To our readers,

First and foremost, I, as the president of Yonhap News Agency, would like to give our readers many thanks for the deep interest shown in our Vantage Point magazine for many years.

With your great interest and encouragement, Yonhap has done its utmost to make Vantage Point, South Korea's sole North Korea-only monthly in English, a quality magazine over the years.

However, Yonhap has very regretfully decided to discontinue the publication of the magazine, making the January issue in 2016 its last.

This discontinuance, however, will never mean weakening Yonhap’s North Korea news service.

On the contrary, Yonhap, as a leading news agency in South Korea, has the grave obligation to play a part in helping materialize the Korean people’s ardent wish for the reunification of the Korean Peninsula by providing our readers at home and abroad with accurate news on the reality of the communist North and the South Korean government’s North Korea policy.

Hence, Yonhap promises to continuously meet our Vantage Point readers’ keen interest in and high demand for stories on Korean Peninsula issues by providing you with a quicker, fairer, more accurate and stronger North Korean news service via its Web page (www.yonhapnews.co.kr).

I would like to express my deep appreciation to our faithful readers once again, and hope you will continuously maintain interest in Korean issues down the road.

Best regards,

Park No-hwang
President-publisher
Yonhap News Agency
폐 간 사

독자 여러분들에게,

우선 그동안 연합뉴스 Vantage Point를 예득해주신 독자 여러분들에게 깊은 감사의 말씀을 드립니다.

그동안 연합뉴스는 독자 여러분들의 높은 관심과 격려 속에서 한국의 유일한 북한 전문 영문월간지인 Vantage Point를 품격있는 잡지로 만들기 위해 최선을 다해왔습니다.

매우 아쉽게도 연합뉴스는 2016년 1월호를 마지막으로 Vantage Point 발행을 중단하기로 결정하였습니다.

그러나 잡지의 폐간이 절대로 연합뉴스 북한 뉴스 서비스의 약화를 의미하지는 않습니다

대한민국을 대표하는 통신사인 연합뉴스는 국내외 독자들에게 북한의 실상과 한국정부의 대북 정책을 정확히 전달해 한국민들이 열망하는 한반도 통일의 꿈을 실현하는데 일익을 담당해야 할 책임이 있습니다.

따라서 연합뉴스는 보다 더 공정하고 정확하고 신속하고 강화된 북한 뉴스 서비스를 홈페이지 (http://www.yonhapnews.co.kr)를 통해 제공함으로써 한반도 문제에 대한 Vantage Point 독자 여러분들의 깊은 관심과 수요를 계속 충족시켜드릴 것을 약속드립니다.

다시 한번 독자 여러분들에게 깊은 감사의 말씀드리며 한반도 문제에 대해 앞으로도 계속 관심을 가져주실 것을 희망합니다.

연합뉴스 대표이사 사장
박 노 황
COVER STORY
Kim Jong-un’s Choice in 2016
North Korea is standing at a crossroads, facing the choice between deeper international isolation or a new relationship with the world through reform and opening-up.

ANALYSIS
Rise and Fall of North Korea’s Power Elites

NEWS FOCUS
Uncertainties over Inter-Korean Talks
Washington’s New Sanctions on North Korea

TIP ON NORTH KOREA
Inter-Korean Gap via Statistics

STUDIES  By Ko Kyung-min
Political Impacts of Internet in North Korea: Analysis and Prospects Based on Foreign Precedents

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS
Internal Affairs / External Affairs / Inter-Korean Affairs

PEOPLE & CHRONOLOGICAL REVIEW

COVER PHOTO: This photo shows the nightscape of downtown Pyongyang. It was released by the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) on Dec. 16, 2015 in memory of late North Korean leaders Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il. (KCNA-Yonhap)
After muddling through the past four years, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un enters his fifth year in power in 2016 with a heap of domestic and external challenges. As ever before, the young leader confronts the country’s deepening isolation due to his obsession with nuclear weapons, coupled with its dismal human rights violations. Yet, he has to focus on rebuilding its moribund economy to feed the impoverished country’s 24 million people.

The leader has inherited autocratic power from his father Kim Jong-il who died in December 2011. It was the first third-generational succession of supreme power in communism’s 100-year history.

Kim Jong-un’s grip on power was never an easy task. Kim ruthlessly removed potential rivals, including his uncle and one-time mentor Jang Song-thaek, and replaced top military brass with people loyal to him.

Kim elevated the role and status of the ruling Workers’ Party. In due course, the status of the military has downgraded, although Kim Jong-un outwardly maintained his father’s ruling ideology of the military-first politics.

Kim Jong-un’s Attempts

Over the years, Kim went all out to resuscitate the North’s stagnant economy by 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.

Externally, its isolation has deepened with the United States and Western countries, mainly due to its obsession with nuclear weapons and missiles. The six-party talks to end Pyongyang’s nuclear ambitions have been stalled since its last session in 2008.

Despite some signs of a thaw, the North’s relations with China have not been so smooth as Beijing has appeared to distance itself from its wayward socialist neighbor. China seeks to undertake a more responsible role as a region-
al power.

At the center of the diplomatic setback is the North’s adherence to its nuclear weapons program, as Kim Jong-un set the “byeongjin” line, or paralleled promotion of nuclear and economic capabilities, as his national goal. Seoul and Washington have warned that the North’s dual-track policy is a dead end.

Since assuming power, Kim has continued efforts to tighten his grip through the frequent changes of top officials and idolization projects. He has appointed cronies to key positions within the Workers’ Party and he has replaced top army brass several times.

The North’s leader has executed around 100 party and military officials, according to the Institute for National Security Strategy (INSS), a think tank under South Korea’s state spy agency.

In May, North Korea executed Hyon Yong-chol, former defense chief, with an anti-aircraft gun over alleged disloyalty to Kim. In November, Choe Ryong-hae, a senior secretary of the ruling party and a key aide to Kim, was sent to a rural farm as punishment for his mishandling of a newly built hydroelectric power plant project.

Kim Yong-chun, who was vice marshal in the North Korean military, a position now held by Hwang Pyong-so, was also demoted and now holds a minor position in the party.

The INSS said that a growing number of North Korean power elites are disenchanted with the leader’s brutal governing style. “Deep doubts about Kim’s leadership are spreading among working-level officials. Some officials based in foreign nations are trying to seek asylum,” it said.

But experts said that there is a slim possibility that such jitters will evolve seriously enough to threaten the North’s regime in the short term.

Iron-fisted Rule

The iron-fisted rule has helped the North’s leader reshuffle old-time officials and set up his own legacy, experts said. “What strikes in
the North’s power structure is the emergence of new power elites in their 40s and 50s,” said Kim Yong-hyun, a professor of North Korean studies at Dongguk University in Seoul. “A shift in generations will continue among party officials.”

In May this year, North Korea will convene its first congress of the ruling Workers’ Party in 36 years. Analysts said that the planned congress will be a watershed for gauging the direction of Kim’s governing rule.

Kim Jong-un is expected to reveal his new aides in the major party convention, a South Korean government think tank said recently. The reclusive North is also unlikely to conduct a nuclear test in 2016, raising the possibility of a breakthrough in efforts to resume the six-way talks to denuclearize North Korea, according to the Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU).

Chances are high that it will set the stage for a “political ceremony for the full-scale resignation of the second revolutionary generation led by Choe Ryong-hae and the rise of the third and fourth revolutionary generations to power,” the institute said in a report.

As to the scheduled party congress to be attended by more than 3,000 officials, the KINU said it would introduce more new faces in the ruling elite rather than fresh policies.

“A new line-up of power elites in the Kim Jong-un administration will be revealed,” it said, adding Kim is apparently confident of his grip on state affairs.

“That would have been a basis for Kim Jong-un’s decision to open the 7th party congress in 2016.” The institute expects Kim to offer an olive branch toward the South in his New Year speech.

Historically, the Workers’ Party congresses were rife with accusations of factionalism and political purges, but were also used to make key changes in the ideological doctrine of the isolated state.

**Full-fledged Start of Kim’s Era**

Experts said that Pyongyang is using the congress to herald the full-fledged start of Kim’s era.

