of Unification said on Dec. 12 in a report analyzing the North Korean situation over the past three years under Kim's control.

"The North could also make a proactive peace overture (toward the South) next year on the occasions of the 70th anniversary of the Korean Peninsula's independence from Japanese colonial rule and the 15th anniversary of adopting the June 15 inter-Korean joint declaration that calls for exchanges and cooperation between the two Koreas," the ministry said.

Though the unruly regime is expected to continue its provocations by firing off missiles and violating the western sea border, it "would stop short of conducting another nuclear test," according to the ministry, citing clear opposition from China and Russia as a reason.

The North has carried out three underground nuclear tests so far, with the latest one in February 2013, and has threatened to conduct "a new form" of detonation test.

North Korea also hinted at the possibility of improving relations with Seoul in a report from its foreign ministry.



It is the determination of Kim Jong-un to continue to make positive efforts in the future for the improvement of North-South relations, according to the report of the Disarmament and Peace Institute of the North's Foreign Ministry, carried by the official Korean Central News Agency on Dec. 12.

Supporting the ministry's prediction, a South Korean opposition lawmaker who has just returned from a one-day trip to North Korea, said North Korea seems to have strong willingness for dialogue.

Forecast of Pyongyang's Move

"I got the impression that North Korea has a strong will for dialogue," Rep. Park Jie-won of the main opposition NPAD said on Dec. 16 upon returning from a trip to North Korea's border town of Kaesong where he met with Won Tong-yon, vice chairman of the North's Asia-Pacific Committee.

Park went there to deliver a wreath commemorating the third anniversary of the death of the North's late leader, Kim Jong-il, the father of the current leader, Kim Jong-un, on behalf of Lee Hee-ho, the widow of former South Korean President Kim Dae-jung, who had a historic summit meeting with Kim Jong-il in 2000.

"Vice chairman Won said he hopes that the South and the North will promote reconciliation and cooperation next year, when they celebrate the 15th anniversary of the June 15 Declaration," referring to an agreement reached at the historic summit.

Won, however, said the two Koreas will be able to recover mutual trust only when the South stops the scattering by activists of leaflets critical of Pyongyang, according to the lawmaker.

Park served as chief of staff to the late South Korean president during his term from 1998 to 2003.

The government approved Park's visit to North Korea as it is to reciprocate the North's wreath in August to mark the fifth anniversary of the former South Korean president's death.

"Today, the government approved the North Korea trip (by Rep. Park) in consideration that the (planned) delivering of the wreath is a reciprocal move," ministry spokesman Lim Byeong-cheol said at a press briefing on Dec. 15.

He added the North has notified the peace center of its decision to send Won Tong-yon to receive the wreath.

In another positive development for inter-Korean relations, the 92-year-old widow of Kim Dae-jung, who is president of the Kim Dae-jung Peace Center, is planning a trip to North Korea in May or June this year when the weather is milder and more favorable for her health.

Lee expressed her desire to visit the North for humanitarian purposes when she met South Korean President Park Geun-hye in late October, to which the president agreeably accepted. Pyongyang also accepted the request in November.

Lee had wished to visit the North last year but postponed it at the advice of her doctors. (Yonhap)

Seoul's Participation in Rajin-Khasan Project

Seoul vows full support for a landmark three-nation project to import coal from Russia via North Korea, saying it would help propel the "Eurasia Initiative."

■ By Kim Tae-shik

A Chinese-flagged ship carrying a sizable volume of Russian coal arrived in South Korea's Pohang port on Nov. 29 after a 33-hour journey from North Korea's Rajin port, casting a green light for South Korea's participation in the Rajin-Khasan project.

A consortium of three South Korean companies -- the POSCO, Hyundai Merchant Marine Co. and Korail Corp.-- has been sounding out the feasibility of joining the Russia-North Korea project as a step toward the "Eurasia Initiative" of South Korean President Park Geun-hye.

In a landmark pilot operation, 40,500 tons of Russian coal arrived in the South Korean port, the home of POSCO, 374 kilometers southeast of Seoul. The coal was transported from the Russian Far Eastern border town of Khasan to Rajin on a 54-kilometer railway that was re-connected in 2013 after years of renovation.

POSCO unloaded the coal from the 32,911-ton Xin Hong Bao Shi at its iron mill in Pohang. The shipment was a US\$4 million

project, including the coal and freight.

The shipment was part of the South Korean consortium's envisioned program to bring in Russian coal via the North's ice-free port of Rajin, using the newly-renovated railway.

A South Korean inspection team comprising 13 officials from the consortium and the government also returned to the South from Rajin on Nov. 29 via Russia after overseeing the full process of the pilot run, including the railway transport of the Russian coal from Khasan and cargo loading.

The inspection team entered North Korea on Nov. 24 after crossing the North Korea-Russian border to determine whether the three-nation logistics project should be further pursued.

Chi Yong-tae of Korail, who acted as head of the inspection team, told reporters at the Incheon International Airport that the purpose of the inspection was to examine the process of linking railway transportation and marine transportation and that North Korea offered full cooperation during their inspection.

Chi said the facilities in Rajin port and rail-

way operating facilities were “better than expected.”

Welcoming the successful pilot shipment, the South Korean government declared its support on Dec. 1 for the nascent Rajin-Khasan project, saying it would help spur the Eurasia Initiative.

Seoul's Welcome

The unification ministry described the logistics program, which is on a test run, as the starting point for economic cooperation among the two Koreas and Russia.

“It is meaningful as a project to lay the foundation for realizing the Eurasia Initiative, peace in Northeast Asia and the renovation of our economy,” ministry spokesman Lim Byeong-cheol said at a press briefing.

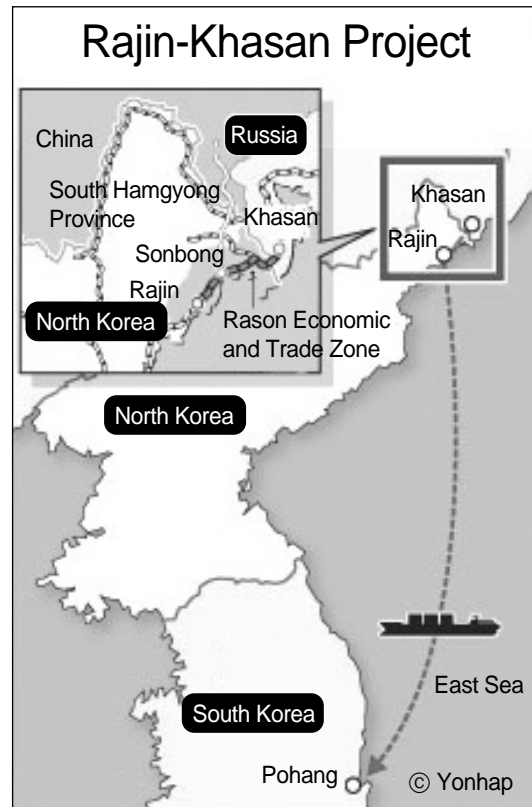
Lim said his government will provide every necessary support for the tripartite project in an effort to achieve the Eurasia Project.

Another ministry official said the South's consortium is expected to ink a formal contract with Russia this year and there would be another pilot shipment before the main deal.

It plans to purchase a stake from RasonKonTrans, a joint venture in charge of the Rajin-Khasan scheme, he told reporters on background. “If necessary, I think there could be one more round of pilot operations (before signing the deal),” the official said.

RasonKonTrans was established in 2008 by Russia's RZD Trading House and the port of Rajin, with 70 percent controlled by Russia and 30 percent by North Korea. The South's consortium is seeking to buy some of Russia's stake.

In 2013, President Park suggested linking energy and logistics infrastructure in the Far



East and Europe.

As the pilot shipment of the Russian coal to South Korea seemed to be successful, it is keenly watched if it can become another case of inter-Korean economic cooperation like the joint factory park in the North Korean border town of Kaesong.

If the project is concluded to be profitable and leads to the sealing of a contract, it will give substantial impact on inter-Korean relations.

At present all inter-Korean economic cooperation is blocked by the May 24 measures, except for the operation of the Kaesong industrial park. The Rajin-Khasan project will be another economic cooperation project between the two Koreas, albeit in the form of three-way business with Russia.

Park's Eurasia Initiative

The project was envisioned during a summit meeting between President Park Geun-hye and her Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, in November 2013, with the two sides agreeing to help South Korean firms join the Russia-North Korea deal to reinvigorate transport between their cities.

A joint statement adopted at the end of the Seoul summit said Russia welcomes the Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative proposed by Park, and the two sides agreed to invigorate cooperation in this field.

South Korea agreed to take part in a Russian-led rail and port development project in North Korea that could help reduce tensions with Pyongyang and open up a new logistics link between East Asia and Europe in line with the Eurasia Initiative.

The agreement was the most tangible outcome from Park's summit with Putin. It calls for South Korea's steel giant POSCO, Hyundai Merchant Marine and Korail to participate in the Rajin-Khasan development project.

The project was designed to develop North Korea's northeastern port of Rajin into a logistics hub connected to Russia's Trans Siberian Railway. In September, a 54-kilometer, double-track rail link reopened between Rajin and Khasan after years of renovation.

Once the project to modernize the port of Rajin is completed and the tripartite logistics project progresses smoothly, the rail-connected port can be used as a hub for sending cargo by rail from East Asia to as far as Europe. South Korean firms can also ship exports first to Rajin and transport them elsewhere via Russian railways.

After conducting two rounds of feasibility tests at Rajin last year, the South Korean consortium is seeking to participate in the Rajin-Khasan Project by taking over Russia's shares in the Russian-North Korean joint venture RasonKonTrans in order to bypass the government's May 24 measures, which prohibit South Korean businesses' investment in North Korea.

The sanctions, taken after the North torpedoed the South Korean Navy corvette Cheonan in 2010, virtually cut off all economic and cultural exchanges between the two Koreas, except for the joint economic factory park in Kaesong.

The consortium is reportedly seeking to secure 50 percent of the Russian holdings in RasonKonTrans at a cost of between 180 billion won (US\$164 million) and 200 billion won.

Sources at the consortium and the government said on Dec. 4 the consortium has been negotiating with Russia's state railway company on the establishment of a special purpose corporation (SPC) for the Rajin-Khasan project and agreed to take 49 percent of the shares of the SPC while the Russian side will hold 51 percent. A final contract is likely to be signed by the end of the first half of 2015.

If the deal is successfully forged, Park's Eurasia Initiative is likely to gain an impetus and ways to link the Rajin-Khasan development project to the Trans-Siberia Railway (TSR) project will be studied in earnest.

South Korea hopes to eventually link its rail network to Russia's Trans-Siberian Railway via North Korea, an ambitious project that will cut shipping times and logistics costs for South Korea's Europe-bound exports.

Russia as well hopes to use the Rajin-

Khasan railway to transport cargo from Northeast Asian countries, inclusive of South Korea, to Europe via the TSR.

Alexander Galushka, Russia's minister for development of the Far East, said the Rajin-Khasan logistics project will be the first step toward broader economic cooperation among the three nations.

"It is a fruit of joint efforts by the three countries. This is only the first step. There are much more things to achieve together and I am confident that the potential is great," he said during talks with South Korea's unification minister Ryoo Kihl-jae in late November.

The deal is also expected to help Pyongyang secure a stable supply of cash from overseas.

A POSCO official said the steel giant will confirm whether there are any problems in importing coal via North Korea through the pilot shipment.

POSCO imports about 2 million tons of Russian coal a year, mostly via Vladivostok. The company plans to increase its imports of Russian coal via North Korea if it is judged to be more economical than imports via Vladivostok.

KEPCO's Participation

In a related development, the five units of South Korea's utility giant Korea Electric Power Corp. (KEPCO) said on Dec. 7 that they are considering participation in the Rajin-Khasan project in a bid to reduce the costs of importing coal from Russia through North Korea.

The five KEPCO units, led by Korea Midland Power Corp., are reviewing the economic feasibility of the project. "But it is hard to say we will participate in the project as

nothing has yet been decided," said a KEPCO official.

POSCO and the KEPCO units are expecting to reduce logistics costs of importing Russian coal by up to 15 percent if they participate in the Rajin-Khasan project.

Meanwhile, a ranking North Korean official expressed the hope that Rajin port could be developed into a logistics hub in Northeast Asia.

Kim Chol-ho, a vice director at the Railways Ministry, said the Russian-North Korean railway development project would not only develop economic cooperation between the two countries but also will contribute to the transportation of exported goods to third countries.

"Our country (North Korea) can play a role as a relay hub for logistics and transportation (in Northeast Asia) with its geopolitical location," Kim said in an interview with Choson Sinbo, the organ of the pro-Pyongyang Korean residents' organization in Tokyo.

Experts said, however, that the progress of the tripartite project would depend on the attitude of North Korea and future inter-Korean relations, pinpointing North Korea's months-long suspension of the Kaesong industrial park in 2013 amid high tension between the two sides.

As the government made the Rajin-Khasan project an exception from the May 24 measures, additional cooperation among the three countries and between the two Koreas would be available and there could be a turning point for the improvement in the stalled inter-Korean relations, they said. (Yonhap)

Emerging Political Role of Kim Jong-un's Sister

“Kim Yo-jong is playing a substantive role in creating Kim Jong-un's image as a people-oriented leader, standing at the core of his efforts to solidify his power base.”

■ By Lee Kwang-ho

The younger sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un has emerged as a key figure in the socialist regime after being appointed vice director of the North's ruling Workers' Party.

This was confirmed when the North's official news agency unveiled on Nov. 27 the official title of Kim Yo-jong amid growing speculation over her political role and stature in the communist regime. She was among Kim's entourage when he visited a cartoon film studio in Pyongyang, reported the North's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA).

As the only younger sister of the current leader, she was often seen accompanying him on public activities, but this is the first time that Pyongyang's state controlled media have revealed her official title. Those who accompanied him included “vice department directors Kim Yo-jong and Kim Ui-sun of the Workers' Party of Korea Central Committee,” the KCNA said.

Both Kim Jong-un, reportedly 31, and Kim Yo-jong, 27, were born to Ko Yong-hui, known as the third wife of late leader Kim Jong-il. The siblings lived in Pyongyang together and went to the same boarding school in Switzerland.

It has not been confirmed which department Kim Yo-jong is responsible for, while media

reports and North Korean experts speculate that she belongs to either a department in charge of propagating the North Korea system or a department for managing the leadership of the isolated state.

Vice Director of Workers' Party

The confirmation showed that Yo-jong is apparently being groomed to play a key supporting role for her brother in the absence of their once-powerful aunt, Kim Kyong-hui. She disappeared from the public eye after her husband and former No. 2 man in the Kim Jong-un regime, Jang Song-thaek, was executed in December 2013.

The South Korean government believes that Yo-jong is working in the propaganda department of the party, because among the entourage with her was the ruling party's propaganda secretary Kim Ki-nam. An official from the unification ministry noted that her father, Kim Jong-il, served in the department while he was being groomed to become the nation's leader.

The unification ministry refused to answer questions on whether the government here views Yo-jong as a substitute for Kim Kyong-hui. But some observers say that Yo-jong cur-

rently holds the vice ministerial post, but that her actual political status appears to be much higher, indicating that her ranking has already surpassed that of her aunt.

She is the youngest vice director of the Workers' Party in the history of North Korea. Her father Kim Jong-il became the vice director of the Propaganda and Agitation Department in 1970 when he was 32. Her once-powerful aunt Kim Kyong-hui became the vice director of the International Department when she was 30.

The North Korean press did not say which department Yo-jong is in charge of, but officials in Seoul believe the post must be fairly important.

Speculation about her role started when she was spotted accompanying Kim Jong-un at a Supreme People's Assembly event in March. Key aides Choe Ryong-hae, a secretary of the Workers' Party, and Vice Marshal Hwang Pyong-so were also on Kim's side. Since then, she has accompanied her brother on 12 official functions.

After Kim Jong-un came back from his 40-day medical seclusion in October, his sister has accompanied him at various public events.

Mount Paektu Bloodline

North Korea watchers said it is entirely normal for a member of the Kim dynasty to be the second most powerful person in Pyongyang, saying Kim Yo-jong, who inherited the "Mount Paektu bloodline," fits that bill.

"Mount Paektu bloodline" refers to the descendants of Kim Il-sung, the founder of the



Kim Yo-jong (in the circle) watches her older brother and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un (C) talk with officials during a visit to an anti-U.S. museum in Sinchon, South Hwanghae Province. The (North) Korean Central News Agency reported the visit on Nov. 25, but did not elaborate on when the visit was made. (KCNA-Yonhap)

North, who reportedly led guerrilla activities against the Japanese occupation from the northern mountain.

As a part of the personality cult of the Kim dynasty, the North has stressed the importance of keeping the country's leadership based on the Mount Paektu bloodline.

Kim Jong-chol, the 33-year-old older brother of the North Korean leader, reportedly has health problems. Kim Jong-nam, the half-brother who has been living abroad in exile, is highly unlikely to be a successor.

Some other watchers believe Kim Yo-jong is well on her way to becoming the No. 2 figure in the reclusive state. When Kim disappeared from public view for around 40 days in September and October, some press reports suggested she was effectively at the helm.

Chang Yong-seok, senior researcher at a Seoul National University institute, said Kim Yo-jong seems to be more influential than Kim Kyong-hui was.

"Kim Yo-jong is playing a substantive role in

creating Kim Jong-un's image as a people-oriented leader, standing at the core of his efforts to solidify his power base," he said.

However, Cheong Seong-chang, a senior fellow at the Sejong Institute, offered a different view, commenting that she seems more likely to be in charge of the leadership's management department.

"Yo-jong appeared in the North's media on March 9 for the first time. At that time, she accompanied figures all related to the leadership management such as Choe Ryong-hae," Cheong said. "It is premature to decide whether she is in charge of the propaganda department."

Koh Yu-hwan, a professor of Dongguk University in Seoul, pointed out, considering that Kim Jong-un's leadership is still at a precarious stage, "Yo-jong's influence would be bigger than expected because she might be one of a few figures on whom Kim Jong-un can rely, given that the two share the same blood."

Kim Jong-un, meanwhile, affirmed his affection for animation. Touring the Korean April 26 Cartoon Film Studio, he said his visit is intended to "bring about a fresh turn in animation and, through it, put the filmmaking in full progress," the KCNA said.

He was quoted as adding that animation films "play an important role" in educating people and promoting their revolutionary spirit.

"The DPRK's (North Korea) animation startles the world people for its originality, appeal, high level of depiction and rapid production speed, and its animators advanced into the world animation field from long ago, fully displaying the country's developed cartoon production technology with their distinguished skills," Kim Jong-un was quoted by the KCNA as saying.

Yet, Seoul officials said that while North

Korean leader Kim Jong-un has managed to strengthen his power base since the execution of his uncle, Jang Song-thaek, he still faces some domestic and external risks in the long run.

"The power of Kim Jong-un has strengthened in the short term over the past one year since the execution of Jang," an official told reporters on background. After a show trial in December 2013, Pyongyang executed Jang on charges of treason and corruption, among others.

The Kim regime is still in the works of clearing the last vestiges of the Jang era, while continuing efforts to tighten Kim's grip through the frequent changes of top officials and idolization projects, said the Seoul official.

Kim is also confronted with external challenges in the absence of Jang, who was Pyongyang's point man on Beijing.

Political exchanges between the two sides have notably decreased since the loss of Jang and major bilateral economic cooperation projects have come to a halt, the official said. "It looks like North Korea has not found a replacement for Jang in terms of relations with China."

He also said Jang's wife, Kim Kyong-hui, seems to be alive despite some press reports that she was killed or committed suicide. If she was dead, the North's media would have published an obituary, he added.

Dire Need of Allies

Meanwhile, a British newspaper said recently that Kim Jong-un is scrounging for supporters within his own government as his younger sister was appointed to a senior role.

In an interview with the Independent newspaper on Nov. 27, Remco Breuker, professor of Korean studies at Leiden University, the

Netherlands, said Kim Jong-un's appointment of his younger sister to a senior role in the North Korean government suggests the leader is "in dire need of allies."

But Breuker said this does not necessarily mirror the relationship of his father and aunt. "Kim is in dire need of allies and if he is forced to appoint his sister, who is both younger than him and a woman (to this role), then he doesn't have enough people to rely on," Dr. Breuker told the Independent, adding, "He probably wants her as a close ally and confidante."

Breuker believes the appointment shows Kim Jong-un is looking for ways to get more power, suggesting he is in a weak position in his own government.

"You could make the opposite argument that Kim Jong-un is so strong he can put his sister into a position of power, but given what is going on, I don't think this is the case. Strong leaders aren't absent from the public for six weeks without any reason," he said.

North Korea's diplomatic policy and its current treatment of the European Union shows a more complete picture of Kim Jong-un's position in his own government at the moment, Breuker said.

"The fact that North Korea is willing to talk about the country as a nuclear state and to respond about human rights says more than these kinds of appointments," he said, adding that North Korea is "almost wooing the EU" over the human rights issues following the highly critical U.N. report earlier this year.

"North Korea is extremely worried about the human rights resolution being voted through to the U.N. General Assembly by 111 countries; this gives us a much stronger grip on the position of the North Korean government at the moment," he said.

More recently, Kim Yo-jong received a spotlight in South Korea when a newspaper reported that she would visit Seoul in March to attend an inter-Korean event. But the unification ministry denied the report.

Yo-jong's Possible Visit to Seoul?

The Korea Economic Daily reported on Dec. 4 that North Korea has offered to send Kim Yo-jong to an inter-Korean food festival. In the report, the head of the South Korean organizer was quoted as saying that the event was planned to take place in Seoul in March.

According to the report, the event is jointly organized by the North's Rakwon General Trading Corporation and the South's General Association of Inter-Korean Economic Cooperation Businessmen. The names of top North Korean Workers' Party officials, including Kim's younger sister, were provided in Pyongyang's letter of intent for the event, it said.

The unification ministry said that it has rejected the organizer's plan for the food festival because the application lacked the required documents.

An official said the letter of intent and an invitation from North Korea were submitted by the South Korean organizer and that the letter of intent included Kim Yo-jong's name as a participant. "But we need to confirm whether that name actually means she is the younger sister of Kim Jong-un," he said.

The ministry, however, said it is willing to review and approve her visit, if the trip is actually pushed forward through the proper channels. "It is the government's current stance that non-political, social and cultural exchanges will be allowed," the official said. (Yonhap)

Leader's Name Banned for North Koreans

The directive to ban the use of the leader's name by North Koreans was designed to maintain the hereditary succession of power in North Korea.

North Korea has ordered its people to change their name if they share it with their current leader Kim Jong-un since he was designated as the heir of Kim Jong-il about four years ago so that there is only one Kim Jong-un in the country.

According to an administrative directive of Kim Jong-il issued on Jan. 5, 2011, officials of the party, army and police were ordered to urge citizens with the name Kim Jong-un or Jong-un to voluntarily change their name and revise it in official documents such as birth certificates and school diplomas and on social security cards, sources well versed in North Korean affairs recently said.

The regime also ordered the relevant officials not to accept the applications of citizens registering the name of the leader for their sons or daughters and educate people not to make complaints or spread rumors regarding the measure.

The directive was designed to maintain the hereditary succession of power in North Korea, experts said. North Korea had banned

the use of the names of the previous leaders -- founder Kim Il-sung and his son, Kim Jong-il, to boost the personality cult and maintain the Kim dynasty.

The Kim dynasty from Kim Il-sung to Kim Jong-un has ruled North Korea for more than six decades with an iron fist and pervasive personality cult.

North Korea prohibited its residents from using the name of Kim Il-sung in the 1960s in the course of establishing his monolithic leadership.

Three-generation Ban

It also banned the use of Kim Jong-il and Jong-il as names in the 1970s when he was anointed as the successor to Kim Il-sung.

Therefore, North Koreans have been forced not to use the names of their leaders and support the power succession for three generations.

Meanwhile, North Korea prohibited the use of the names of South Korean presidents in the

past, a defector said.

Ahn Chan-il, director of the World North Korea Research Center in Seoul, said on a TV program that North Korea had prohibited the names of former South Korean presidents Syngman Rhee and Park Chung-hee, recalling that one of his friends named Chang Syngman changed his name to Chang Jong-il. Chang later had to change his name again after the name Jong-il was prohibited.

“If the Workers’ Party orders people to change their name or anything, the North Korean people should change it,” Ahn said.

Referring to speculation that the use of the name Ri Sol-ju, the wife of Kim Jong-un, was also banned in North Korea, Ahn said the measure may be confined to the Kim’s name.

“As far as I know, the name Ri Sol-ju is not subject to the ban because the measure is related to the dignity of the ‘supreme leader.’”

He said his younger brother also had to change his name from Ahn Jong-il to Ahn Chong-il, adding that names that bring to mind the Kim dynasty like “Taeyang” (sun) or “Jongilbong” (Kim Jong-il peak) were also subject to the ban.

Idolization of Kim Jong-un

Meanwhile, North Korea has been stepping up idolization of Kim Jong-un, especially since the shocking execution of Jang Song-thaek, the uncle of Kim who once was regarded as the number two man in the North, through “revolutionary episodes” of Kim in state media. Revolutionary episodes are stories about the greatness of the North’s royal family, including the three late and incumbent leaders and their family members, and are used as materials to “educate” North Korean

people.

“Inmin Gyoyuk,” a bimonthly magazine, introduced a revolutionary episode of Kim in its Feb. 15 issue last year. The episode titled “Great Common People” emphasized Kim’s “people-friendly” behavior.

In the episode, Kim happened to know that a guest room for executive members was under construction in Pyongyang and declared that he would not allow the establishment of such facilities for the privileged class in the future.

The Rodong Sinmun, the organ of the ruling Workers’ Party, also carried a revolutionary episode of Kim on April 23 in which it praised the leader as the “great genius of architecture,” introducing Kim’s lecture at the Pyongyang Architecture University in November 2013.

The paper said Kim showed extensive knowledge in architecture before professors and students of the university.

North Korea’s Central TV Broadcasting Station also showed photos of Kim when he was young while airing a performance of Moranbong Band for the participants in an air force pilots’ rally attended in April. The photos used as a backdrop of the performance showed a young Kim aged four or five in air force uniform, and a teenage Kim seating in a cockpit of an airplane grabbing the control stick.

It was the first time that North Korean state media released photos of Kim when he was young, an indication that Pyongyang will accelerate the idolization of the leader.

Some sources said North Korea included the “childhood of Marshal Kim Jong-un” in the curriculum for elementary school students in 2013. (Yonhap)

Mirage of Russian Sponsorship

It is very premature to expect, or worry, that Russia will be both able and willing to replace China as North Korea's chief sponsor.

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

In the last few months, the world media has been full of speculation about what appears to be a reconciliation between a couple that separated long ago: Russia and North Korea. In the years of the Cold War, these two countries indeed formed an economically close, while politically uneasy alliance. Now, it seems to be reborn.

Indeed, at first glance there is reason to believe these geopolitical partners will once again be united. The frequency and intensity of meetings between the two sides in their respective capitals is unprecedented since the 1980s. In recent months, Pyongyang has been visited by Rustam Minnikhanov, president of the Autonomous Republic of Tatarstan; Alexander Galushka, Russian minister for the Development of the Far East; and Yuri Trutnev, Russian vice-premier, with a number of high-level economic talks having been arranged as well.

In late November, Choe Ryong-hae, the special envoy of the young North Korean leader Kim Jong-un went to Moscow to meet President Vladimir. Sergey Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, stated that Russia is ready for a summit between Kim and Vladimir Putin.

Of course, it is symbolically important if Kim Jong-un chooses the Russian president as the first foreign leader he is going to meet. This choice demonstrates the great significance that is attached to Russia in Kim's foreign policy.

It also shows the extent of the freeze in Sino-North Korean relations and is seemingly a personal snub to Chinese President Xi Jinping - a snub that Xi will probably not be all that concerned by.

However, if we look at the situation more closely, it becomes clear that things are not as simple as they might appear on the surface. While relations between Moscow and Pyongyang are indeed improving, it is very premature to expect, or worry, that Russia will be both able and willing to replace China as North Korea's chief sponsor.

Economically Incompatible?

All the media fuss about high-level political contact often causes people to forget about economic statistics. Indeed, many journalists and analysts seem to have not bothered to check the current state of trade between Russia and North Korea. Had they found some time to look through the trade statistics, they would be surprised by what they would see. In essence, Russo-North Korean trade is tiny, almost non-existent, and has remained as such for the last two decades.

North Korea's trade with China in 2013 was US\$6.45 billion. Furthermore, for the last fifteen years or so, Sino-North Korean trade has been steadily growing, increasing from \$0.5 billion in 2000 to \$3.4 billion in 2010 and then to its current figure.

At the same time, in 2013, Russo-North Korean trade was a mere \$0.12 billion, almost sixty times less than North Korean trade with China. Remarkably, the volume of the Russian-North Korean trade has remained basically unchanged since the early 1990s, when the Russian government abruptly ended its subsidies of exchanges with North Korea.

Soviet era trade with North Korea was not really trade, it was unilateral aid, thinly disguised as economic exchange.