“Kim is expected to push for an overhaul of the party’s leadership and personnel reshuffle at the scheduled congress,” said Cheong Seong-chang, a senior researcher at the Sejong Institute, a South Korean private think tank. “His grip on power will likely be strengthened further. By putting his young elite aides, including his sister Yo-jong, at the forefront of the party, Kim will strengthen his grip on power,” he said.

Moreover, the Pyongyang regime is expected to put more emphasis on economic development to improve the livelihood of the poor North Korean residents. To this end, the North will likely expand the burgeoning market economy and to attract as much foreign capital as possible to boost its sluggish economy.

The Workers’ Party celebrated its 70th founding anniversary on Oct. 10 with a military parade in Pyongyang. In a rare public speech, Kim Jong-un promised to introduce “people-first” policies in a possible hint at a future change of policy direction.

Kim Jong-un regime’s economic policy is still in its test period without yet reaching 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 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 sluggish 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.

North Korea’s economic conditions appear to be improving thanks to a series of economic and agricultural reforms the impoverished regime has introduced, a recent U.S. congressional report said.

**Economic Conditions**

The assessment by the Congressional Research Service could suggest the North’s “byeongjin” policy of simultaneously pursuing economic and nuclear development may be working, albeit on a limited scale, though U.S. and South Korean officials have dismissed the policy as a nonstarter.

“Since early 2015, reports have trickled in about modest economic growth in North Korea. A series of tentative economic reforms announced in 2014 appear to have lifted the living standard for a portion of ordinary North Koreans,” the CRS said in a report on July 27.

“The reforms, which appear to apply market principles to some sectors of North Korean
business and agriculture, have created opportunities for economic growth in the impoverished country,” the report said.

In North Korean cities, such practices as allowing managers to set salaries and hire and fire workers are permitted while agricultural reforms in the countryside allow farmers to keep a larger portion of their harvests, the report said.

Along the border with China, the report said, journalists have reported a bustle of commerce and trade, including scores of labor compounds on the Chinese side that employ North Korean workers in factories, and large-scale construction taking place on the North Korean side.

“Economists caution that these reforms are modest in scale and are far from irreversible, but they may be enough to lift North Korea’s moribund economy from its low base,” the report said.

The Unification Ministry in Seoul said the North’s economy seems to have recovered based on the data, but it is questionable whether North Koreans’ livelihoods have improved.

North Korea’s economic growth is estimated to have slowed in 2014 from a year earlier as its staple industries posted tepid performances while the gap in gross national income (GNI) between the two Koreas widened slightly, according to the Bank of Korea on July 17.

The North’s economy is projected to have expanded 1.0 percent in 2014, decelerating from the 1.1 percent on-year growth in the previous year, according to the data compiled by the central bank.

It has posted economic expansions for four years in a row since it contracted 0.9 percent and 0.5 percent in 2009 and 2010, respectively.

The report said the North’s relations with China have been “unusually poor” since 2013, compared with the pattern over the previous two decades.

The souring ties may have spurred the North to expand its relations with Russia, but Moscow is unable to provide the economic ballast that Beijing has traditionally given the North, it said.

Meanwhile, a German expert predicted recently that Kim Jong-un could announce a dramatic policy change, comparable to economic reforms that China and Vietnam embraced in the 1980s, when he convenes the Workers’ Party congress this year.

Ruediger Frank, a North Korea expert at the University of Vienna, said Kim could use the meeting for a “declaration of his victory in the domestic struggle for power” after massive purges in the past years or to announce a major policy change marking the departure down a path of true reform.

Policy Toward Seoul

Another focal point of interest on the Workers’ Party congress is whether the reclusive country will adopt a new policy line toward its southern neighbor. South and North Korea reached a landmark deal on Aug. 25 to make efforts to defuse military tension and hold high-level talks in either Seoul or Pyongyang as soon as possible.

There are a number of contentious issues between the two Koreas.

North Korea has urged Seoul to lift its punitive sanctions on the North and to resume a suspended joint tour program at Mount Kumgang on the North’s east coast. Seoul sus-
Suspended the Mount Kumgang tour program, a symbol of inter-Korean reconciliation, in 2008 following the fatal shooting of a South Korean female tourist by a North Korean soldier at the scenic resort.

Since May 2010, South Korea has imposed economic sanctions on North Korea to punish it for the deadly sinking of a South Korean warship in March of that year.

President Park Geun-hye said on Nov. 13 that she is open to a summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un if the North shows sincerity in giving up its nuclear weapons program and improving Seoul-Pyongyang relations.

Park said that exchanges in the areas of culture, environment and quality of life should be facilitated to promote the unity of Koreans on both sides and expand cooperation.

As part of efforts to improve its ties with the North, the Seoul government is seeking to spur civilian exchanges while placing top priority on finding a solution to the issue of separated families.

**Rough Road for Inter-Korean Dialogue**

Still, inter-Korean dialogue has rough road ahead, as seen at the recent high-level talks.

The two Koreas ended the rare vice-ministerial talks on Dec. 12 without producing any agreement, casting a cloud over inter-Korean ties.

The talks broke down due to differences over a series of pending issues. Seoul officials said the talks turned into a tug-of-war as
Pyongyang officials insisted on resuming the lucrative tours to the North’s scenic mountain and linking the issue to the separated families.

The South Korean side insisted the “humanitarian issue” of divided families should be separate from the resumption of the tour program.

As the inter-Korean relations remain deadlocked, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon plans to visit Pyongyang. Ban, who has roughly a year remaining in his term, has repeatedly expressed hope to play a meaningful role in improving inter-Korean relations and bringing peace to the divided Korean Peninsula before his term ends in December.

Observers said his rumored Pyongyang trip is likely to help him leave a legacy as the head of the U.N. Ban is seen as a potential presidential hopeful in the 2017 election despite his repeated denials that he will run.

As to the breakdown of the recent inter-Korean high-level talks, Ban said, “We should not be frustrated. I sincerely hope that the parties will continue to engage in talks so that they can, first of all, expand the political space through dialogue and exchanges and cooperation, so that they can, first of all, build reconciliation between the two parties.”

North Korea’s relations with China, its traditional ally and biggest economic benefactor, have also been less than smooth. A sign of strain between the two countries is the fact that Chinese President Xi Jinping has yet to meet North Korea’s Kim Jong-un, even though he has visited Seoul and held several summits with South Korean President Park Geun-hye.

Pyongyang-Beijing Relations

Moreover, Pyongyang-Beijing relations have long been stagnant as China was upset with North Korea’s nuclear test in early 2013 and the North’s execution of Jang, who had close ties with Chinese officials.

But their icy ties have shown signs of improvement since China sent Liu Yunshan, who ranks fifth in China’s ruling Communist Party hierarchy, to the North’s event to mark the Workers’ Party founding anniversary on Oct. 10. The North conducted a massive military parade to mark the party’s anniversary. Kim delivered a rare public speech ahead of the parade where the North Korean leader showed his care for people.

“There is a possibility that China may give a ‘big present’ to North Korea ahead of the North’s planned party congress or the North’s leader may visit China,” said Yoo Ho-yol, a professor of North Korean studies at Korea University.

Ahead of the major party event, Kim may take a conciliatory gesture toward China in a bid to produce some achievements in both internal and diplomatic affairs, some experts said.

But other analysts said that how smoothly their relations will go hinges on whether North Korea is willing to give up its nuclear weapons. China has warned against nuclear tests and missile launches, reiterating its principled approach against the North’s nuclear arsenal.

In December, China’s diplomacy with its key ally North Korea displayed uncertainty after the sudden cancellation of the concerts in Beijing by an all-female band formed by the North’s leader Kim Jong-un, diplomatic sources and analysts said.

Organized by the International Department of the Chinese Communist Party’s Central
Committee, North Korea’s Moranbong Band had been scheduled to perform for three days in a row starting Dec. 12 in Beijing, in what was seen as a fresh sign that ties between the allies were getting warmer.

However, the North Korean band abruptly returned home hours before the first concert began because of unspecified communication issues. The abrupt cancellation of the concerts was the latest example of North Korea’s unpredictability and the difficulty that China faces in building a normal, state-to-state relationship with the traditional ally.

Cheong Seong-chang, a senior analyst at the Sejong Institute in Seoul, said, “The cancellation may not pose an immediate and big impact on relations between North Korea and China, but it will deepen mistrust from the Chinese leadership over North Korea’s behavior.”