There is nothing surprising about this stagnation. The Russian and North Korean economies are not compatible. Russian companies have little interest in the few items North Koreans sell. Similarly, the North Korean side has no money to spend on Russian exports.

Indeed, the two major items that North Korea can offer the world are mineral resources and seafood. Both sell well in China,

but Russia, itself a major exporter of mineral resources, has no interest in North Korea's coal or iron ore. The same is applicable to seafood, since Russians - essentially a continental people in their diet - do not have a voracious appetite for seafood.

It is true that Russia may be interested in another item that the North Korean side is actively exporting now: cheap, but relatively skilled labor. However, demand for labor is quite limited, since in most cases, Russian employers would rather hire migrant workers from former Soviet Eurasia, where people speak Russian and are more used to Russian norms and Russian construction sites.

It is not incidental that Galushka recently said that two governments should aim at bringing the trade volume to the level of \$1 billion by 2020. He described this goal as "ambitious", and given the current state of trade and the objective obstacles, this is indeed the case. However, one should not forget that even achieving this "ambitious goal" will merely mean that by 2020 North Korea's trade with Russia will be equivalent to some 15% of its current trade with China.

Admittedly, North Korea can also make a significant commission by selling transit rights to Russian companies interested in using North Korean land for railways, pipelines and port facilities. However, such projects, including the oft-cited trans-Korean railway proposal, cannot be carried out through in an unstable political situation - and, indeed, the Korean Peninsula at present is hardly a paragon of stability.

It seems more or less clear what has brought about the current flurry of activity between the two sides.

North Korea has grown increasingly wary of China's steadily increasing economic influ-

ence, as China has become Pyongyang's sole significant trade partner. Such a situation is anathema to North Korean diplomatic instincts - Pyongyang has always wanted to have a number of rival great power sponsors, whose contradictions between could be used to Pyongyang's advantage. It is therefore no surprise that the North Korean government is looking for an alternative to its potentially dangerous dependence on China.

Not-so-realistic Expectations

Things might be further aggravated by the personal antipathy that seemingly exists between the leaders of the two countries. It appears that Xi Jinping and his government see North Korea as a troublesome, freeloading and highly unreliable partner. It also seems that Kim Jong-un has a measure of personal distrust and animosity toward China.

Therefore, it is only logical that Russia appears to be the natural choice for Kim Jong-un. Since the eruption of the Ukrainian crisis and the annexation of Crimea in early 2014, Russia has found itself on a collision course with the West, and for an outside observer, it might appear that it increasingly behaves like the former Soviet Union once did. This impression is further strengthened by a powerful nostalgia many, or even most, Russians feel about the supposed glories of the Soviet past. The generous use of Soviet symbols in the Russian media is yet more evidence for such a view. This, seen from Pyongyang, a resurgent challenge of Washington from Moscow, a challenge that includes bankrolling anti-American forces worldwide, including North Korea, appears plausible.

On the Russian side, there are equally

understandable political reasons for engaging Pyongyang. North Korea, with its personality cult gone mad and moribund economy, remains the object of ridicule for many, if not most, Russians. However, the recent frenzy of anti-EU and anti-U.S. sentiment means that North Korea is now bound to attract at least some sympathy as a brave David challenging the American Goliath.

While such feelings create a favorable environment for a geopolitical reunion, Russian leaders also have some realistic reasons to pay more attention to North Korea. In essence, Russia has good reason to follow the normal tit-for-tat logic which has driven the great powers' diplomacy since times immemorial: the enemy of my enemy is my friend. Hence, Russia is inclined to provide at least symbolic support to many regimes willing to challenge the United States.

Issues of human rights, often raised by the Western powers, are not very important for both the Russian government and the Russian public. The Russian political system nowadays is far less authoritarian than most Westerners might imagine, but the skepticism when it comes to human rights rhetoric is near universal. Additionally, the average Russians are completely opposed to humanitarian intervention and do not want their state to expend blood and treasure to promote lofty ideological schemes in remote lands (i.e. lands beyond the former borders of the Soviet Union).

Hence, there is some seeming confluence of geopolitical interests. Nonetheless, this confluence is rather shallow because there are some factors that should give us reason to be skeptical about Russia's willingness to become North Korea's co-sponsor (let alone its sole sponsor).

There is little doubt that Pyongyang wishes to

become the recipient of Moscow's largess once again. There are two reasons why the North Korean leaders are liable to be disappointed.

First, Russia is in rather bad shape economically. The decade-long boom, the period of fast growth which began in the early 2000s, seems to be over. The Ukrainian crisis and the annexation of Crimea have proved to be rather expensive; Western sanctions have made matters worse. Even of greater significance is the fast decline in global oil prices which is creating significant problems for the Russian economy. The rouble is sliding down with remarkable speed, having lost one third of its value in the last few months. Inflation has spiked, and GDP growth is stagnant.

In short, things in the Russian economy have taken a remarkably negative turn, and this is bad news indeed for the government.

What this means is that from now on Russia will be very careful before spending money.

Second, there is a very important difference between the Soviet Union and Russia of today. The former Soviet Union was a global superpower, remarkably willing to invest money in promoting its international standing. Russia today is a mere great power, so far remarkably reluctant to invest in foreign policy goals that do not immediately advance its economic interests.

In other words, for the present-day Russia, foreign policy is a way of making money, not buying soft power or strategic advantages. Admittedly, this does not apply to former Soviet republics where foreign policy can be subsidized generously. However, outside this part of the world, Russian foreign policies have been remarkably pragmatic and driven by economic imperatives. This is applicable to the Korean Peninsula, too. It is not incidental that the Russian officials and businessmen

while talking about projects to be undertaken with North Korea, are never tired of assuring the Russian public that these projects will be conducted on the reciprocity basis, with no unilateral aid or even risky investment being made by the Russian participants.

Some Hidden Problems

Therefore, North Korean hopes for generous Russian aid are largely unfounded. Moscow will indeed encourage cooperation between Russian companies and North Korean partners. However, due to reasons laid out above, such cooperation is liable to remain relatively limited in scale. It is telling that preliminary statistics for last year indicate that, in spite of all media buzz about the revival of Moscow-Pyongyang alliance, the trade between two countries shrank once again, go even lower from its current low level. This is yet another reminder of the harsh economic reality.

This does not mean, of course, that there will be no joint projects or developments between Russia and North Korea. The recent shipment of coal via the North Korean port city of Rason is a good example of a viable project - exactly because it does not require much political support and is economically viable. Some similar projects might also come about, and this will be very a good news for all parties concerned. Nonetheless, this is still very different from what North Korea ultimately wants. If Pyongyang leaders learn how to play by the normal rules of the international trade, then they will indeed make some money from trading and cooperating with Russia. However, if they are looking for disguised aid, then in a year or two, they are likely to be disappointed.

Prospects for Six-party Talks: Contention between Strategic Patience and Strategic Deterrence

■ By Jina Kim, *associate research fellow at Korea Institute for Defense Analyses in Seoul*

North Korea has renewed its positioning by establishing its identity as a nuclear weapons state. Ever since North Korea revised its social constitution at a parliamentary session on April 13, 2012, and passed a decree on “Further Consolidation of the Self-defense Nuclear Power Status” at the Supreme People’s Assembly on April 1, 2013, it has been pursuing its stated goal. Since North Korea made a statement that it would pursue “practical preparation for quantitatively and qualitatively reinforcing nuclear deterrence and counterstrike capabilities,” it has been developing nuclear weapons capability to ensure minimum deterrence -- deterring a nuclear adversary by making the cost of a first strike unacceptably high. North Korea refuses to return to the six-party talks unless preconditions are off, presumably knowing that such a demand is unacceptable to the other parties concerned.

What worries us is that North Korea seems to be buying time to develop retaliatory strike capabilities, which is gradually gaining attention in Washington. International observers are concerned about North Korea accomplishing a “nuclear-triad” of its own style because North Korea is developing mobile ballistic missiles, unmanned delivery vehicles and sea-based ballistic missiles capability.

In this regard, two recent developments require due attention. North Korea getting close to mastering technology to load a nuclear warhead on a Rodong missile is no longer an issue secretly discussed in academia or policy circles.

North Korea’s recent missile tests, in which Pyongyang fired Rodong missiles at a higher than usual launch angle in order to shorten their maximum range, shows increasing flexibility in North Korea’s use of ballistic missile capabilities. The discovery of a test pad in the eastern coastal city of Sinpo in North Korea and a land-based test of an ejection launcher, a sign that North

Korea is moving ahead with plans for underwater missile strike capabilities for a future nuclear-tipped missile, add to the ever-increasing anxiety.

Although North Korea remains years away from being able to launch ballistic missiles from a submarine, the U.S. and South Korea remain vigilant on the trajectory of North Korean SLBM (submarine-launched ballistic missile) capabilities.

If North Korea achieves a secure second-strike capability, the world may face two options: engaging in a nuclear-armed conflict and political reconciliation with a nuclear-armed North Korea. Developing tactical nuclear warheads and diversifying delivery systems will eventually change the calculus of countries within the range of a nuclear-tipped missile. Then, it becomes more likely that the countries concerned prefer keeping the status-quo rather than risking direct confrontation. The urgency of halting North Korea's quest for strategic deterrence is growing. However, there is no diplomatic process in place that offers any prospect of ending North Korea's nuclear weapons program.

Renewed Tradeoff

With the enhancement of its nuclear strike capability, North Korea may expect more in return from future nuclear negotiations. North Korea emphatically indicated its intention to miniaturize and diversify nuclear warheads, develop delivery systems, and establish a command-and-control system through its state-run media on Feb. 12, 2013. The North's daily Rodong Sinmun printed on April 20, 2013 said that North Korea intends to have talks for arms reduction, not for denuclearization.

A statement by North Korea's National Defense Commission on June 21, 2013 reconfirmed its demand to alleviate military tension, transform the armistice into a peace treaty, and negotiate arms reduction. North Korea also said that its nuclear capability is "not for bargaining for political and economic purposes" on May 7, 2013. This implies that abandoning the nuclear program in exchange of economic aid may not be the deal that North Korea desires, which adds complexity to the tradeoff between North Korea and the rest of the six-party states.

North Korea has rhetorically indicated its intention to establish its status as an equal counterpart of nuclear negotiations with the U.S., but now it is employing coercive diplomacy to demonstrate that it is getting near to that goal. This has significant policy implications for South Korea: North Korea would refuse the idea of having denuclearization on the table alone. Rather, it would demand the U.S. put deterrence on the agenda if another round of nuclear talks begins. One should note that this is not a new demand. What North Korea stressed from Kim Il-sung's era was denuclearization of the "Korean Peninsula," not denuclearization of the North, and removal of all forms of nuclear threats to the regime.

Whether North Korea returns to the six-party talks depends on its calculus of the subjective expected utility of the six-party talks. The expected value of the six-party talks varies among participating states because not only the probability of the intended outcome from nuclear talks, but also the costs associated with not having the intended outcome, has to be taken into account.

Because North Korea's spending on its nuclear and missile programs is increasing,

North Korea is likely to expect more in return for denuclearization dialogue and less likely to abandon its nuclear weapons program. If North Korea intends to deal with Washington from a position of strength, it needs to fulfill some requirements to close the gap between the stated goal of being a nuclear weapons state and the reality.

It is possible that North Korea intends to conduct another nuclear test to ensure its capability to make a nuclear arsenal light and small enough to be deployable on ballistic missiles. To achieve retaliatory strike capabilities, North Korea still needs to increase fissile material stockpiles, diversify delivery systems, and develop fail-proof warheads.

Prospect of Resuming Talks

The odds of resuming the six-party talks are slim. First, North Korea is losing opportunities to make a U-turn in a face-saving way. It seems highly unlikely that the U.S. would modify its principled approach to compel North Korea to change course and offer another package of inducement. Second, North Korea's economic situation is in relatively good shape, and North Korea may feel less urgency to seek a dramatic breakthrough.

In other words, the urgency of resuming talks may not be there on the North Korean side. Third, North Korea's anxiety about preserving its regime is acute. Despite its charm-offensive toward the Middle East, Africa and Europe and its unusual diplomatic maneuvers before and during the U.N. General Assembly Third Committee session, North Korea failed to interrupt efforts to pass resolutions regarding North Korea's responsibility to protect its citizens and its human rights situation at the

U.N. Security Council. Reflecting its hypersensitiveness over its widely condemned human rights record, North Korea warned that it had no option but to consider another nuclear test.

Pyongyang may see that the cost of not returning to nuclear talks is low considering Beijing's reluctance to push its ally, Washington's preoccupations in the Middle East, Russia's interest in improving economic ties with North Korea, and Japan's preference to continue bilateral dialogue on the abductee issue. Stability, not denuclearization, remains China's overriding goal with regard to North Korea. Hence, the urgency of stopping North Korea's pursuit of greater nuclear capabilities is felt by China quite differently than others.

China had indeed engaged in dialogue to enhance coordination with the U.S. and South Korea to prevent a fourth nuclear test when North Korea announced it would conduct a new form of nuclear test in March 2014. South Korean President Park Geun-hye had a phone conversation with her Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping, requesting help to persuade North Korea not to carry out a fourth nuclear test, and Xi stressed that China and South Korea have the same position on opposing a nuclear North Korea on April 23.

The two countries confirmed their desire to reinforce bilateral cooperation to oppose North Korea's nuclear program at ministerial meetings on May 26 and Aug. 8 as well as at the summit talks on July 3. China agreed to try to create the conditions for the resumption of six-party talks after a two-day summit meeting between Park and Xi. However, from South Korea's point of view, it means "reconsidering" conditions already set out for resuming talks, although the South Korea-China joint

statement did not explicitly mention lowering the bar for a return to the talks. It seems likely that Beijing will continue to mete out rewards and punishment accordingly, which, nonetheless, is not at all a major policy shift.

South Korea is taking the lead in discussing conditions for resuming six-party talks in the form of bilateral and trilateral meetings at various ministerial and vice-ministerial talks as well as meetings of envoys to the six-party talks.

It succeeded in putting the North Korean nuclear issue on the global security agenda, resulting in the adoption of a very strongly-worded joint communique at the MIKTA (Mexico, Indonesia, Korea, Turkey and Australia) Foreign Ministers' meeting in April, a G7 Leader's communique condemning North Korea's continued nuclear and ballistic missile programs in June, and a resolution on North Korea at the annual member state conference of the 162-nation IAEA in September.

Pursuing multilateral middle power diplomacy, South Korea strengthened its role in leading the discussion on the North Korean nuclear issue at the Nuclear Security Summit in March, ASEAN Summit Meeting in May, the ASEAN Regional Forum in June, ASEM (Asia-Europe Meeting) Summit in October and many other events. However, one cannot deny that skepticism about restarting the six party-talks is in order.

Assessment of Alternatives

Second-tier nuclear proliferators who have attempted to develop nuclear weapons have some commonalities: they are mostly non-liberal, if not dictatorial, regimes, have a high

threat perception due to historical rivalry, and possess available material resources and manpower. One can insist on pursuing an alternative path such as changing the nature of the regime, eliminating the perceived threat and constraining procurement opportunities.

In the case of North Korea, however, pursuing regime change is currently infeasible: China would not agree to this idea especially when it has keen interests in ensuring its sphere of influence in the region. It is hard to reduce the level of threat arising from the security dilemma on the Korean Peninsula: North Korea's nuclear weapons capability legitimizes strengthening military cooperation between the U.S. and South Korea.

Even concluding a peace treaty might not reduce North Korea's fear: Pyongyang has been critical about the fragile international legal system and hence may not believe that a peace treaty is a cure-all. Sanctions to curb the import of strategic goods do not work effectively because the U.N. mechanism is not universally implemented: U.N. Security Council Resolutions carry insufficient enforcement power, and U.N. member states have asymmetric motivation and weak domestic control mechanisms, creating lots of loopholes for North Korea to utilize.

It is important to understand the unique nature of the North Korean nuclear issue, but this does not mean that any diplomatic effort is meaningless. The utility of the six-party talks has been a long debated issue, and there are consistent parallax views among the six parties that are hard to reconcile. However, it also should be noted that talks in the form of three-party or four-party dialogue took place within the frame of the six-party talks which still may have value as a multilateral mechanism.

Kim Jong-un's Hereditary Power Succession and North's Internal, External Policies during 2009-14

I. Introduction

Occasionally during its history, North Korea has seen a critical juncture, which refers to a critical point in time, especially when it is a very important time in a process or series of events because of a concurrence then of significant changes in domestic, foreign policies. Usually, such a critical juncture has been mentioned rarely in North Korean official documents, or statements. In other words, whether or not there in the North has existed any critical juncture to be analyzed by this essay was determined by outside watchers based on their empirical observations. Through their monitoring, we can stand to speculate when the North Korean leadership has made a decision on a significant policy change at a particular point in time and implemented it sector by sector and step by step, although the North has not clarified the process of making such a decision.

The years of 2009 through 2012 could be considered as recent critical junctures in the North. It is so because a significant process began in 2009 and ended in 2012, the process of transferring power and leadership from the late North Korean leader Kim Jong-il to his youngest and third son Kim Jong-un, accompanied by significant changes in North Korean policies, internal and external.

First of all, the North conducted its second nuclear test in 2009, the year when it started the process of junior Kim's hereditary succession to power and a new U.S. Administration led by President Barack Obama was inaugurated. In 2012, the Kim Jong-un regime was inaugurated and Park Geun-hye, another conservative, was elected South Korean president to serve for five years from Feb. 25, 2013. The North Korean policies regarding nuclear weapons and South Korea have turned tougher since 2009, while the North's second nuclear test affected the U.S. and South Korean policies toward the North in a

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way to make them also difficult.

Second, in 2009 there came a reshuffle in the North Korean power hierarchy in preparation of another hereditary leadership transfer, with the emergence of an alliance of guardians for the young Kim comprising Jang Song-thaek, Kim Kyong-hui, Choe Ryong-hae and Ri Yong-ho. Since 2012, this alliance has been under attack while senior officials at the most powerful Organizational Guidance Department under the umbrella of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea (simply as Party below), the North Korean version of the Communist Party, have become influential.

Third, the North intensified its policies against the market and any social change in 2009. In 2012, however, the North introduced a market-friendly policy, while maintaining tougher social control. This essay will mention in detail changes in the North's domestic and foreign policies made in 2009 and 2012 and their background below.

II. The Background to North's Aggressive Posture, Internal and External, since 2009

Kim Jong-il, who gave up his normal activities in August 2008 when he suffered a stroke, returned to his normal ruling functions two months later. And in January the next year, there came in the North the official declaration that Kim Jong-un will be designated as successor to the senior Kim. In other words, the junior Kim was allowed officially to build his own power base as heir-apparent. At the same time, the North Korean leadership strengthened its hard-line, aggressive position in both domestic and foreign policies -- probably in

late 2008 or early 2009.

1. Worsening Environments for Survival of the North Korean Regime

Until the end of 2007, the North has maintained amicable relations strategically with the international community while improving ties with South Korea and the U.S., based on favorable conditions for nuclear negotiations with them. Domestically, it was enjoying socio-political stabilization, with unity of its citizens behind Kim Jong-il's leadership. But this situation began to turn different sometime in 2008.

This development, undesirable for the North, was ascribable to three factors. The first of them is the appearance of a conservative government in South Korea after a 10-year ruling by two progressive ones. The North resisted the conservative North Korea policies of the new South Korean government and took a hard-line posture toward it. The second one is the collapse in 2008 of the frame for six-way talks aimed at denuclearizing the North, which involve the two Koreas, the U.S., Japan, Russia and China. The third is the unfavorable health conditions of Kim Jong-il, who suffered a stroke that year.

In a move to counter these unfavorable circumstances, the North Korean regime came out with much tougher internal, external policies starting early in 2009. Two topics will be dealt with below. The first one will regard matters regarding the triple crisis. The second one will concern the way in how the crisis is linked with the North's foreign policies, in particular, the aggressive policies toward the South and those on its nuclear weapons development program.

2. A Triple Crisis

1) A Crisis Regarding North's Strategy for Survival

Since 2005, North Korea has pushed ahead with an ambitious strategy for its survival, aimed at attaining five objectives. Until 2007, there were largely no troubles found in the strategy. But in October the next year, there emerged a situation where bleak was the prospects for attaining the strategic goals. In other words, there appeared a situation where North's survival strategy could break down. Thereafter, the North has attempted to make a breakthrough in this impasse, with aggressive policies and measures.

Let us review the five objectives the North Korean regime wanted to attain. First, it wanted to continually possess nuclear weapons and behave as an actual nuclear state under tacit approval of the international community. Second, as a nuclear power, it wanted to conclude a peace treaty with the U.S. and improve relations with Washington. Third, it wanted to promote amicable inter-Korean relations, with the South acting simply as an economic supporter to the North under the South's approval of the North as a nuclear state, excluding the nuclear issue from the agenda in inter-Korean talks. Fourth, with its minimum efforts for reforms aimed at increasing its productivity, it wanted to be absorbed in various business programs and secure political funds necessary for its survival. Fifth, it wanted to attain political stabilization in the country by means of cementing its leader's dictatorship, increasing its capability for social control, boosting rewards for the classes loyal to its leadership, intensifying various political restrictions and

promoting a balance between various factors.

At least until the end of 2007, it appeared that North could attain the policy objectives, with the two agreements made on Jan. 13 and Oct. 3 that year, respectively, in the six-way talks, plus through the second inter-Korean summit held in Pyongyang during Oct. 2-4. The strategies employed by the North then can be summed up as follows.

First, the enriched uranium and nuclear weapons on hand should be excluded from the agenda of the six-way talks. Second, South Korea should behave simply as a political, economic and diplomatic supporter of the North. Third, the North rejects reforms and an opening-up and maintains the current system. As long as the North pursues this strategy, it will be defined as a country that wants to be approved officially or tacitly as a nuclear state, maintain its current closed socio-political and economic system and survive depending on external assistance, in particular, economic aid from South Korea. The North's formation of and expectations for this strategy were affected by the policy behavior of the two progressive governments in the South, which believed that North's nuclear weapons development program was a mere negotiation chip and that the international community can denuclearize the North and lead it to reforms and an opening-up if it provides the North with security guarantee and economic rewards.

Seoul's belief was not much different from the prevalent international views of that time. South Korea then was satisfied with the nuclear negotiations in the six-way talks, although it thought it might take time to denuclearize the North. In other words, the South was in a position to tacitly approve the North's temporary possession of nuclear weapons.

Under this stance, the South pushed ahead with the provision of more economic assistance to the North and the establishment of a peace regime on the Korean peninsula through the six-way talks. This South Korean posture affected the U.S. policy toward the North, helping the six-way talks fix its agenda and reach agreements. Against a backdrop of this optimistic international atmosphere, there came the North Korean declaration in 2007 that the North would focus its attention on economic issues and swing open its gate as a “kangsong taeguk,” a great country that is strong ideologically and militarily and prosperous economically, by 2012.

But the situation changed at the turn of 2008, with the inauguration of a new conservative government in the South, for the first time in a decade. The new Seoul government took a more fundamental position on the question of the North’s denuclearization, assistance to the North and a peace treaty on the Korean peninsula while developing closer cooperation with the U.S. The six-party talks became dysfunctional in December 2008 when the North was reluctant to supplement the account of its nuclear activities, which was viewed by the U.S. as “incomplete,” and allow the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to verify its declaration on nuclear activities. Until then, the North had pushed ahead with the improvement of its relations with the South, the U.S. and other nations concerned with its nuclear activities while freezing its production of plutonium in accordance with the Agreed Framework, a nuclear agreement concluded between the North and the U.S. in October 1994. The success of the North’s attempts was meant for the improvement of its relations with the South, the U.S. and Japan

under the condition that its enrichment of uranium had been approved of by the international community tacitly for a long time. The six-way talks then have made progress in reaching an agreement to freeze the North’s production of plutonium and taking measures to that effect. But at stake was the verification issue raised by Washington and Seoul. In December 2008, the multilateral talks broke down and North’s relations with the South and the U.S. began to worsen.

The North employed hardball tactics in a move to make a breakthrough in that impasse. The North conducted its second nuclear test in May 2009, although the Obama Administration expressed its willingness to engage in and have talks with the North soon after its inauguration in January that year. On the occasion of its second nuclear test, the North made official its position to normalize its relations with the South and the U.S. in the capacity of a nuclear state. In other words, the North began to pursue the policy for demonstrating its capability to enrich uranium and produce nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, discarding the policy for maintaining an ambiguous attitude about its nuclear weapons development program.

The North’s behavior was meant for institutionalizing its confrontation with the South and the U.S. and a change in the situation facing the North in relation with environments for its survival. Until then the North could have managed its environments favorably while getting economic assistance en masse from the South against a backdrop of its frozen nuclear facilities. But the breakdown of the six-way talks deteriorated Pyongyang’s relations with Seoul and Washington, turning that environment for its survival hostile. The crisis in the

North's foreign relations did not remain simply as diplomatic and security problems but led to domestic economic problems. It was so because its troublesome foreign relations resulted in a sharp decrease in foreign assistance to the country, which had served as a mainstay of the North Korean economy.

2) A Crisis Regarding Hereditary Leadership Succession

The nature of the aforementioned problems facing the North is separate from that of potential political unrest touched off probably by another hereditary leadership succession. Viewing the situation from the viewpoint of North Korean leader Kim Jong-il, the succession issue came to the fore under unfortunate circumstances facing him. His health conditions turned troublesome during the latter half of 2008 while the North's internal, external situation was getting tense. Usually in authoritative regimes, the replacement of their leaders can bring about a confusing state in their power hierarchies and a risky situation for the regimes because the leadership change is usually followed by a reshuffle in the key elite group. And it is not easy for a new leader to establish his or her authority influential enough for ruling. For this reason, the North was faced with potential instability caused by the succession issue, along with a crisis regarding the strategy for its survival.

As Kim Jong-il turned 60 in the early 2000s, the question of power succession emerged then already as an important political issue among the North Korean elite. The way in how to transfer power successfully was an important issue not only for the North Korean leader but for the North Korean elite because

it would affect their roles in the North Korean regime in the future. The political group, which has been the most influential next only to Kim since he introduced military-first politics in the mid-1990s, was the army officially called the Korean People's Army. The ever growing influence of the army under the military-first politics has meant double implications for Kim. On the one hand, Kim increased army's influence and utilized it for maintaining his power. On the other, he worried about an excessive increase in the army's influence over his own. Under this situation, the army has attempted to take initiative in the course of power succession and further increase its influence. For Kim, the power transfer to one of his sons was meant for holding the army's influence in check and restructuring the ruling group.

Kim's worries in that direction were exposed in the first half of the first 10 years in the 21st century when the question of hereditary power succession came to the fore. Then under the initiative of the army, there emerged a coalition for a succession project, a coalition composed of Ko Yong-hui, Kim's third wife and Kim Jong-un's mother; a group of senior army officers; and some senior officials of the aforementioned department in the Party Central Committee, including Ri Je-gang and Ri Yong-chol. But Kim forced them to shelve the project probably because of the following reasons. First, he might have been worried about a rapid decrease in his power because of the project. He might have been concerned about the army's leading role in the project. In this situation, the successor can turn into a puppet of the powerful senior army officers.

In the middle of the first 10 years of the 21st century, Kim Jong-il began to hold in

check the alliance of senior officials from the army and the department of the Party Central Committee that was making an attempt to achieve power succession in their favor. Under Kim's rule, Jang Song-thaek had played that role against them starting 2005, or 2006, and his wife Kim Kyong-hui joined him in 2008. To that effect, Kim appointed Jang chief of the Administration Department of the Party Central Committee, which is responsible for, among other things, the daily operational management of the Ministry of State Security, the Ministry of People's (Public) Security, the Military Security Command, the Supreme (Central) Court and the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office. Under Kim's instructions, Jang had curtailed the army's rights for foreign trade. In the course of this development, Kim tacitly allowed Jang to expand his own concessions.

With Kim Jong-un's status established officially as successor-designate, there in North Korea started a keen competition between power groups for taking the initiative in the course of his succession to leadership. At the same time, North Korean leader Kim Jong-il began to restructure the North's power hierarchy in a way to replace the top brass in the army with a new elite group as his close aides. In 2009 the top brass, who have played a leading role in the North Korean regime under the military-first politics, began to be replaced with other senior officers step by step for a key role in the course of another hereditary power transfer. Under Kim's support, Jang Song-thaek could win in struggles for more exclusive economic rights and privileges. The North Korean leader supported the group led by Kim Kyong-hui and Jang Song-thaek, not the military group, in a way to help them

advance in the course of establishing a solid power base for the junior Kim.

The process of restructuring the ruling coalition for hereditary power transfer was made when rising ever were potential tensions and deutes among the elements in the elite group. In a move to help the successor-designate establish a firm power base, the senior Kim restructured the elite group in 2009 and the next year, the group comprising senior, middle-grade and junior officials. The third Conference of Party Representatives held on Sept. 28, 2010 to establish junior Kim's status as heir-apparent was an occasion for the North to temporarily entrust the finishing touches to the ruling elite group. While restructuring its power hierarchy, North Korea demonstrated its military offensive attack capabilities to the world only to bring about tensions between it and the international community. It conducted its second nuclear test in May 2009, followed by the exposure of its uranium-enrichment facilities to a group of American scholars visiting the country in October that year. It also bombed a South Korean warship in the Yellow Sea in March 2010, followed by its shelling of the South Korean islet of Yeonpyeong in the same sea in November that year.