Tug-of-war with U.S.

Yet, tough roads lie ahead of Kim’s tasks in diplomacy. North Korea is expected to continue a tug-of-war with the United States and Western countries while exaggerating its war deterrence capabilities. Over the past years, the North has strongly criticized the annual Korea-U.S. joint military exercises taking place on and around the Korean Peninsula.

A North Korea watcher said the two Cold War enemies would not get back to negotiations easily as Washington is utilizing the North’s nuclear threats for political purposes, while Pyongyang is utilizing Western countries pressure as an excuse of its continued provocations as seen in past years.
North Korea has accused the U.S. of trying to topple its regime and also accused Western countries of exaggerating the gravity of the issue in a scheme to undermine its socialist regime. In this connection, the North’s human rights and nuclear program will be the main issues for the North’s diplomatic battle in the coming year. The North also views its nuclear programs as a powerful deterrent against what it claims is Washington’s hostile policy toward it.

In December, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un claimed that the country has become a “powerful nuclear weapons state ready to detonate a self-reliant A-bomb and H-bomb.” It was believed to be the first time that Kim has publicly claimed development of a hydrogen bomb, which is much more powerful than conventional nuclear weapons.

Pyongyang’s relations with Tokyo have remained at a standstill for years. For the past decade or so, North Korea and Japan have been in a stalemate on the abduction issue since Pyongyang admitted in 2002 to have abducted 13 Japanese nationals. The two neighboring countries have engaged in various forms of contact to resolve thorny bilateral issues but so far to no avail.

Relations with Tokyo

North Korea and Japan agreed in May 2014 to carry out a full-scale reinvestigation into the decades-old issues of Pyongyang’s abduction of Japanese citizens and lift sanctions against the North at talks held in Stockholm.

Japan officially lists 17 citizens as abduction victims but suspects North Korea’s involvement in many more disappearances. While five of the 17 were repatriated in 2002, Pyongyang maintains that eight have died and the other four never entered the country.

The abduction talks had been stalled since 2004 after Tokyo dismissed North Korea’s claims that eight were already dead. Recently, Japan became frustrated over the slow pace of North Korea’s abduction probe. North has told Japan that it needs more time to complete its latest round of investigations.

As North Korea set up an investigation committee in July 2014, Japan eased some of its unilateral sanctions targeting the socialist state. With the purported one-year deadline of July 4 having passed, Japanese lawmakers demanded the government tighten sanctions on the North.

For a cash-strapped Pyongyang, the normalization of relations with Tokyo will be an opportunity to shore up its economy and make good on its much-trumpeted promises to enhance the livelihood of ordinary people. Pyongyang is looking forward to receiving financial compensation for Japan’s 1910-45 colonial rule through a normalization deal.

In a 1965 normalization deal, Seoul received monetary reparations that were used for national development at the time. Through improved ties with Pyongyang, Tokyo also seeks to ease the regional diplomatic isolation. Japan has been estranged from South Korea and China amid their territorial and historical feuds.

North Korea maintains Japan has not made up for its wartime aggression, and demands compensation and atonement. Japan led the U.N.’s condemnation of North’s human rights violations to the United Nations together with the European Union.

On the other hand, North Korea and Russia have been boosting their diplomatic relations
and economic cooperation by declaring 2015 a year of friendship.

Russian President Vladimir Putin is also eager to bolster ties with North Korea in an apparent move against America’s pivot to Asia. After Russia was isolated internationally following its military incursions in Ukraine in 2014, its relations with North Korea notably improved.

**Pyongyang-Moscow Relations**

Russia and North Korea announced they will deepen economic and political ties under the theme of a “Year of Friendship” and step up bilateral exchanges in political, economic and cultural sectors.

The designation came as the two countries are scurrying to tighten bilateral ties amid languid North-China relations. Choe Ryong-hae, a secretary of the North’s ruling Workers’ Party, visited Russia in November 2014 as a special envoy of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un as part of efforts to improve relations.

“North Korea has been striving to strengthen economic cooperation with Moscow, though it will take time for the North to diversify its trade markets due to its heavy dependence on China in the past,” said Cho Bong-hyun, a senior research fellow at the state-run Industrial Bank of Korea in Seoul.

Under the situation, a most conspicuous development was taking place between North Korea and Russia. Russian news media have frequently said the economic relations between the two countries have reached a new level, as they are carrying out transactions in Russian rubles following the write-off of the bulk of North Korean debt.

Russia’s parliament has agreed to write off almost $10 billion of North Korea’s Soviet-era debt, in a deal expected to facilitate the building of a gas pipeline to South Korea across the reclusive state. Russia has written off debts to a number of impoverished Soviet-era allies, including Cuba.

The State Duma lower house on April 18, 2014, ratified a 2012 agreement to write off the bulk of North Korea’s debt. It said the total debt stood at $10.96 billion as of Sept. 17, 2012. The rest of the debt, $1.09 billion, would be redeemed during the next 20 years, to be paid in equal installments every six months.

Moscow also supported Pyongyang’s position for resuming the bogged-down six-party talks on the nuclear issue. However, Russia has made no secret of its determination not to tolerate a nuclear-armed North, because it shares the interests of other nuclear-armed countries, including the U.S., in maintaining the nuclear nonproliferation treaty.

Overall, North Korea is standing at a crossroads, facing a choice between deeper international isolation or a new relationship with the world through reform and opening-up -- including a new start to discussions on denuclearization.

The first test lies in its relationship with Seoul. President Park 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 could go forward much without improving inter-Korean relations first. (Yonhap)
Rise and Fall of North Korea’s Power Elites

“The North’s leader Kim has sought to cut down any sprouts that could pose a threat to his regime as fast as possible,” said Kim Yong-hyun, a professor of North Korean studies at Dongguk University.

By Kim Tae-shik

In 2015, the fourth year of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un’s leadership, the landscape of North Korea’s top hierarchy showed remarkable changes under the “reign of terror” by the young leader.

The most prominent figures who rose to power and fell from it are military power men Hwang Pyong-so and Choe Ryong-hae. Hwang emerged as the North’s number two power man and chief political officer in the military. His name was newly listed to the top rank in the Korean People’s Army (KPA) and the Workers’ Party of Korea (WPK). He became a member of the KPA’s Political Department and vice chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC) of the WPK.

Traditionally the post of the CMC vice head has been taken by the director of the KPA political department or the KPA chief. Until the middle of 2014, Choe Ryong-hae, then director of KPA political department, and Hyon Yong-chol, then armed forces minister, had served the post.

Both Choe and Hyon have been purged.

The 75-year-old Hwang was named member of the WPK Political Bureau in April to replace Choe, who was named a WPK secretary. He was also learned to have been appointed vice chairman of the Central Military Commission of the party in August although there was no formal announcement.

Choe, who had reportedly engaged in fierce competition with Hwang, is believed by North Korea watchers here to have been sent to a remote cooperation farm in Hamgyong Province for “revolutionary reeducation.”

Choe, who once rose to become the second man in power in the North only after Kim, has been ousted due to “negligence of duties” and...
his objection to policies of Kim, according to media reports.

Born in 1950 as the second son of Choe Hyon, then armed forces minister, Choe Ryong-hae graduated from the prestigious Kim Il-sung University and started his career as deputy director of the Kim Il-sung Socialist Youth League in the latter half of the 1960s.

Choe was punished for involvement in a scandal in 1998 but appointed as the deputy director of WPK general affairs department in 2003.

Choe seemed to have been excluded from the inner circle of the power group the next year when he was sent to a cooperation farm for committing irregularities. Following the inauguration of the Kim Jong-un regime, Choe made a splendid comeback in 2012. He was named general director of the KPA political department, a member of the WPK Central Committee and vice chairman of the Central Military Commission of the WPK.

**Fall of Choe Ryong-hae**

Choe was known to have been stripped of his power to take responsibilities for the poor construction of Paektusan Youth Power Plant and objection against Kim’s youth policies.

Rumors of Choe’s fall were first spread in South Korea in early November. Choe’s name was missing from the state funeral committee for Ri Ul-sol, marshal of the Korean People’s Army who died on Nov. 7.