The North probably had three objectives to attain through these belligerent measures. First, they were aimed at declaring the unswerving status of the junior Kim, who designed the measures, as heir-apparent. Second, they were aimed at promoting loyalty of its citizens to the leader and the successor-designate through demonstrating the hard-line posture. Third, they were aimed at intensifying domestic discipline through tense domestic conditions touched off by the North's worsened relations with the international community.

3) A Crisis in Relations between the Political Regime and Society

The years of 2009 and 2010 can be described as the points in time when remarkably high were tensions in relations between the North Korean political regime and society. Tensions there began to increase gradually in 2005 when the North started taking measures against the market.

At the turn of the 2009, when the power transfer process began, the North intensified the anti-market campaign. Unfortunately for the North, the Jasmine Revolution, the civil uprising in Tunisia that protested against corruption, poverty and political repression, took place in December 2010, and its success inspired a wave of similar protests throughout the Middle East and North Africa the next year, at a time when the North was trapped in a terrible situation touched off by the unsuccessful redenomination of its bank notes taken on Nov. 30, 2009. Reflecting the worries of North Korean leadership about the popular dissident movement in North Africa, a police task force was then organized in the North for the first time.

North Korea began to retreat from its policies for reforms and an opening-up in 2005. It instead launched an intensive campaign against non-socialist activities. The drive against non-socialist phenomena was in full swing when the North conducted the redenomination of its currency. This back-peddling policy behavior not only damaged the North Korean economy but also triggered serious disputes between the authorities concerned and retailers who earn their living through market activities. In particular, the redenomination of the North Korean bank notes has

dealt a critical blow on the retailers and other general North Korean citizens who usually keep their properties in cash. The North Korean economy fell into a serious slump as the currency redenomination destroyed a sub-structure of the market as well as weakened the purchasing power of many North Korean citizens in 2010. The money-related policy awakened most North Korean citizens to the fact that the origin of the painful situation facing them was the policy of their central government.

In a move to cope with social unrest caused by the anti-market measures, including the redenomination of the North Korean bank notes and its worsening relations with the South, the North strengthened remarkably the functions of the Ministry of State Security and the Ministry of People's Security for more intensive social control. Soon after the third Conference of Party Representatives in 2010, the North launched an intensive campaign against non-socialist activities in the areas bordering China under a leading role played by successor-designate Kim Jong-un. The key targets were North Korean citizens crossing the border illegally to escape to China, narcotics and the products of foreign countries. The North's shelling of the South Korean islet of Yeonpyeong came as that campaign was in full swing.

III. A Changing North Korea under Kim Jung-un's Rule since 2012

Kim Jong-il, who had ruled North Korea virtually since 1980 as heir-apparent and formally since the death of his father Kim Il-sung

in July 1994, died on Dec. 17, 2011. In less than four months, North Korea launched a new regime led by successor-designate Kim Jong-un, naming him first secretary of the Party Central Committee in the fourth Conference of Party Representatives on April 11, 2012 and first chairman of the National Defense Commission (NDC) in a session of the Supreme People's Assembly (SPA), the North's rubber-stamp parliament, held two days later. Upon its inauguration, the Kim Jong-un regime made a change in the North's policies regarding nuclear and South Korea, restructured its ruling group and entered new a relationship with North's society, steering their policies in a new direction.

Above all, the North Korean policies regarding nuclear and South Korea made a more aggressive turn. Under policies in that direction, the North conducted its third nuclear test in February 2013 and demonstrated its missile-related capacity, even breaking an agreement reached a year earlier with the U.S. to suspend any nuclear testing, uranium enrichment and long-range missile launches. And the North has since resisted international sanctions imposed on the North for its belligerent behavior.

Second, upon the completion of his succession to power, Kim Jong-un scuttled the alliance of Jang Song-thaek, Kim Kyong-hui, Ri Yong-ho and Choe Ryong-hae, which was influential in the course of power succession in a move to replace it with a new elite coalition as aforementioned. The core members of the new coalition were senior officials of the Organization-Guidance Department of the Party Central Committee, who had played a leading role in an attempt to make Kim Jong-un successor-designate early in the first 10

years of the 21st century, hand in hand with Ko Yong-hui, young Kim's birth mother.

Third, the new North Korean leadership began to signal a market-friendly policy aimed at utilizing the market. Under the guidelines for the June 28, 2012 reform-oriented measures aimed at improving the economic management on farms and in an array of industrial sectors, the North began to allow more market activities. But the North Korean leadership intensified social control starting the latter half of 2013 and took a more intensive turn later with the purging of Jang Song-thaek in December that year.

1. Policies Regarding Nuclear and South Korea

1) Nuclear Policy

On Feb. 29, 2012, just slightly more than two months after the death of his father Kim Jong-il and well before the official inauguration of his leadership, Kim Jong-un stoked a nuclear deal with the U.S., the negotiations the two countries began while the senior Kim was alive. But the new North Korean leadership discarded the agreement in less than two months, on April 13, when the North test-fired a long-range rocket while calling it an "artificial satellite named Kwangmyongsong-3." When the rocket launch ended in a failure, the North test-fired another ballistic missile named "Unha-3" in December that year -- successfully. The missile launches were followed by the North's third nuclear test in February the next year.

Thereafter, the North has shown a significant change in its nuclear policy. Since its third nuclear test in February 2013, the North

has trumpeted its nuclear capabilities, describing its nuclear weapons as ones made “smaller and lighter,” and its nuclear deterrence as that “in various forms.” At the same time, it has trumpeted its efforts to develop “various” short, mid and long-range missiles that can carry its “various” nuclear weapons. In a statement of its Foreign Ministry on March 7, 2013, which mentioned its “claim on the right to launch a preemptive nuclear strike,” the North began to threaten to deploy nuclear weapons in a war. In a New Year Message delivered by Kim Jong-un in 2014, and in an “important proposal” made by the NDC, the North mentioned a “deadly nuclear catastrophe” and “nuclear disaster,” respectively, while threatening Seoul and Washington. And the NDC statement on March 14 this year declared that the target of North’s “nuclear strike in various forms” is the U.S.

2) Policy toward South Korea

Upon its inauguration, the Kim Jong-un regime has expanded its capability of attacks on South Korea and stepped up the offensive nature of military strategies against the South. At the turn of 2012, it restructured the Missile Guidance Bureau to the Strategic Rocket Forces in a way to boost the North’s missile capabilities. In a military parade made in April 2012, it began to demonstrate its military capabilities, exposing a KN-8, a road-mobile intercontinental ballistic missile under the names of Rodong-C and Hwasong-13. Under special instructions of Kim Jong-un, the North established the Strategic Cyber Command in August that year to train thousands of talented agents for cyber warfare. And a month later, it was confirmed that the North had established a

southwestern frontline army command to counter a South Korean military command for its northeastern islands. Declaring 2015 as “the year of completing unification,” the North has prepared for a full-scale war against the South, conducting tactical drills in all branches of its army and building up its war potential. To that effect, it changed completely the formula of tactics and training in all army units.

Even after conducting its third nuclear test, the North further intensified its tough, offensive posture toward the South while pressing it. Under the pretext of international sanctions against it and the annual joint South Korea-U.S. military drill, the North has fueled mounting tensions in inter-Korean relations during March-May 2013. The North then also has threatened to nullify the Armistice Agreement under which the three-year Korean War came to halt in July 1953 and to discard the inter-Korean agreement concluded in 1992 not to invade each other, while ordering its army to prepare for the highest level of combat readiness and trumpeting its right for preemptive strikes. The North has test-fired 111 missiles in 19 occasions during the first eight months plus a few days of this year.

3) The Background of North’s Tougher Nuclear and South Korea Policies

The North Korean policies regarding nuclearization and South Korea, which turned more aggressive since 2009, are ascribable to a triple crisis facing the North Korean regime. That North’s crises concerned the North’s relations with foreign countries and the international community, another hereditary power succession and relations between its political regime and its people.

Among the factors related with the North's external policies, which have remained unchanged since 2009, is the serious disharmony between the conditions for the survival of the North Korean regime and its environment. On the one hand, the North is pushing ahead aggressively with the expansion of its nuclear capabilities, braving high risk. On the other, the international community is countering the North's nuclear development program with an array of intensive sanctions against the North, led by the U.S. and South Korea. As the North has repeated its nuclear testing, the international community has increased the intensity of its sanctions against the North.

North Korea has repeatedly pursued a policy aimed at weighing whether or not the South and the U.S. accept its strategic appeasement measures taken after achieving its strategic objectives through preemptive provocations. The North conducted its second nuclear test soon after the inauguration on Jan. 20, 2009 of the Obama Administration, which was asserting talks and engagement with the North, followed in July by the signal of its appeasement policy toward the South and the U.S. The North reached an agreement with the U.S. on Feb. 29, 2010 after its bombing of a South Korean warship in March that year, its shelling of the South Korean islet of Yeonpyeong in November and its tour of uranium enrichment facilities to U.S. scholars in the same month. The North test-fired a long-range missile in December 2012 and conducted its third nuclear test in February 2013, despite the moderate postures held by candidates of both the ruling and opposition parties during the South's presidential election in December 2012. Moreover, the North closed the Kaesong industrial park in April 2013. And then its

stance toward the South turned mild, even accepting the South's proposal in February 2014 for arranging a round of meetings of families living separately in the two Koreas. The North test-fired missiles en masse in March, June and July 2014 while threatening to conduct its fourth nuclear test. But in September that year, it participated in the Incheon Asian Games undoubtedly in an effort to foster an atmosphere conducive to improving inter-Korean relations.

4) The North's Raising of Nuclear Capability Aimed at Justifying Its Domestic Politics

As one of the North's characteristics in the Kim Jong-un era, the North Korean regime is actively utilizing an increase in its nuclear capabilities for promoting the legitimacy of its domestic politics. The North even scrapped its agreement with the U.S. reached on Feb. 29, 2012 and test-fired a long-range rocket on April 13 that year only to mark the centennial birthday anniversary for its founding leader Kim Il-sung, Kim Jong-un's grandfather, and celebrate the "opening of its gate as a kang-song taeguk." In the preamble of the North Korean constitution revised in April 2012, North Korea clarified itself as a nuclear state, declaring that its late leader has turned the country into a nuclear power and an invincible military power. The North held an Army-People mass rally in Pyongyang on Dec. 14, 2012 to celebrate its successful launch of a long-range rocket two days earlier and another public rally of that kind on Feb. 14, 2013 with the participation of 150,000 servicemen and Pyongyang citizens to commemorate its third nuclear test conducted two days earlier. And a plenary session of the Party Central

Committee held on March 31 that year adopted “a new strategic line on carrying out economic construction and building nuclear armed forces simultaneously under the prevailing situation and to meet the legitimate requirements of the developing revolution.” Moreover, an SPA session held the next day adopted a decree: “About Further Solidifying the Status as a Self-Defensive Nuclear State.”

2. The Continued Restructuring of the Ruling Coalition

The process in North Korea of initiating hereditary power succession in 2009 was meant for the process of intensifying competition of various rival power groups for taking initiative. In the course of these developments, Jang Song-thaek came to the fore under Kim Jong-il’s support, while a power group of the army and another one of the Organization-Guidance Department of the Party Central Committee were kept in check.

But the situation soon changed with the death of Kim Jong-il. In appearance, the coalition led by Kim Kyong-hui and Jang Song-thaek seemed to maintain their initiative. But Kim’s death was meant actually for the complete disappearance of power sources for them, followed by the domination of the army-party coalition, probably with Kim Jong-un joining them. To make matters worse for Jang Song-thaek, his wife Kim Kyong-hui was trapped in health problems in 2012 and the next year. Under these circumstances, Jang turned into the “leader of a factional group” and a “traitor to the nation” who should be sentenced to death by a special military tribunal of the Ministry of State Security held on Dec. 12, 2013.

Among the senior officials who have reportedly played a leading role in purging Jang is Jo Yon-jun, first vice director of the Organization-Guidance Department of the Party Central Committee, who had maintained close relations with Ri Je-gang, also first deputy chief of the department, who had reportedly campaigned earlier for Kim Jong-un’s successorship. Choe Ryong-hae, who had replaced Ri Yong-ho as chief of the General Political Bureau of the army, had to hand over the powerful army office to Hwang Pyong-so, also first vice director of the department in April 2014.

3. The Easing and Intensification of a Crisis in Relations between the Political Regime and Society

The relationship in the North between the political regime and its Korean people, which began to worsen remarkably right after the currency redenomination in November 2009, was most tense in 2000 and the following year. But it was recovered to normalcy to a certain extent thanks to improvements in the state of the North Korean economy. Unusually, rice prices and foreign currency exchange rates have shown a downward movement throughout 2013. On June 28, 2012 the North introduced a new economic management system that allowed a role of the market in the North Korean economy, with loose restrictions on market activities. The North Korean authorities concerned also loosened their crackdown on North Koreans’ communications with outsiders through cell phones and the products of foreign countries during the period from the start of 2012 through September 2013.

But under the young Kim’s leadership, the

North continued to make various provocations against the international community and the South, aimed at stirring tension on all fronts and utilize that tension for promoting discipline of North Korean society. While test-firing a long-range rocket in December 2012 and conducting its third nuclear test in February 2013, the North placed its army under the state of mobilization for combat in January 2013 and all of its citizens under a quasi-state of war the next month.

The North Korean authorities concerned intensified social control in the latter half of 2013, with an intensive crackdown on South Korean videos. On the occasion of purging Jang Song-thaek in December that year, they toughened control of North Korean citizens under various reasons, and that undesirable social atmosphere has remained unchanged throughout 2014.

IV. Conclusion

Reviewing North Korean history, there have been points in time when there emerged significant changes in internal and external policies that can be considered critical junctures. The years of 2009 through 2012 were such points in time. In 2009, the North began to be faced with a crisis, inside and out, and it has attempted to make a breakthrough in the crisis through a hard-line policy. In 2012, some factors causing the crisis have remained unchanged while some others have disappeared.

The North Korean domestic and foreign policies turned more aggressive in 2009 when the six-way nuclear talks broke down and the North began the process of achieving another

hereditary power succession. That year, the North conducted its second nuclear test and began to call on the international community to recognize it as a nuclear state. Its policy toward South Korea turned more aggressive and it discarded its ambiguous posture on its nuclear weapons development program. In the course of attaining another hereditary power succession, there in the North came a reshuffle in the ruling coalition.

The North completed the process of hereditary succession to power by Kim Jong-un in April 2012. It conducted its third nuclear test in February 2013. On the occasion of that nuclear test, the North began to mention its preemptive strikes with its nuclear weapons in various forms. It also began to trumpet its missile capabilities while threatening the South more intensively with conventional weapons. The disputes between elite power groups in the course of the power succession ended in the purge of Jang Song-thaek in late 2013 and the hegemony established by senior officials at the Organization-Guidance Department of the Party Central Committee. The North has taken an array of reform-oriented economic measures, including market-friendly ones, since June 28, 2012. But it continued to take steps for ideological control, restrictions on its citizens' contacts with the products of foreign countries and a crackdown on its citizens dissenting.

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

Internal Affairs**N. Korean leader visits naval unit, calls for stronger naval power**

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un has visited a naval unit and called for efforts to boost its combat capabilities next year, the North's media reported on Dec. 13 .

During the visit to the naval unit, code-named 189, Kim was briefed on "the ongoing combat and political training" and guided "the maneuvers of submarines," the (North) Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said in a report, monitored in Seoul.

The North Korean military has been carrying out winter drills since early December in an "unusually intensive" way, according to South Korean defense sources.

Calling for making 2015 "a year of bringing about a fresh turn in the strengthening of the navy," Kim urged the servicepersons there "to effect a collective innovation in the training for the new year," the KCNA report said.

The report did not disclose the date of Kim's latest visit and the location of the navy unit.

He also stressed the need to employ "advanced training methods ... and set forth the tasks and ways for rounding off sub unit's war preparations," the report said.

There have been signs that Pyongyang has beefed up its naval power with a focus on boosting submarines' capabilities. According to sources, it has launched a new submarine capable of firing ballistic missiles, raising further concerns over the North's evolving missile and nuclear threats.

During his latest inspection, Kim was accompanied by Choe Ryong-hae, the Workers' Party of Korea secretary, Hwang Pyong-so, director of the general political bureau of the Korean People's Army (KPA), and other commanding officers, according to the KCNA. (Yonhap)

N. Korea replaces air force chief

North Korea has replaced its air force chief, Pyongyang's state media confirmed on Dec. 8, as leader Kim Jong-un inspected a major aviation unit.

The Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) identified Lt. Gen. Choe Yong-ho as commander of the air and anti-air forces of the Korean People's Army, while calling his predecessor Col. Gen. Ri Pyong-chol a "responsible worker" at the Workers' Party of Korea.

Ri led the air force until recently, according to earlier reports by the KCNA.

It is unusual for a two-star general to take command of the North's Air Force, with a three-star general being transferred to the Central Committee of the party apparently to hold a high-ranking position.

The replacement may be part of efforts to increase the party's influence over the Air Force, observers said.

South Korea's unification ministry said it is aware of the replacement. But it said it has no credi-

ble information yet on the reason for it or related background.

The secretive communist nation's leader Kim has changed top military officials relatively frequently since taking power in late 2011 in an apparent bid to tighten control of the armed forces.

"He stressed the need for the pilots to make a deep study of plans for takeoff and landing at not only the unit's airfield, but also other unfamiliar airfields, and of their geographical features," reported the KCNA. (Yonhap)

AFC disciplines N.K. player, coach for misconduct during match

A North Korean football player and team coach have been suspended from six to 12 months for their misconduct during an Asian Games match in South Korea, according to the Web site of the Asian football governing body on Dec. 7.

The disciplinary committee of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) decided at their November meeting to penalize North Korean team's head coach Yun Jong-su with a 12-month suspension, barring him from all AFC competitions. He is still allowed to register as a team official, attend training sessions and participate in other football activities.

The committee also disciplined player Kim Yong-il with a six-month suspension on the same terms.

The two were accused of violating disciplinary codes in a finals match against South Korea on Oct. 2 during the 2014 Asiad, hosted by the South Korean port city of Incheon.

The AFC Web site said they displayed offensive behavior and went against fair play. Coach Yun had appealed fiercely to the referee, claiming handling, after South Korea scored a goal. South Korea went on to win the game and earn a gold medal. Kim threw a bottle of water at the group of referees.

Yun is the current head coach for North Korea's under-23 team for the 2016 Winter Olympics qualifiers. (Yonhap)

N. Korean leader visits military unit to lead winter drill

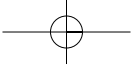
North Korean leader Kim Jong-un has visited a military unit to instruct ongoing winter training, calling for thorough preparations "to fight," Pyongyang's state media said on Dec. 5.

During his visit to Unit 1313 of the Korean People's Army, the young leader was briefed on "the situation of the new year combat and political drill," and then guided a firing exercise, according to the (North) Korean Central News Agency (KCNA).

The KCNA didn't disclose the date of Kim's latest visit and the location of the military unit.

"Next year should be the time of improving the quality of the training and achieving results in completing our combat readiness," Kim was quoted by the KCNA as saying.

With a goal to achieve national reunification in 2015, North Korea has geared up for all-out war by conducting tactical training and boosting its attack capabilities, according to the Seoul government.



The leader also stressed the need for “intensive training on the basis of concrete information on the enemy’s situation and steadily improving the training methods and programs,” instructing officers “to accelerate efforts to complete preparations to fight,” it said.

Kim was accompanied by Hwang Pyong-so, director of the general political bureau of the Korean People’s Army (KPA), Ri Yong-gil, chief of the KPA General Staff, and other commanding officers, according to the KCNA. (Yonhap)

N. Korea opens new tourism website

North Korea launched a new website intended to draw more foreign tourists on Dec. 1.

The site, www.dprktoday.com, provides foreigners with detailed information on the secretive communist nation’s tourist attractions, hotels and tour programs through related stories and video clips.

The North has a few other propaganda sites for outside online users like Uriminzokkiri (www.uriminzokkiri.com) and Naenara (www.naenara.co.kp). But the new website focuses more on attracting foreign tourists.

The North’s media said the website has been created to “satisfy growing interest and expectation” over the nation.

It also offers specific flight schedules from Beijing, Vladivostok and several other foreign cities to Pyongyang as well as a list of various package tour programs as well as information on luxury hotels and ways to contact relevant tour agencies abroad. (Yonhap)

N. Korean leader guides joint military drill

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un guided a joint military drill to highlight improved combat readiness, the country’s official news agency said on Nov. 23, amid the North’s repeated threats of retaliation against a recent United Nations resolution on its human rights situation.

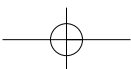
Kim guided the combined drill of two Korean People’s Army (KPA) units that included simulations of a coastal landing and attacks on enemy troops, said the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), monitored in Seoul. As is customary, the report did not disclose when the drill was conducted.

Kim guided the entire drill and was satisfied, the KCNA’s English-language report said, quoting him as saying that “They are fighting well and no enemy troops would come to their senses when they are exposed to such attack.”

The North has also criticized Seoul’s Hoguk joint drill that involved all branches of South Korea’s military. The North denounced the 12-day drill, which ended two days ago, as a cause of worsening inter-Korean ties.

The KCNA said Kim instructed his country’s military to conduct frequent war rehearsals to be better prepared for modern warfare.

“I used to create circumstances all of a sudden any moment to personally organize and guide



drills of units because the present drill is directly linked with the future fight and destiny of our country,” Kim said during his guidance.

Kim also stressed the need to frequently stage such combined joint rehearsals “in order to bolster up the capability of units at various levels to conduct operations and improve the operation commanding ability of commanding officers by focusing main efforts on rounding off the close coordination among units of services and arms of the army and ensuring promptness, rapidity, unity and accuracy in combat actions,” the KCNA said.

External Affairs

U.S. Congress passes legislation on N.K.'s prison camps

The U.S. Congress has passed legislation that requires the government to submit a report on North Korea's political prison camps amid mounting international pressure on Pyongyang over its human rights violations, sources said on Dec. 12.

The bill, H.R.4681, passed through the House of Representatives and the Senate on Dec. 9 and 10, respectively, the sources said. It was believed to be the first time that Congress has requested a report on the North's prison camps.

The move came as international pressure has been mounting on North Korea to improve its human rights record, with a U.N. General Assembly committee passing a landmark resolution in November that calls for referring the issue to the International Criminal Court.

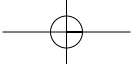
When the bill was first initiated in the House by Mike Rogers (R-MI), it did not require reporting on the North's prison camps. But the section was included in the Senate version of the bill submitted by Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) and was later added to the final legislation, the sources said.

The legislation calls for the government to submit a report on the North's prison camps to the intelligence committees of the House and the Senate, and to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

The report should describe the actions the United States is taking to support implementation of the recommendations of the U.N. Commission of Inquiry on the North's human rights, including the eventual establishment of a tribunal to hold individuals accountable for abuses, the legislation said.

It should also include the estimated prisoner population of each such camp, its geographical coordinates, the reasons for confining the prisoners at each camp, a description of the primary industries and products made at each such camp, and the end users of any goods produced at each camp.

The legislation also calls for information identifying individuals and agencies responsible for conditions in each political prison camp at all levels of the North's government, a description of the conditions under which prisoners are confined, with respect to the adequacy of food, shelter, medical care, working conditions, reports of ill-treatment of prisoners, and unclassified imagery, includ-



ing satellite imagery, of each such camp.

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 such criticism, calling it a U.S.-led attempt to topple its regime. (Yonhap)

North Korea calls claims of its Sony Pictures hacking ‘false rumor’

North Korea on Dec. 7 denied claims that it had hacked into Sony Pictures, calling the allegations a “false rumor” spread by South Korea.

The U.S. film company had come under cyber attack in late November after a series of threats from North Korea for its comedy movie “The Interview,” in which the CIA plots to assassinate the country’s young leader Kim Jong-un.

“The South Korean group, keen on serving its master, groundlessly linked the hacking attack with the DPRK and floated the ‘story about the North’s involvement,’” an unnamed spokesman for the policy department of the North’s powerful National Defense Commission said. DPRK stands for the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, North Korea’s formal name.

Pyongyang does not know “where in America the Sony Pictures is situated and for what wrongdoings it became the target of the attack,” the North’s official Korean Central News Agency cited the spokesman as saying in an interview with the media.

The North said the attack might be a “righteous deed of the supporters and sympathizers” with the North in response to its appeal to the world for an anti-U.S. struggle.

Following the attack that knocked down Sony Pictures’ Web site and a number of the company’s blockbuster films set to be released soon, U.S. news media have said the North might be responsible for the attack, noting that some of the malware used in the attack contained Korean-language code.

However, a spokesman for the North’s mission to the United Nations reportedly denied his country’s involvement in the hacking attack after the FBI launched an investigation into the case. (Yonhap)

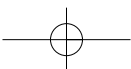
N. Korea slams U.S. over racial discrimination

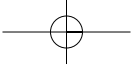
North Korea sharply criticized the United States on Nov. 28 for violent protests in Ferguson, apparently seeking to turn the tables on Washington often critical of Pyongyang’s human rights abuse.

The communist nation’s foreign ministry claimed it is absurd for the U.S., troubled by its own human rights problems, to blame other countries.

It cited civilian protests prevalent in Ferguson, Missouri, after a grand jury’s decision not to indict a white police officer in the killing of an unarmed black man aged 18. Public resentment is spreading to other U.S. cities.

“The occurrence of nationwide protests at present goes to prove that the U.S. human rights regime is beset with serious problems,” an unnamed ministry spokesman said, according to the Korean





Central News Agency.

It shows the “real picture” of the U.S. where “extreme racial discrimination acts are openly practiced,” he added.

The spokesman accused President Barack Obama of making “irresponsible remarks” that the U.S. is a country that adheres to the rule of law and the people need to accept the decision of the judicial authorities.

“But such individual human rights abuses are taking place one after another and have reached a systematic and wide-ranging and extremely grave phase,” he said. (Yonhap)

N. Korean leader launches outspoken attack on U.S.

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un expressed antipathy toward the United States in an unusually unequivocal way, labeling Americans as “cannibals,” according to Pyongyang’s state media on Nov. 25.

He called for an “all-out anti-U.S. struggle,” as he provided “field guidance” at an anti-U.S. museum that Pyongyang claims commemorates the massacre of civilians by American troops during the 1950-53 Korean War, reported the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA).

It was his second known visit to the museum in Sinchon, South Hwanghae Province, following the previous one in 1998. At that time, he went there with his father, Kim Jong-il, who died in late 2011.

“The massacres committed by the U.S. imperialist aggressors in Sinchon evidently showed that they are cannibals and brutal murderers seeking pleasure in slaughter,” Kim was quoted as saying.

Kim stressed that Koreans should not forget the wartime atrocities by the U.S. in the region, the KCNA added.

He said the brutality of the U.S. has become more insidious, emphasizing the need for more anti-America education at home and in school. (Yonhap)

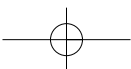
N. Korea slams U.S. for overstating Pyongyang’s missile capacity

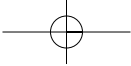
North Korea lambasted the United States on Nov. 14 for trying to exaggerate Pyongyang’s missile capacity, a tactic which the North said is aimed at stepping up the U.S. military presence on the Korean Peninsula.

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.”

The North Korean report also came one day after South Korean Defense Minister Han Min-koo warned of North Korea’s growing military capacity.

Asked to confirm the North’s suspected development of a missile-loaded submarine, Han said in a parliamentary meeting that he cannot officially verify it but South Korea is keeping close tabs on the issue. (Yonhap)

Inter-Korean Affairs

Kaesong park remains vulnerable to external factors

A joint inter-Korean industrial complex has made strides over the past decade but it remains an incomplete economic cooperation project due to its vulnerability to external factors, analysts in Seoul said on Dec. 14.

The Kaesong Industrial Park in the North Korean border town of the same name started its operations in 2004, in a landmark inter-Korean economic project that combines South Korea’s technology with the North’s cheap labor.

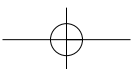
Despite a jump in its output, the industrial park, which marks the 10th anniversary of its production on Dec. 15, remains susceptible to political and military factors, leaving the sole inter-Korean economic project incomplete, according to the analysts.

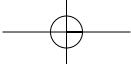
According to South Korean government data, the output of the joint industrial complex reached US\$230 million in the first half of this year, compared with \$14.91 million for all of 2005.

Currently, some 53,000 North Koreans are employed by South Korean companies, up from roughly 6,000 in 2005. The number of South Korean companies with factories in Kaesong has also surged to 124 from 15.

South Korean companies are estimated to pay North Korean workers a combined \$87 million in wages and social insurance per year.

Experts, however, said that inter-Korean relations still exert great influence over the operations of





the joint industrial park, making it an incomplete economic cooperation project between the Koreans.