Speculation was spreading that Choe, a close confidant to Kim Jong-un, may have been removed from power or be experiencing some personal problems due to his disappearance from the list of some 170 officials on the funeral committee for the veteran military official.

Moreover, Choe was not seen in a group of officials who accompanied Kim Jong-un on his visit to the mortuary where Ri’s body was laid to rest on Nov. 8 in Pyongyang.
Accompanying the young North Korean leader to the mortuary were other high-flying executives listed in the committee, such as Hwang Pyong-so, vice chairman of the National Defense Commission and director of the general political bureau of the military; People’s Armed Forces Minister Pak Yong-sik; and Ri Yong-gil, chief of the KPA general staff.

The list of the funeral committee for Ri showed some changes in the ranks of the North Korean leadership.

The order of names on lists of funeral committee members for important figures like Ri gives valuable clues to who has been promoted, demoted or purged from the most elite circle of power in North Korea.

The funeral committee put Kim Jong-un on top of the power chain as First Chairman of the National Defense Commission, followed by Kim Yong-nam, the North’s titular head of state; Hwang Pyong-so; Cabinet Premier Pak Pong-ju; and WPK Secretary Kim Ki-nam.

Hyon Yong-chol, who was reported by South Korea’s intelligence agency to have been executed in April on charges of being disrespectful for Kim -- possibly for falling asleep in Kim Jong-un’s presence at a meeting -- was not on the list. Pyongyang has not verified Hyon’s execution or his whereabouts.

Gen. Choe Pu-il, minister of people’s security, who was rumored to be demoted after the deadly collapse of an apartment project in Pyongyang last May, made an appearance on the list as the 18th official, which could be seen as his regaining of the trust of leader Kim.

Ri Jae-il, first vice director of the party’s propaganda and agitation department; An Jong-su, director of the light industry department; and Han Kwang-sang, director of the finance and accounting department, appeared to have also been dismissed.

**Rise of Leader’s Sister**

Among the kin of Kim Jong-un, Kim’s once powerful aunt Kim Kyong-hui faded out while his younger sister Yo-jong emerged in 2015.

Kim Kyong-hui has stepped down from most of her major posts, a South Korean government directory on the secretive neighbor’s ruling elites showed on Dec. 18.

The 2015 directory, released by the Ministry of Unification, does not include Kim Kyong-hui’s name on the list of the Cabinet members, the list of ruling Workers’ Party of Korea’s secretaries or the party’s politburo.

The 69-year old is a daughter of North Korean founder Kim Il-sung and sister of late leader Kim Jong-il. She married Jang Song-thaek, former vice chairman at the all-powerful National Defense Commission, who was unexpectedly executed in 2013 for treason charges.

Since her husband’s purge, Kim has often been rumored to have been dismissed or in ill-health.

“It has been mostly likely confirmed that Kim Kyong-hui resigned from all official posts following the purge of Jang Song-thaek,” a South Korean government official said. The official said the unification ministry’s directory was compiled based on publicly accessible data.

He added the aunt has not appeared to the public even once since September 2013.

Kim Yo-jong, 28, who became the vice director of the party’s propaganda and agitation department in November 2014 made pub-
lic appearances to accompany her brother on more than 25 occasions in 2015.

Yo-jong was seen near the head table of the North’s biggest military parade on Oct. 10 to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Workers’ Party. She did not have a seat at the head table but presided over the entire process of the event of the day. She also accompanied her brother when he made guidance of a leisure boat Mujigae on Sept. 28. Yo-jong is known to be making effort to maintain Kim Jong-un’s power base. She is in charge of propaganda affairs and indoctrination education of the North Korean residents.

She was first spotted at a photo session for participants at the 3rd Conference of the Workers’ Party of Korea in September 2010.

Kim Yo-jong was given much publicity during the funeral service for Kim Jong-il in December 2011, when she appeared several times alongside her brother Kim Jong-un or leading funeral processions of central officials, although she was not a funeral committee member. She was then reportedly given a position under the National Defense Commission at the beginning of 2012 as tour manager for Kim Jong-un, but has not appeared in news reports except for November 2012, when the Korean Central Television showed her accompanying Kim Jong-un at a military riding
ground. She was officially mentioned for the first time on March 9, 2014, as she accompanied her brother in voting for the Supreme People’s Assembly. Kim Yo-jong was identified as a “senior official” of the WPK Central Committee.

In October 2014, she was reported to have possibly taken over state duties for her ailing brother while he underwent medical treatment for months.

On November 28, 2014, she was named vice director of the Workers’ Party’s Propaganda and Agitation Department (PAD). On July 24, 2015, Kim Yo-jong, was made in charge of the PAD. As the vice director of the country’s propaganda arm, she will be in charge of developing her brother’s cult of personality. She replaced Kim Ki-nam, 89, who has run PAD since the 1990s and served the Kim dynasty since the 1960s.

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un is expected to reveal his new aides in a major WPK convention to be held in May in 2016, a South Korean government think tank said on Dec. 15.

Possible Change in 2016 WPK Congress

The Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU) said in a report chances are high that it will set the stage for a “political ceremony for the full-scale resignation of the second revolutionary generation led by Choe Ryong-hae and the rise of the third and fourth revolutionary generations to power.” The institute made the report on the outlook for this year’s security situation involving the North.

As to the scheduled party congress to be attended by more than 3,000 officials, the KINU said it would introduce more new faces in the ruling elite rather than fresh policies.

“A new line-up of power elites in the Kim Jong-un administration will be revealed,” it said, adding Kim is apparently confident of his grip on state affairs. “That would have been a basis for Kim Jong-un’s decision to open the 7th party congress in 2016.”

Meanwhile, North Korean officials are increasingly disenchanted with Kim Jong-un’s iron-fisted rule, but such a sentiment seems not to be serious yet enough to pose a threat to his leadership at least in the short term, analysts said.

The North’s young leader ordered the execution of his once-powerful uncle for treason in December, 2013. The execution of the high-profile figure was conducted in a brutal way just four days after he was removed from all of his posts.

The case was a key example of Kim’s reign of terror, in which he has sought to consolidate his power since taking office in 2011 following the sudden death of his father Kim Jong-il.

Experts said that a series of purges and executions have paved the way for Kim to take a firm grip on power although party and military officials’ complaints are on the rise.

“The North’s leader Kim has sought to cut down any sprouts that could pose a threat to his regime as fast as possible,” said Kim Yong-hyun, a professor of North Korean studies at Dongguk University. (Yonhap)
Uncertainties over Inter-Korean Talks

South and North Korea’s failure to produce a breakthrough at their recent high-level talks is feared to bring their frayed ties to a standstill.

By Lee Kwang-ho

Uncertainties over the prospects of inter-Korean ties rose recently as the rare cross-border talks broke down due to differences over a series of pending issues including the stalled tours to Mount Kumgang and the issue of families separated by the border.

The breakdown came when South and North Korea ended rare high-level talks on Dec. 12 without producing any agreement on mending ties, casting a cloud over inter-Korean ties. The vice-ministerial talks were the first since the incumbent Park Geun-hye government took office in early 2013.

The two Koreas failed to set the date for further talks at the two-day vice-ministerial meeting held at a joint industrial park in the North’s border city of Kaesong.

Seoul officials said the talks that started on Dec. 11 turned into a tug-of-war as Pyongyang officials insisted on resuming the lucrative tours to the North’s scenic mountain and linking the issue to the reunion of families separated by the border at the end of the 1950-53 Korean War.

The South Korean side insisted the “humanitarian issue” of divided families should be separate from the issue of the resumption of the tour program, which was suspended after a South Korean tourist was shot dead in 2008 for purportedly straying into off-limit areas.

The breakdown dampened hopes for improvement in bilateral ties that remain chilly due to the North’s provocations and pursuit of nuclear arms, among other issues.

“The North Korean side did not budge an inch from its stance that without the resolution of the issue of the tour program, they would not discuss any other issues,” Seoul’s Vice Unification Minister Hwang Boo-gi told reporters after the two-day talks.

Hwang led the South Korean delegation during the talks, while the North Korean side was headed by Jon Jong-su, a vice director of the North’s Committee for Peaceful Reunification of Korea which handles inter-Korean affairs.
Tug-of-war between Two Koreas

The government talks were held after the two sides agreed to hold them to enhance cross-border relations under a broader Aug. 25 deal that brought the two sides away from the brink of an armed clash following Pyongyang’s land-mine provocation on Aug. 4 and artillery fire on Aug. 20. Two South Korean soldiers were maimed in the incident.

Holding the high-level meeting was a key element of the August inter-Korean agreement to ease tension and promote more civilian exchanges.

Hwang said that during the talks his delegation prioritized finding a “fundamental” resolution to the issue of separated families. His delegation demanded the two sides allow separated families to find out whether their loved ones are still alive and to enable the cross-border exchange of letters among them.

But Pyongyang has kept a lukewarm stance, hoping to barter the issue with the resumption of the tour program.

In October, the two Koreas held family reunions at Mount Kumgang and have held 20 rounds of such events so far since the first inter-Korean summit in 2000.

Seoul has said that such a one-off event is too insufficient to fulfill the hopes of around 66,000 elderly people to meet their kin in North Korea.

In two days, the South and North Korean delegations, composed of three members each, met over five sessions.

Hwang said he had explained to Pyongyang on the first day that “nuclear weapons are an impediment to advancing South-North Korean relations, so the issue must be resolved.”

As Pyongyang repeatedly continued to emphasize that it would discuss inter-Korean family reunions only after Mount Kumgang tourism was specified in the agreement, South Korea’s top agenda items failed to be discussed in detail.

Those included facilitating a letter exchange
between war-torn families and verifying surviving relatives, a proposal to build an international peace park in the demilitarized zone, and resolving customs and communications issues at the Kaesong Industrial Complex.

**Contentious Issues**

Seoul reiterated its stance that Pyongyang should take measures to prevent a recurrence of the 2008 fatal shooting incident, guarantee the safety of South Korean tourists and South Korean properties in the resort facilities.

But the North pressed the South to reopen the tour program in exchange, rejecting Seoul’s offer for separate working-level talks to discuss the issue, he added.

“We stressed that it is not proper to connect the issue of separated families to the resumption of the tour,” Hwang told a group of reporters in the North’s city.

Pyongyang has repeatedly pressed Seoul to reopen the tour program to earn hard currency as it is under heavy U.N. sanctions over its nuclear tests and missile launches.

North Korea reportedly proposed that if tourism on Mount Kumgang were to be reinstated in March or April, inter-Korean family reunions could be discussed.

Tours at the scenic North Korean mountain resort started in 1998 and had since become a symbol of inter-Korean rapprochement and cooperation until it was halted in 2008.

As the two sides failed to set a date for follow-up talks, future government-level dialogue is likely at an impasse for the time being.

Hwang said that his delegation had suggested to Pyongyang that they remain in contact over the Panmunjom channel, but added that North Korea had not given a clear answer.

South Korea proposed to Pyongyang another round of talks for 10 a.m. on Dec. 14. But in response, “North Korea unilaterally gave the position that the South Korean side does not seem to have any will to resume the tourism program, and so therefore, there is no need to
negotiate any further,” Hwang said.

North Korea passed the buck to South Korea over the talks’ results, taking issue with Seoul’s attitude. Pyongyang’s official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported on Dec. 12 that the South had refused to discuss fundamental issues, including the resumption of the Mount Kumgang tourism program, and insisted on “unreasonable claims.”

It went on to say that the North Korean delegation put in “sincere efforts to propose constructive plans to resume the most urgent and feasible tourism on Mount Kumgang, resolving speedily the issue of scattered families, along with the revitalization of diverse civilian exchanges.”

Pyongyang’s Reaction

Because of South Korea’s position and attitude, it added, the talks ended without anything coming to fruition.

Uriminzokkiri, the North’s state-run propaganda Web site, further blamed South Korea on Dec. 13 for the talks falling through, saying it had been slanderous and defamatory, “spoil- ing the mood for talks and the improvement of relations.”

It also cited President Park Geun-hye’s speech on Dec. 1 to UNESCO in Paris as an issue, saying that the speech had attacked Pyongyang over nuclear threats and human rights issues, and warned South Koreans involved in improving inter-Korean relations to “pay heed to their words and actions.”

On Dec. 15, North Korea said that prospects of its relations with South Korea look bleaker as Pyongyang accused Seoul of being responsible for the collapse of their recent high-level talks.

The talks brought about results that are worse than not holding talks and “the prospects of North-South relations became even bleaker,” a spokesman of the North’s Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea said in a statement carried by the KCNA.

The unidentified spokesman of the North’s body also said South Korea will be held responsible for the collapse of the talks.

Meanwhile, South Korea’s Unification Ministry, which handles inter-Korean affairs, expressed regret over what it says is North Korea’s distortion of facts and urged Pyongyang to respond to Seoul’s efforts to move forward inter-Korean ties.

This round of talks initially raised expectations that this kind of inter-Korean governmental dialogue could become regularized.

Experts’ View

With the breakdown in negotiations, some experts in Seoul have expressed doubt over the prospect of future talks.

Cheong Seong-chang, an expert on North Korea and a senior analyst with the Seoul-based Sejong Institute think tank, pointed out that the results were “already predictable” if the South Korean government had held the
position that the resumption of tourism on Mount Kumgang was not open for discussion.

If the Park Geun-hye government did not intend to discuss the program’s reinstatement, he added, then it would have been more appropriate to instead hold working-level talks.

Analysts also said that the deal breaker for the talks was a sharp division over dealing with the resumption of a suspended joint tour program at Mount Kumgang.

“There was no reason for North Korea to solve the separated family issue if Seoul would not accept its request over the tour project,” said Chang Yong-seok, a researcher at the Seoul National University Institute for Peace and Unification Studies.

“The North would want to achieve some feats on inter-Korean affairs ahead of the ruling party’s congress in 2016,” said Kim Yong-hyun, a professor of North Korean studies at Dongguk University in Seoul. “For the North’s part, if Seoul does not accept its request for the tour issue, North Korea’s room for maneuver is limited.”

Analysts said that inter-Korean ties may be strained for the time being as the two sides could not set the date for future talks. But some said that all doors for further dialogue are not closed as the North still has the motivation to improve inter-Korean relations ahead of the May congress of the Workers’ Party of Korea.

“I don’t think that momentum for dialogue has totally fizzled out. The two sides have earned a chance to further think about how to resolve their pressing issues,” said Hong Hyun-ik, a senior researcher at Sejong Institute.

Meanwhile, the talks’ breakdown coincided with the abrupt cancellation of a well-publicized concert in Beijing by an all-female band formed by the North’s leader, Kim Jong-un. The planned concert by Moranbong Band had been considered an important sign of a thaw in chilled relations between the two sides.

A U.S. expert said on Dec. 15 the simultaneous breakdown of North Korean efforts to reach out to South Korea and China could suggest that Pyongyang cannot play the game the way it wants and rebuild its economy as long as it remains on a nuclear path.

It is unclear what exactly caused the cancellation, but sources said it followed China’s decision to send officials of lower rank to the concert in response to the North’s leader hinting recently that Pyongyang had developed a hydrogen bomb.

“If both inter-Korean relations and improvement of Sino-DPRK relations have floundered as a result of North Korea’s continued commitment to nuclear development, it would be powerful evidence that Pyongyang’s ongoing nuclear efforts are pushing Seoul and Beijing together in their opposition to a nuclear North Korea in ways that are costly to the country’s leadership,” said Scott Snyder, a senior Korea analyst at the Council on Foreign Relations.

Through the two incidents, both Seoul and Beijing have sent “a powerful signal that North Korea’s alternatives to a return to denuclearization diplomacy are limited and costly to the North,” Snyder said in an article in the publication National Interest.

“Kim Jong-un’s idea of how to move forward seems premised on the idea that his nuclear deterrent is the only way to create a secure environment for North Korea’s economic development. Yet, his neighbors clearly believe North Korea’s economic survival and prosperity is only feasible if North Korea reverses course and pursues denuclearization,” the expert said. (Yonhap)
The United States has been intensifying its pressure on North Korea in the hope of getting the defying country to come to the table for talks on denuclearization.