“The weakest point of the Kaesong Industrial complex is the fact that it remains sensitive to political and military factors,” Hyundai Research Institute said in a recent report. “South and North Korea should operate the park regardless of political and military tensions in order to develop it into a stable and sustainable project.”

Amid heightened inter-Korean tensions last year, North Korea unilaterally withdrew its workers from the complex, leaving South Korean companies there idle for more than five months.

On Dec. 6, North Korea announced a plan to scrap a 5-percent cap on the annual increase for Kaesong workers’ minimum wage and hikes in overtime payment.

South Korea said it cannot accept North Korea’s unilateral decision, heralding a clash with North Korea over the issue down the road.

The two Koreas remain technically in a state of war as the 1950-53 Korean War ended in a ceasefire, not a peace treaty. (Yonhap)

Ex-N. Korean ping pong star hopes to see unified Korean squad again

Ri Pun-hui, a retired North Korean table tennis star who once competed on a unified team with South Koreans for a world title, said on Dec. 14 she hoped to see the two Koreas play on the same team once again.

In an interview in Sydney, where she is visiting with Pyongyang’s deaf football team, Ri said the divided countries should try to form unified squads more often.

Ri, currently secretary general of the North Korean Sports Association for the Disabled, was a member of the unified Korean squad at the 1991 World Table Tennis Championships in Chiba City, Japan. She teamed up with the South Korean star Hyun Jung-hwa for the gold medal in the women’s team event, as the Koreans denied China its ninth straight championship.

“It’s disappointing that the unified (table tennis) team was a one-time thing at Chiba City,” Ri said. “I hope there will be more unified teams in the future.”

The success of the 1991 table tennis squad was made into a South Korean film, titled “As One,” in 2012.

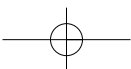
Ri, 45, had been scheduled to visit the South Korean port city of Incheon in October, as part of the North’s delegation to the 2014 Asian Para Games, and to reunite with Hyun for the first time since the 1991 world championships. However, Ri suffered injuries in an auto accident late September and was unable to recover in time for the trip.

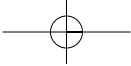
Ri said she wasn’t as severely injured as was reported, but added that she is still dealing with after-effects of the accident.

“I think I will have another opportunity to visit South Korea,” Ri said.

Within a week of Ri’s accident, Hyun crashed into a taxi while driving under the influence of alcohol, and had to resign from her post as the mayor of the athletes’ village for the Asian Para Games.

Ri said she had heard about Hyun’s situation, adding that she hoped to meet her former teammate





in the near future.

“We all go through different things in life,” Ri said. “Hopefully, we can meet again soon.” (Yonhap)

Ex-first lady Lee to visit N. Korea in 2015

The widow of former South Korean President Kim Dae-jung plans to visit North Korea next May or June when the weather is milder and more favorable to her health, her nonprofit organization said on Dec. 1.

Lee Hee-ho, 92, expressed her wish to travel to North Korea for humanitarian purposes when she met with South Korean President Park Geun-hye in late October.

Pyongyang accepted the request in November.

“(Lee) wished to visit the North this year, but at the earnest advice of her doctors, she postponed the visit to next year,” the Kim Dae Jung Peace Center said in a news release.

“Doctors advised her that it would be impossible to visit the North in the cold weather due to her health conditions as she was hospitalized with pneumonia in the summer and under medical treatment for more than two months.”

Lee, who plans to visit two day care centers in Pyongyang, would be making her second trip to the North in three years. She made her last trip to Pyongyang to attend the funeral of then North Korean leader Kim Jong-il. At that time, she met with the current leader, Kim Jong-un.

She also accompanied her husband to the North in 2000 for the historic inter-Korean summit talks.

Lee would become the highest-profile South Korean figure to visit North Korea in recent months, with government-level dialogue suspended amid prolonged military tensions. (Yonhap)

Unification minister urges passage of N. Korea human rights bill

South Korea’s unification minister appealed to lawmakers on Nov. 26 to pass a bill on North Korea’s human rights abuse, citing the need for a legal basis for “systemic” efforts to address the problem.

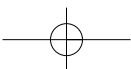
The legislation, if adopted, would give a ray of hope to North Korean people, said Ryoo Kihl-jae, Seoul’s point man on Pyongyang.

“If the North Korea human rights bills are enacted through a compromise between the ruling and opposition parties, the government will draw up a basic plan to improve North Korea’s human rights conditions on the basis of that,” Ryoo said at a forum here on reunification.

The Park Geun-hye administration will also make concrete efforts in cooperation with civic groups in South Korea and the international community to deal with the matter, he added.

It would help send a clear message not only to Pyongyang but also to the world that Seoul is not sitting idle over the suffering of people in the North, said Ryoo.

His call came as the National Assembly has launched formal discussions on a pair of long-pend-



ing bills -- one proposed by the ruling Saenuri Party and another proposed by the main opposition New Politics Alliance for Democracy.

The move was apparently prompted by a U.N. panel's decision to put a fresh resolution against Pyongyang to a vote at the General Assembly. It calls for a referral of the North's leaders to the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity.

The ruling party's bill, if passed, would pave the way for the government to provide financial assistance to civic groups sending anti-Pyongyang leaflets across the border.

The main opposition party's version focuses more on promoting the North Korean people's rights to freedom. (Yonhap)

S. Korea returns 10 N. Korean fishermen

South Korea returned 10 North Korean fishermen rescued from their boat drifting in the South's eastern waters on Nov. 26, the unification ministry said.

The South handed over the vessel and the fishermen to the North at around 1:30 a.m. through the Northern Limit Line (NLL) in the East Sea.

It had an engine glitch and was found near the uninhabited islets of Dokdo on Sunday night.

All of them expressed their desire to go back to the North, the ministry said.

Despite military tensions, the two Koreas have the practice of repatriating civilians who accidentally land in each other's territory in a humanitarian move. (Yonhap)

Koreas to hold joint Buddhist service

A delegation of 30 South Korean Buddhist leaders will soon visit North Korea to attend a joint religious service, the unification ministry said on Nov. 25.

It said the government has approved the delegation's trip to the North's border town of Kaesong, slated for Nov. 26, under a policy to support inter-Korean exchange in the non-political sector.

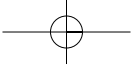
The joint ceremony to be held at the historic Yeongtong Temple in Kaesong is to mark the ninth anniversary of its restoration. It is also to commemorate the 912th anniversary of the passing of the legendary monk Uicheon.

The representatives from the Cheontae Order will cross the demilitarized zone around 9 a.m. and return to the South at 4 p.m., according to the ministry.

"The government has endorsed their visit, as the joint service is a pure religious event, which is part of social and cultural exchanges in the non-political and non-military field," it said. (Yonhap)

Hyundai vows efforts to resume suspended inter-Korean tours

Returning from a trip to North Korea to commemorate the anniversary of an inter-Korean tour program, Hyundai Group's chairwoman said on Nov. 18 that she and North Korean officials reaffirmed their pledge to resume the suspended mountain tours.



Hyun Jeong-eun led a delegation of Hyundai officials to attend a ceremony at Mount Kumgang on the North's east coast to celebrate the 16th anniversary of the start of the tour program.

"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.

Once a major cash cow for the impoverished North, tours to Mount Kumgang were suspended in 2008 after a South Korean tourist was fatally shot by a North Korean soldier after straying into an off-limits military zone next to the resort.

Tours to Mount Kumgang, long famous for its scenic beauty on North Korea's southeast coast, 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. "Mount Kumgang was as beautiful as it was before. Hyundai will make utmost efforts to allow Korean people to see the scenic beauty again."

Hyundai's delegation and North Korean officials shouted, "Open Mount Kumgang!" several times, she 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.

Later in the day, 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.

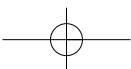
The Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said in an English dispatch that the participants said Kim Jong-un is "paying deep attention to Hyundai Group and the tour of Mount Kumgang," calling for efforts to resume the tour program "as soon as possible." (Yonhap)

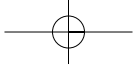
N. Korea shows jump in military activities near border: source

North Korean soldiers have increased their reconnaissance activities near the tensely guarded land border in 2014 from a year ago, prompting more warning broadcasts and shots from South Korea, a government source in Seoul said on Nov. 16.

The source said South Korea has broadcast warning messages toward the North on "about 60 occasions" this year, a marked increase from a year ago. South Korea never had to fire warning shots across the border last year but has done so "five to six times" in 2014, according to the source.

Most recently, about 10 North Korean soldiers apparently came a few feet south of the military demarcation line (MDL) on Nov. 10, while taking pictures of signposts set up there. In response, South Korea launched warning shots, but there was no exchange of fire, as the North Koreans moved away from the MDL without firing back.





In October, the two Koreas exchanged fire after troops from the communist country drew near the MDL. No casualties were reported.

“North Korea has increased its reconnaissance in the demilitarized zone since last month (October),” the source said. “The South Korean military is analyzing the North’s intention behind it.”

According to a military official here, the North has been sending about 10 or so soldiers at a time to check up on signs that mark the MDL, which was established by the armistice that ended the Korean War in 1953 and stretches for some 250 kilometers. There are 1,292 such signs, with some old wooden ones having been replaced by concrete posts.

On Nov. 15, North Korea condemned South Korea for firing warning shots at its soldiers, saying Seoul will have to pay for such “provocations.” (Yonhap)

FOREIGN TIPS

N.K. shows no signs of preparations for nuclear test: think tank

North Korea is showing no signs of preparing to conduct a nuclear test, despite its threat to do so in anger over a U.N. General Assembly resolution on its human rights violations, a U.S. think tank in Washington said on Dec. 10.

The website 38 North made the assessment, saying commercial satellite imagery shows that there has been “low-level activity” at the North’s Punggye-ri underground nuclear test site for the past four months.

“It is unlikely that North Korea will conduct a nuclear test in the next two to three months,” 38 North said in a report.

The North has so far conducted three nuclear tests at the site in 2006, 2009 and 2013.

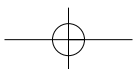
Speculation mounted early this year that the North could conduct a nuclear test after the regime threatened to conduct a “new form of nuclear test.” But the regime did not go ahead with a test.

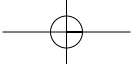
In November, Pyongyang again threatened to test a nuclear device after the Third Committee of the U.N. General Assembly passed a resolution that called for referring the North to the International Criminal Court for human rights violations. (Yonhap)

Young N.K. defectors share ordeals at State Department

Two young North Korean defectors spoke of tragic ordeals they went through before and after fleeing the communist nation as the State Department hosted a special Human Rights Day event to promote awareness of how much Pyongyang mistreats its own people on Dec. 10.

The event marked the first time that the department has invited North Korean defectors to speak





on International Human Rights Day. U.S. officials attending the event included Amb. Robert King, special envoy for North Korean Human Rights Issues, and Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Tom Malinowski.

It was part of U.S. efforts to continue to ratchet up pressure on Pyongyang to improve its human rights record after a U.N. General Assembly committee passed a landmark resolution in November that calls for referring the issue to the International Criminal Court.

“North Korea has one of the worst human rights records of any nation on the Earth,” King said, adding that the communist nation stood at rock bottom in a recent assessment by the Economist of the human rights records of 167 nations in the world.

The young defectors, Joseph Kim and Yeonmi Park, shared powerful stories with the audience.

Park, 21, first talked about how she grew up in a North Korean city near the China border, where she witnessed the public execution of the mother of one of her friends for selling foreign DVDs. After her father was punished for doing unauthorized trade with China, Park said she and her mother fled to China.

Silence descended in the State Department’s Dean Acheson Auditorium as Park spoke of one of her first experiences in China: A broker demanding sex with Park, then only 13, with a threat to send them back to the North, and her mother offering to be raped instead to protect her daughter.

Park ultimately came to South Korea via Mongolia. She is now a college student.

“They are being treated like animals. No one deserves to be treated this way,” Park said of North Korean refugees hiding in China.

Kim, 24, talked about how his poor family struggled with hunger in his hometown, also near China, saying he often left home at 5 a.m. in search of firewood and came back at midnight and how he spent his birthday without having any food.

“Hunger is humiliation and hunger is hopeless,” he said. “This famine was created by government policies. I know South Korea did not have a famine like this even though they have similar climate and geographies. It’s really to think about how many people have suffered and starved to death.”

Kim said he lost his father to starvation. His death left the family in an even more difficult situation and his mother and elder sister left for China in search of food. A few months later, his mother was arrested in China and repatriated but only after his sister was sold to a man in China, he said.

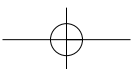
Failure to say goodbye properly to his sister when she left for China remains “one of my biggest regrets in my life,” he said.

Kim later fled to China and came ultimately to the United States. He’s now a college student in New York.

“I’m eternally grateful to the U.S. government” for allowing defectors like him not only to resettle, but also to have an experience of a “true meaning of freedom.”

“To me, freedom means being able to imagine who I want to be and actually having a chance to make it possible,” he said.

Assistant Secretary Malinowski said that the United States will keep up pressure on the North to improve its human rights record and the issue will “stay on the agenda of the U.N. Security Council permanently until no longer it needs to be there.”



Malinowski said the State Department will disclose all information it has about the North's human rights violations, such as political prison camps, on a government website at www.HumanRights.gov.

"One day, the North Korean people will be free. That is inevitable," he said. "The Korean Peninsula will be whole and our goal is to try to do whatever we can to accelerate that progress." (Yonhap)

Int'l aid to N. Korea tumbles over past decade as country's image worsens

Humanitarian aid to North Korea fell sharply over the past decade as nuclear saber rattling and consequent sanctions worsened the international perception of the country, a report by a state-run think tank said on Dec. 9.

In the first 11 months of 2014, the amount of aid reaching the communist country stood at US\$28.3 million, a tenth of the more than \$301 million that flowed into the North in the early 2000s, the Korea Development Institute (KDI)'s monthly North Korean report showed. The report is based on data provided by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

It said the North's threat to develop more nuclear weapons and use them played a part in the drop in support. Punitive steps by South Korea, the United States and Japan against Pyongyang also contributed to the drop, it said.

The institute's analysis showed fluctuations in the amount of aid, peaking at \$360.8 million in 2002 and falling to \$24.5 million in 2010 after the North conducted its second nuclear test the year before, but the overall trend has been less aid going to North Korea over the years.

In the 2000-2014 period, South Korea provided \$430.9 million in assistance to the North, followed by \$250.9 million from the United States, and \$247.2 million from Japan.

The three countries accounted for 80 percent of the aid to North Korea in 2000, but this dropped to 20 percent in 2013.