The U.S. slapped fresh sanctions dealing with weapons proliferation on North Korea’s “Strategic Rocket Force” and other areas on Dec. 8 amid growing concern about the country’s ballistic missile capabilities.

The measure is interpreted as Washington’s firm determination to squarely counter the North’s moves to develop various missiles, including the latest failure of the North’s test-launch of a submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM).

The Strategic Rocket Force, which is charged with overseeing the North’s ballistic missile program, was accused of “engaging in activities that have materially contributed to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction or their means of delivery.”

“The Strategic Force conducted multiple ballistic missile launches during 2014. Specifically, it conducted the launches of two short-range Scud-class ballistic missiles on March 3, test-fired two medium-range No Dong (Rodong) class ballistic missiles on March 26 and conducted the launch of a short-range ballistic missile on July 26,” the Treasury Department said in a statement on its website.

“The launches of these missiles materially contributed to North Korea’s ballistic missile program,” it said.

Technically, it is the State Department that blacklisted the rocket force, though the announcement was included in the Treasury Department release.

Also sanctioned were six individuals and three shipping firms.

The individuals were Choe Song-il and Kim Jung-jong, Tanchon Commercial Bank officials based in Vietnam; Jang Bom-su and Jon Myong-guk, Tanchon Commercial Bank officials in Syria; Ko Tae-hun, a Tanchon Commercial Bank representative; and Kim Kyong-nam, an official of the North’s Foreign Trade Bank in Russia.

The three firms were Haejin, Pyongjin and Yongjin ship management firms.

“North Korea threatens international peace and security by expanding its nuclear program...”
and continuing its proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and conventional weapons,” said Acting Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Adam J. Szubin in the statement.

“Treasury is committed to exposing North Korea’s global proliferation network and excluding these facilitators from the international financial system,” he said.

Under the sanctions, any property or interest in property of the designated persons in the possession of U.S. persons or within U.S. jurisdiction must be frozen and transactions by U.S. persons involving the designated persons are generally prohibited, it said.

But the measures are seen only as symbolic, as those sanctioned are not believed to be holding any assets in the U.S. or engaged in any dealings with U.S. persons.

**North’s SLBM Test**

The U.S. measures followed the North’s failed test-launch of an SLBM in late November. The North fired a KN-11 missile from a submarine in the East Sea on Nov. 28, but the missile failed to emerge from the waters.

Expressing concern over North Korea’s test of an SLBM, the U.S. urged Pyongyang on Dec. 1 to refrain from violating U.N. Security Council resolutions. North Korea is banned from any test of ballistic missile technology by a series of U.N. resolutions.

“We’re obviously concerned by those reports,” State Department deputy spokesman Mark Toner said at a regular briefing.

The U.S. and its partners in the stalled six-party talks with the North continue to send a “very strong and clear and consistent message” to Pyongyang to “refrain from any violations of the U.N. Security Council resolutions, or any other actions that raise tensions in the region, and threaten international peace and security,” he said.

In May, North Korea claimed it successfully
carried out an SLBM test underwater, renewing tensions on the Korean Peninsula amid concerns that the North’s SLBM capability, if fully developed, would pose a serious threat because its mobile nature would make it very difficult to detect preparations for a launch.

But experts said it was believed not to be a full-scale test, but an “ejection” test conducted in an early stage of developing SLBM capabilities. U.S. officials said the North also exaggerated progress and is many years away from developing an SLBM.

Washington’s new sanctions also came five days after the U.S. held trilateral talks with South Korea and Japan.

The chief nuclear envoys of South Korea, the United States and Japan met in Washington on Dec. 3 for talks about how to deal with North Korea and its nuclear program.


Trilateral Talks

In addition to the SLBM test, North Korea is also believed to be excavating a new tunnel at its Punggye-ri nuclear test site that could be used for its fourth nuclear test.

North Korea has conducted three underground nuclear tests so far: in 2006, 2009 and 2013. The country has also conducted a series of long-range missile and rocket launches since 1998.

Pyongyang, meanwhile, has shown conciliatory gestures, agreeing to hold high-level talks with the South on Dec. 11.

Details of the three-way meeting were not immediately available, but the three countries were expected to exchange their views on the current situation and discuss ways to induce changes in North Korea’s attitude.

“We’ve reaffirmed the urgency to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue at the Korea-U.S. summit and reconfirmed our intention to strengthen Korea-U.S.-Japan cooperation at the Korea-Japan summit. This week’s meeting takes place in this context,” Hwang told Yonhap News Agency.

Hwang also said he’s considering adding a new element to the current two-track approach of pressure and dialogue toward the North. He did not elaborate on what the new element would be.

The three countries held the last gathering of their chief nuclear envoys in Seoul in May. The Dec. 3 meeting is also the first since Japan replaced its top delegate to the six-way talks in October.

After arriving in Washington, Hwang held a meeting with U.S. Treasury Department officials to discuss how to improve the effectiveness of sanctions on North Korea. He also held a bilateral meeting with the new Japanese envoy.

On Dec. 3, Hwang also had a one-on-one meeting with U.S. envoy Kim.

The two sides reaffirmed “there is no daylight” between the two countries on North Korea, the State Department said in a Twitter message without elaborating.

The six-party talks aimed at resolving the North Korean standoff have been stalled since late 2008. North Korea demands the unconditional resumption of negotiations, while the
U.S. says that Pyongyang must first take concrete steps demonstrating its denuclearization commitments.

Analysts have warned that it is only a matter of time until the North develops nuclear-tipped missiles capable of striking the U.S.

The analysts said the U.S. measures show Washington’s intention to maintain pressure on Pyongyang as the socialist country has not shown any fundamental changes in its position regarding denuclearization and nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction although it showed some gestures for dialogue.

Pyongyang urged the U.S. to have talks to discuss the replacement of the Korean War Armistice Agreement with a peace treaty.

The U.S. said on Dec. 8 that denuclearization remains the top priority in its dealings with North Korea as the nation has stepped up its demand for peace treaty negotiations.

North Korea has long demanded a peace treaty with the U.S. that would replace the 1953 armistice that halted the Korean War.

But Pyongyang has been stepping up its demand for peace treaty talks with the U.S. in recent months as the six-party nuclear talks have long remained stalled.

On Dec. 3, the North’s Foreign Ministry renewed the demand for unconditional peace treaty talks, claiming, “Nothing can be settled as long as the issue of concluding the peace treaty is mixed with the matter of realizing the denuclearization.”

The U.S. has said the North’s demand is a nonstarter as long as it pursues nuclear ambitions. U.S. officials have stressed that the regime has got the wrong order and should first focus on negotiations to end its nuclear program.

“Our policy has not changed, and we will judge North Korea by its actions, not its words. Denuclearization remains our top priority,” Katina Adams, a State Department spokesperson, said in response to a Yonhap News question about the North’s demand.

The U.S. also remains in close contact with
the other members of the six-party talks about the “shared goal of the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in a peaceful manner,” she said.

Analysts said the U.S. measures show Washington’s intention to maintain pressure on Pyongyang as the socialist country has not shown any fundamental changes in its position regarding denuclearization and nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction although it showed some gestures for dialogue.

Pyongyang’s Reaction

Reacting to Washington’s fresh sanctions, North Korea harshly condemned the new sanctions and claimed it has made positive and sincere efforts for peace on the Korean Peninsula by proposing the U.S. talks for a peace treaty.

A spokesman for North Korea’s Foreign Ministry on Dec. 16 claimed that the DPRK government’s positive and sincere efforts for ensuring solid and lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula are facing blatant challenges of the U.S. The DPRK is the acronym for the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, the North’s official title.

“The DPRK proposed the U.S. side to conclude a peace treaty as the most reasonable way for putting an end to the evil cycle of tension and confrontation that have lasted for more than six decades,” the spokesman said in a statement.

The statement said it is a clear reason that everybody can understand and sympathize with, as lasting peace and stability are only possible on the Korean Peninsula when the U.S. hostile policy toward the North is brought to an end and hostile relations between them are defused.

“Nevertheless, the U.S. is responding to the DPRK’s fair and aboveboard proposal by elaborating in action on its hostile policy already branded as ‘failed strategy’ far from taking a sincere approach toward the proposal,” it said.

The statement slammed the new U.S. sanctions for being a typical example of its recent ever more reckless moves to ratchet up “sanctions” against the North. It is putting the armed forces, munitions and trade organs of the North and their officials, as well as even North Korean diplomats, on the list of “sanctions.”

“Lurking behind this action is a sinister political intention to tarnish the international image of the DPRK and make other countries feel uneasy about dealing with it and thus suffocate its overall economy including munitions industry as well as civilian field,” it argued.

“If the U.S. persistently pursues its anachronistic hostile policy toward the DPRK this way, this would only entail unimaginable consequences quite contrary to what the U.S. desires,” warned the statement. (Yonhap)
Inter-Korean Gap via Statistics

S. Koreans live an average 12 years more than N. Koreans

South Koreans live 12 years more than their compatriots in the North on average, mainly due to fewer newborn deaths, government data showed on Dec. 20.

According to Statistics Korea, the life expectancy of a South Korean stood at 78.2 years for men and 85 for women in 2015. Corresponding numbers for North Korea were 66 for men and 72.7 for women.

This translates into an average South Korean man living 12.2 years longer than one in the North, while a South Korean woman could expect to live 12.3 years longer.

The latest estimate showed that if current trends continue, the gap could widen to 14.5 years for men and shrink to 11.9 years for women by 2055. In that year, a South Korean man’s life expectancy could hit 85.9 years and that for a woman could reach 89.8 years.

The statistics agency said the major reason for the difference can be found in the high infant mortality rate in North Korea.

In 2015, the number of infant deaths in the North for every 1,000 newborns reached 22, 7.6 times larger than the 2.9 deaths for the South.

Predictions showed that the infant mortality rate in the North could fall to 7.1 for every 1,000 newborns in 2055, but this would still be larger than 0.6 deaths estimated for the South in the same year.

In addition, the latest findings showed the average North Korean consumed 2,094 kilocalorie (kcal) of food per day compared with 3,056 kcal for a South Korean. The number for the North falls shy of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAOs) daily recommendation of 2,500 kcal, as well as the global average of 2,870 kcal.

In particular, the consumption of animal protein by a person living in the North hovered around 10.1 grams per day, one-fifth of 50.5 grams for South Korea. In terms of gender balance, South Korea had more men, while the North had more women.

In 2014, for every 100 women, there were
100.1 men in the South, while for the North the number stood at 95.3.

**Economic gap between two Koreas widens in 2014**

According to data by Statistics Korea, on Dec. 15. North Korea’s nominal gross national income (GNI) came to 34.23 trillion won (US$28.93 billion) in 2014, with that of the South hitting 1,496.6 trillion won, or roughly 44 times larger.

GNI is the total value that is produced within a country, which is comprised of the gross domestic product along with income obtained from other countries such as dividends and interest earnings.

In 2013, South Korea’s GNI was 42.6 times larger than the North’s. On a per-capita basis, South Korea’s GNI came to 29.7 million won, 21 times more than that of its northern neighbor, which stood at 1.39 million won. The difference widened slightly from the 20.8 times more tallied in 2013.

In addition, South Korea’s economy advanced 3.3 percent in 2014, compared to 1 percent for North Korea. On other fronts, as of the end of 2014, South Korea had a total population of 50.42 million compared to the North’s 24.66 million, according to the data.

South Korea also continued to greatly outperform the North in trade.

In 2014, South Korea’s overall trade volume came to a little under $1.1 trillion, 144 times larger than North Korea’s $7.6 billion.

South Korea’s overall energy output capacity reached 93.21 million kilowatts, 13 times larger than the North’s 7.25 million kilowatts, while in the area of rice production the South had a two-to-one advantage. In 2014, Seoul’s total rice production reached 4.24 million tons versus 2.15 million tons for Pyongyang.

In the mining and manufacturing sector, the South had a seven-fold lead in cement production, while in steel the gap was even greater, with South Korea’s output being 59 times larger than that of the North.

The two Koreas also showed significant gaps in social infrastructure. South Korea’s road network totaled 105,673 kilometers compared with the North’s 26,164 kilometers. (Yonhap)
Political Impacts of Internet in North Korea: Analysis and Prospects Based on Foreign Precedents

I. Introduction

It might still be impractical and embarrassing to mention the Internet system and its operation in North Korea although it has been a long time since the global system of interconnected computer networks, which use the Internet protocol suite (TCP/IP) to link billions of devices worldwide, became popular around the world. The North made its debut in cyberspace, a metaphor for describing the non-physical terrain created by computer systems, in January 1997. At that time the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), a mouthpiece of the North Korean authoritative socialist regime, launched a website for its Tokyo branch under a Japanese national domain name, <www.kcna.co.jp>, with a web server located there in Japan. The North began to use its own server in the country in October 2010 and its own national domain name <.kp> in January the next year. But the North has yet to allow its citizens to have free access to global Internet networks.

It might be unreasonable for scholars to discuss domestic political impacts of the North’s Internet system under strict state control. For this reason, academic concerns and studies of the North Korean Internet regime in South Korea and elsewhere remain in the province of curiosity. This worldwide scholarly attitude toward the North’s Internet regime has shown little change since it began to make policy changes in the Internet in 2010 or so. It was so because the North’s policy turn has affected insignificantly the strict restrictions imposed on its citizens’ access to foreign websites as well as the Internet’s nominal impact on the domestic political arena.

Despite these developments, evident is the fact that the Internet is meaningful to the North. The Internet can serve as a useful means of promoting economic development and democracy in the country. For the North as a police state, any democratic wind riding on the Internet...
is what it should deter, but the Internet’s positive economic effect is what it needs to promote. Considering 2.5 million citizens use cell phones with Internet functions, the Internet is one form of media with remarkable potential for bringing about significant change in the economic and political arenas.

This essay is aimed at analyzing the political influence of the Internet, a serious issue facing the North since it began to introduce more active policy measures regarding the cyber world. However, the North has not only launched its Internet system belatedly but has imposed strict restrictions on it to date. Because of these developments, it is hard for North Korea watchers to know how the North controls the Internet and utilizes it.

This essay is aimed at analyzing the political influence of the Internet, a serious issue facing the North since it began to introduce more active policy measures regarding the cyber world. However, the North has not only launched its Internet system belatedly but has imposed strict restrictions on it to date. Because of these developments, it is hard for North Korea watchers to know how the North controls the Internet and utilizes it.

This issue is not unique to the North but has been common in socialist regimes or other authoritative political regimes in the past. For this reason, their experiences and policy measures regarding the Internet can be used as reference data in this essay for analyzing political influence of the Internet in the North, which has made the related information unavailable.

The situation facing the North Korean Internet regime can be explained in two theoretical points when various views on the Internet’s political influence are simplified on a basis of existing discussions of that influence. One is to set democratization as a political effect of the Internet. According to this logic, the North can hardly escape the dilemma for long when it is hard to determine whether it should lift all restrictions imposed on its Internet and tolerate significant change in its political regime or it should disregard the positive effects of the Internet and tolerate its lasting stagnant economic situation.

The other is to utilize the Internet for reinforcing its political regime. In other words, it can employ all technological, systematic measures aimed at maximizing the economic effects of the Internet while strictly controlling it.

But this essay is not aimed at predicting whether a free Internet regime in the North, if anything, will result in democratization of the authoritative North Korean regime or will end simply in reinforcing its dictatorship.

It is so because this writer has reached the conclusion that the North Korean Internet regime is in the initial phase and in a stage of experiment.

For this reason, it will deal with political influence of the North Korean Internet regime, focusing on factors exposed in the course of scholarly discussions and foreign precedents such as state control, democratization, emulation and learning, plus inter-Korean relations.
II. Opening up Non-democratic Countries’ Internet Regimes and Domestic Political Impacts: Theoretical Examination and Analytical Framework

1. Internet’s Political Influence: Optimism versus Pessimism

As for the political influence of the Internet, there are various views which confront each other although they are attractive, competitive and sometimes contradictory. In particular, as for the influence in authoritative states, there are two theories: the theory of the “dictator’s dilemma” proposed in 1997 by Christopher Kedzie and that of “cyberocracy” presented in 1992 by David Ronfeldt.