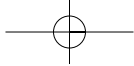
Hwang Ji-hwan, a professor of international relations at the University of Seoul, said the latest data indicated that not only was the total size of aid falling, but there were also fewer countries offering to help the country.

"The greatest factor that caused aid to drop this year is the reluctance of North Korean authorities to allow outsiders to monitor where the humanitarian shipments are going to," the scholar said.

Hwang said the perception that the North Korean regime has become unstable since young Kim Jong-un took power in late 2011, the worsening inter-Korean relations and Pyongyang's nuclear program are all affecting aid shipments. (Yonhap)

In Pyongyang, odd-even ban imposed on cabbies: report

North Korean taxi drivers in the reclusive country's capital of Pyongyang have been ordered to drive their vehicles only every other day since April 2014, but the reason of the restriction remains unknown, China's state-run media reported on Dec. 4.



In a dispatch from Pyongyang, China's Xinhua news agency said, under the ban, a taxi with an odd numbered license plate is allowed to drive on the city's roads only on odd numbered days. A taxi with an even numbered plate is allowed for the roads on even numbered days.

"The reason for introducing the license plate restriction for taxis remains unknown. It appears not likely that the niche has become saturated as people often vie to hail a taxi," the report said.

A Pyongyang taxi driver named Han Chol-mun was quoted in the report as saying, "It is the government that made the regulation. We just need to follow the rule."

In November, Beijing imposed a similar odd-even plate ban on cars in the Chinese capital in an effort to reduce the city's notorious smog during the APEC Summit.

At the end of 2013, there were more than 1,500 taxis in Pyongyang, the report said, citing "official figures."

Since the North's young leader Kim Jong-un took power in late 2011, following the death of his father, Kim Jong-il, the number of taxis have been on the rise, according to the report.

"In fact, a large number of new vehicles have been put on the roads in Pyongyang to boost taxi services since Kim Jong-un took the helm in 2011," the report said. Most taxis in Pyongyang were produced by a Chinese automaker BYD Co., according the report. (Yonhap)

N. Korean leader bans foreign cigarettes: source

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un has ordered the country's senior officials not to smoke foreign cigarettes, saying it is a matter of patriotism, a source said on Dec. 2.

Kim, who is apparently a habitual smoker himself, said he sees no need for foreign cigarettes in his country as domestic ones have good quality as well, according to the source involved in trade with North Korea.

Kim said smoking foreign cigarettes means a lack of patriotism, added the source based in China.

Kim, reportedly in his early 30s and educated in Switzerland, has often been spotted smoking during his public appearances.

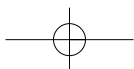
The brand of his cigarettes has not been confirmed yet, however.

Kim's orders might have stopped the North's imports of foreign cigarettes, but it remains uncertain whether the measure will actually affect consumption of them in the smuggling-prone North, observers said. (Yonhap)

N. Korea building new thermal power plant to meet energy shortages

North Korea has been building a new coal-powered thermal power plant near Pyongyang in a sign that the destitute nation is struggling to resolve chronic electricity shortages, a U.S. researcher said on Nov. 25.

Commercial satellite imagery shows that construction of the power plant began sometime in late 2010 or early 2011 in Kangdong County, in eastern Pyongyang, said Curtis Melvin, a researcher at the U.S.-Korea Institute at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, in a report on



the Website 38 North.

Steady progress has since been made on key facilities such as the distinctive cooling tower, employee housing, an electrical switch yard, generator hall, smoke stack and conveyor system for bringing coal into the boiler building, the researcher said.

The new power plant is expected to be capable of generating 100-300 megawatts, about 20 percent of the capacity of the Pukchang Thermal Power Plant, the North's largest thermal power plant. The new power plant could be an attempt to supplement the aged Pukchang complex, he said.

Construction continued despite North Korean leader Kim Jong-un's calls in his New Year's address for producing more electricity "with priority given to hydraulic resources and by using wind, geothermal, solar and other kinds of natural energy," Curtis said.

"Though Kim Jong-un has not yet made energy policy one of his public priorities, continued construction of the Kangdong Thermal Power Plant indicates that energy security remains an important goal of his regime," the expert said. (Yonhap)

N. Korea conducts ejection launcher test for submarine missile: report

North Korea has conducted a test of an ejection launcher that helps fire missiles from submarines in a sign that the communist nation is making progress in its efforts to develop a submarine-based ballistic missile, a news report said on Nov. 21.

The land-based test simulated the initial stage of boosting a missile out of a submarine launch tube and is a sign that the rogue state is moving ahead with plans for underwater missile strike capabilities for a future nuclear-tipped missile, the Washington Free Beacon reported, citing unidentified defense officials.

U.S. intelligence agencies observed the test in late October at a facility known to be a key development center for the North's submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) program, the report said, citing two officials with access to intelligence reports.

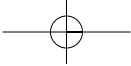
In October, a U.N. think tank said, citing commercial satellite imagery, that the North has built a new test stand on its eastern coast to research and develop submarine-based ballistic missiles that can be launched from submarines.

The assessment from the website 38 North, run by the U.S.-Korea Institute at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, was in line with South Korea's intelligence that the North is believed to be developing a submarine-launched ballistic missile.

In September, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a report to a lawmaker that there is an indication that the North is developing an SLBM. A military source also said intelligence agencies spotted signs that the North has developed a ballistic missile launch tube for submarine use. (Yonhap)

Son of Jang Song-thaek's aide disappears in Paris

A North Korean college student in Paris has been missing for more than two weeks, sources said on Nov. 19, amid speculation that agents from the North are attempting to forcibly take him back to



the communist nation.

The student, only identified by his surname Han, is a son of an aide to Jang Song-thaek, the once powerful uncle of the North's leader Kim Jong-un. Jang was executed in December 2013 on treason charges.

Han's father is known to have been purged recently as part of the Kim regime's continued work to clear the remnants of the Jang era.

A senior official at Han's school told Yonhap News Agency that, "I asked other students and faculty members about Han's whereabouts but nobody has seen him at least for the past 15 days."

Local police came to the school in the previous week in search of Han, added the official.

A source said Han had been picked up by North Korean agents dispatched to Paris.

He dramatically escaped while being taken to an airport and he is now staying at a certain location, the source said.

If confirmed true, the case could cause a diplomatic rift between North Korea and France. (Yonhap)

Swiss NGO to join study on landmine removal in DMZ

A Swiss NGO will participate in South Korea's research on removing landmines in the demilitarized zone (DMZ) bisecting the Korean Peninsula, an official in Seoul said on Nov. 17.

The South Korean government is pushing an ambitious project to turn the heavily-fortified area into a peace park amid persistent doubts over its feasibility.

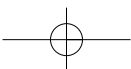
The Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) has been chosen, along with two domestic firms, to conduct a government-commissioned study of how to clear landmines in the DMZ with minimal environmental impact, the unification ministry official said, requesting anonymity.

Formed in 1998, the Geneva-based group specializes in eliminating mines, cluster munitions and other explosive remnants of war.

South Korea has earmarked more than 20 billion won (US\$18 million) for the envisioned work to get rid of mines in the DMZ. But the project has made little progress due to North Korea's refusal to cooperate.

Last year, South Korean President Park Geun-hye proposed that the two Koreas build an international park inside the last-remaining frontier of the Cold War as part of efforts to improve bilateral ties.

The DMZ is a four-kilometer-wide buffer zone separating the two Koreas. The two Koreas remain technically at war as the 1950-53 Korean War ended in a truce rather than a peace treaty. (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)

- Nov. 19 gives field guidance to Fishery Station No. 18 under KPA Unit 567.
- 21 inspects the KPA's Air and Anti-Air Force Unit 991.
- 23 guides a combined joint drill of the units under KPA Combined Units 572 and 630.
- 25 visits a museum in Sinchon, South Hwanghae Province, that marks what North Korea calls atrocities committed by the United States forces during the Korean War (1950-53).
- 26 receives a message from Alberto Anaya Gutierrez, national leader of the Workers' Party of Mexico, on the occasion of the third anniversary of the death of leader Kim Jong-il.
- 28 guides a flight drill of pursuit airwomen of the KPA Air and Anti-Air Force.
- Dec. 1 inspects the Artillery Company under KPA Unit 963 that started the new year combat and political drill.
- 2 sends a message of greeting to Choummaly Sayasone, president of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR), on the occasion of the 39th anniversary of the founding of the LPDR.
- 5 inspects the KPA's Unit 1313 honored with the Title of O Jung Hup-led 7th Regiment.
- 8 inspects KPA Air and Anti-Air Force Unit 458 honored with the title of O Jung Hup-led 7th Regiment.
- 13 inspects KPA navy Unit 189 honored with the title of O Jung Hup-led 7th Regiment.

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

- Nov. 17 sends a message of greeting to Qaboos Bin Said, sultan of Oman, on its national day.
- 21 sends a congratulatory message to Klaus Iohannis for being elected as Romanian president.
- 28 sends a message of greetings to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas as part of world solidarity with the Palestinian people.
- Dec. 1 sends greetings to Catherine Samba-panza, president of the Central African Republic, on the occasion of the 56th anniversary of the proclamation of the republic.
- 5 sends a congratulatory message to Bhumibol Adulyadej, king of Thailand, on his birthday and its national day.
- 9 holds a talk with Alexandr Timonin, Russian ambassador to Pyongyang who paid a farewell call on him, at the Mansudae Assembly Hall.
- 9 sends a message of greeting to Uhuru Kenyatta, president of Kenya, on the occasion of the 51st anniversary of its independence.

Pak Pong-ju: Premier

- Nov. 18 sends a congratulatory message to Boyko Borisov for being appointed as prime minister of Bulgaria.
- 30 sends greetings to Freundel Stuart, prime minister of Barbados, on the occasion of the 48th anniversary of its independence.
- Dec. 10 makes a field survey of the Unryul Mine in South Hwanghae Province.

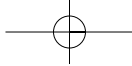
CHRONOLOGICAL REVIEW**(Local Events)**

- Nov. 17 The Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) says the National House of Class Education displayed recently found relics and remains of drafted workers and miners who were shot by the Japanese during their 1910-45 colonial rule.
- 23 The KCNA says an army-civilian joint rally took place in Kangryong County, South Hwanghae Province to mark the fourth anniversary of what it called the “victory of the Yeonpyeong Island shelling.”
- 27 The KCNA says Ryesonggang Youth Power Station No. 4 went operational in North Hwanghae Province.
- Dec. 12 Nine youngsters, who North Korea claims were abducted by South Korean agents but succeeded in coming back home in May, are interviewed by domestic and foreign reporters at Koryo Compatriots Hall.
- 12 A group of young students pledges to remain loyal to Kim Jong-un at the plaza of the Kumsusan Palace of the Sun on the occasion of the third anniversary of the demise of leader Kim Jong-il.
- 14 Agricultural workers make an oath to remain loyal to Kim Jong-un with increased production of rice, the last instructions of Kim Jong-il, at the Unhung Cooperative Farm, Thaechon County, North Phyongan Province to commemorate the third anniversary of Kim Jong-il’s death.

(Foreign Events)

- Nov. 16 The Rodong Sinmun, an organ of the ruling WPK, denounces the U.S. decision to sell 135 PAC-3 missile batteries to South Korea.
- 17 Choe Ryong-hae, a WPK secretary, arrives in Russia as a special envoy of Kim Jong-un.
- 18 Hyun Jeong-eun, chairperson of South Korea’s Hyundai group, attends a ceremony to commemorate the 16th anniversary of an inter-Korean tour program at the Bureau of Special Zone for International Tour of Mount Kumgang.

- Nov. 18 The Rodong Sinmun criticizes South Korea for kicking off a joint regular aerial exercise, Max Thunder, with the U.S. calling it a vicious challenge to the DPRK's (North Korea's) efforts to improve inter-Korean relations.
- 18 Choe Ryong-hae meets with Vladimir Putin, president of the Russian Federation, at the Kremlin, Moscow.
- 20 North Korea lashes out at the passage of a U.N resolution on its human rights conditions, calling it a "politically-motivated provocation" by the United States.
- 20 The Rodong Sinmun slams the floating of balloons containing anti-Pyongyang propaganda leaflets across the border by South Korean activists.
- 20 The KCNA says South Korea is mocking the international community by carrying out the Hoguk joint drills, claiming they are preparation for nuclear war against the North.
- 26 A delegation of the Kim Il-sung Socialist Youth League led by Jong Yong-won, vice-chairman of its Central Committee, leaves Pyongyang to visit Russia.
- 27 The KCNA claims in a commentary "the imperialists' human rights racket is a prelude to war," referring to a Nov. 23 NDC statement that said it would regard the U.N. human rights resolution as an unprecedented and undisguised declaration of war and launch the toughest-ever counteraction in response.
- 29 Kim Chol-ho is appointed as DPRK ambassador to Ethiopia, according to a decree of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly.
- Dec. 2 North Korea's leading newspapers in commentaries denounce South Korea and Japan for joining in the "U.S.' human rights racket against the DPRK" at the U.N.
- 7 The Rodong Sinmun denounces the South Korean Christian group Hangichong's move to inaugurate a promotion committee for building the Aegibong Light Tower as "psychological offensive" against the DPRK.
- 9 The Minju Joson, a DPRK Cabinet newspaper, says in a commentary that Japan's denial of its criminal past shows that it is afraid of the truth being disclosed to the world.
- 10 The Central Committee of the WPK sends a message to the South West Africa People's Organization of Namibia to congratulate the party on winning a victory again in the nation's presidential election.
- 11 The spokesman for the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea lashes out at South Korean President Park Geun-hye, saying she should first take issue with the United States' "stockpile of tens of thousands of nuclear weapons."
- 11 The KCNA says delegations of political parties and bodies of Uganda, Equatorial Guinea and DR Congo visited the DPRK embassies in their countries on Dec. 2 and 5 in remembrance of late leader Kim Jong-il.
- 12 The KCNA says Atanas Ivanov, honorary chairman of the Bulgarian Communists Union, released a statement on Dec. 5 to commemorate the third anniversary of Kim Jong-il's demise.
- 13 The KCNA accuses the United States of stepping up efforts to "siege" China by deploying THAAD in South Korea and using Japan as its missile shield.
- 13 The Rodong Sinmun criticizes Japan's efforts to urge the U.S. to rewrite world history textbooks for public high schools in Los Angeles and other areas in California as an action that



revives militarism.

- Dec. 13 A spokesman for the DPRK Foreign Ministry accuses the U.S. of systematical human rights abuses, following a report that revealed “inhuman acts of torture applied by the CIA agents against suspects of international terrorist groups.”
- 14 The Minju Joson slams Japan for increasing the scope of the self-defense forces with support from the U.S., adding North Korea will not overlook the moves of Japan to “inflict huge misfortune and pain upon the Korean nation.”

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