The former theory argues: “Totalitarian societies face a dilemma: either they try to stifle these (information and communications) technologies and thereby fall further behind in the new industrial revolution, or else they permit these technologies and see their totalitarian control inevitably eroded. In fact, they do not have a choice, because they will never be able entirely to block the tide of technological advance.”

In contrast, the latter theory maintains: “Cyberocracy, a hypothetical form of government that rules by the effective use of information, may manifest itself narrowly, as a form of organization that supplants traditional forms of bureaucracy and technocracy, and broadly, as a form of government that may redefine relations between state and society, and between the public sector and the private sector.”

These two theories are typical in representing optimism and pessimism, respectively, as far as political influence of the Internet is concerned.1


Optimism argues that Internet users in a police state focus their interest on access to information, bringing about their demand for more information and eventually turning their authoritative regime into a democratic one. For this reason, the authoritative regime put their top priority on deterring political influence of the Internet. In contrast, pessimism
asserts that the authoritative regime attempts to establish a system to block political influence of the Internet while putting priority on effectively utilizing the Internet for its own interest.

2. Political Influence of the Internet

Political influence of the Internet does not remain simply in the arena of theoretical discussion. Understanding the Internet’s political influence can vary in countries according to the nature of their political regimes, and the difference will result in various policy measures to counter it. Despite the difference, however, it is evident that all authoritative states worry about the political influence of the Internet, which may threaten the survival of their dictatorial regimes.

The policy measures taken by authoritative regimes to protect themselves from the political influence of the Internet can break down into two categories. Namely, one is aimed at limiting its citizens’ access to the Internet and the other is aimed at controlling the utilization of the Internet.

Restriction on public access to the Internet is the measure to fundamentally deter political influence of the Internet, allowing a limited number of citizens to use the Internet or intentionally maintaining a low rate of Internet supply.

Governments have broad regulatory power over the Internet, which regard law, social norms, market and architecture, as mentioned by Harvard law professor Lawrence Lessig in his book published in 2006, “Code Version 2.0.”

The countries trapped in a “dictator’s dilemma” usually restrict public access to the Internet and block its political influence on their citizens, while states siding with the theory of “cyberocracy” allow public access to the Internet but control the Internet system and monitor public usage by means of the control mechanism mentioned by Lessig.

Accordingly, optimism and pessimism regarding political influence of the Internet serve as useful criteria for their policy measures taken by authoritative regimes to deal with domestic political influence of the Internet.

The validity of the theory of the “dictator’s dilemma,” in the meantime, has been eroded inevitably since authoritative regimes turned active in their policy on the Internet. North Korea appears to be the last country that is trapped in that dilemma. For this reason, the discussion of Internet’s political influence hereafter will likely be plausible when the question is approach on a basis of the theory of cyberocracy.

The theory stresses the point that authoritative regimes can utilize the Internet as a means of maintaining and reinforcing them. For them, the Internet can serve as Orwellian technology for monitoring their citizens’ remarks and behavior. It serves not only as an effective means of propaganda aimed at reinforcing the regime but as an essential factor for making their economic achievements and reinforcing their legitimacy.

The theory of cyberocracy might be more plausible than the theory of the dictator’s dilemma. But this theory can hardly apply uniformly to all countries. It is because their different internal and external environments can cause different political influence of the Internet. For this reason, not only internal factors of the North but its external factors must be taken into consideration when we examine political influence of the Internet in the country.
In the book, “The Information Revolution in Asia,” co-authored by Nina Hachigan and Lily Wu and published in 2003, Hachigan focused on how the North Korean regime utilizes the Internet to rule and to make a change in domestic political dynamics.

In other words, Hachigan paid attention to the top-down initiative of North Korean authorities concerned about utilizing the Internet for governing. This initiative is meant for state control of the Internet. Under this formula for controlling the Internet regime in a country, the authoritative regime can mobilize various measures, including law, social norms, market and architecture.

But these measures mentioned by Lessig are the methods for controlling Internet use in a free Internet regime. The measures taken by the North are more conservative and fundamental ones for controlling its Internet regime. Here this writer will examine whether or not there is a change in the North Korean policy on Internet control, along with its policy regarding cell phones.

In addition, attention will be given to any bottom-up behavior of North Korean citizens and civic society in the North for systematic resistance to the North Korean regime. Technical characteristics of the Internet underline that the Internet is suitable for organized grassroots activities and it functions effectively in multi-way communications, if and when its techniques are combined with mobile ones. Through “Twitter,” an online social networking service that enables users to send and read short 140-character messages called “tweets,” for instance, Internet users can reach hundreds or thousands of their “followers” within a few seconds.

These techniques can encourage the people who want to challenge the authoritative rule, as viewed by Larry Diamond in his paper “Liberation Technology,” which was published in 2010. It examines the possibilities that the Internet can serve as a means for North Koreans to turn their dictatorial political regime democratic.

Among the external factors that affect the North’s management of its Internet regime are the experiences of socialist regimes or other authoritative regimes, and its relationship with South Korea, China, Vietnam and Cuba are front-runners among socialist countries as far as the Internet is concerned.

Already in the mid-1990s they had not only joined the global Internet network but were furnished with their own system and laws for the operation of their own Internet regimes. North Korea seems to have belatedly examined gains and losses resulting from its operation of an Internet system -- much later than the other three socialist countries. Undoubtedly, the North will emulate some measures taken by them and learn other things from their experience.

The inter-Korean relationship can affect the North Korean operation formula of its Internet system positively or negatively. Once the info-communications sector drew the attention of North Korea watchers in Seoul as one of the most promising sectors for promoting inter-Korean cooperation.

More recently, drawing their attention were inter-Korean negotiations for an Internet connection between the two Koreas within the Kaesong industrial complex in the North, which houses more than 100 South Korean companies, along with inter-Korean passage and customs clearance procedures there.

Although the Internet connection will be limited to the area housing the industrial park, inter-Korean cooperation in the Internet arena,
if any, is noteworthy because of its possible impacts on the Internet regime in the North.

An inflow of foreign information, which may regard inter-Korean relations, is undoubtedly a factor making the North reluctant to opening up its Internet regime, albeit gradually.

We need to take into consideration that the North has been nervous about South Korean leaflets flown into the North Korean territory and the Korean Wave, dubbed Hallyu, a neologism referring to the increase in the popularity of South Korean culture since the late 1990s, when we analyze how an inflow of foreign information will affect North’s operation of its Internet regime.

III. North Korea’s Control and Utilization of the Internet

North Korea made its debut in cyberspace in January 1997 when as aforementioned, the KCNA launched its website with a server in Tokyo under a Japanese national domain name. The North has since used foreign servers and domain names for its websites until September 2007.

At that time it was allowed its own national domain name <.kp> by the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), a nonprofit organization, organized by the Secretary of State of the State of California in the U.S., which is responsible for coordinating the maintenance and methodologies of several databases, with unique identifiers, related to the namespaces of the -- and hereby, ensuring the network’s stable and secure operation.

But there were no specific Internet-related developments in the North until the eve of the 65th founding anniversary of the Workers’ Party of Korea falling on Oct. 10, 2010. The North then launched its website for the KCNA and some others under its national domain name, connecting them with the World Wide Web (www), where documents and other materials are identified by a Uniform Resource Locator (URL), interlinked by links and can be accessed. In other words, the North exposed the real identity of its websites as long as 13 years after it debuted in the cyberworld.

North Korea has since expanded the sphere of activities for utilizing the Internet, launching more new websites with an active mind-set toward the Internet. North Korean websites operated under more than 50 of the North’s and foreign domain names, according to Martyn Williams, senior correspondent at a news service run by International Data Group (IDG), an American technology, media, research, event management and venture capital organization specializing in collecting data on North Korean Internet sites. The North is relatively active in managing such websites for propaganda as <www.naenara.com.kp>. Naenara is a Korean word meaning “my country.”

The North has continued to allow its general citizens to approach its own intranet even after it joined the global Internet networks, only with its own national domain name. It allows an extremely small number of specific citizens to have access to foreign websites, undoubtedly in a move to minimize their political influence over North Korean society, as noted in March 2011 by Reporters Without Borders, a France-based international non-profit, non-governmental organization that promotes and defends freedom of information and freedom of the press.
In fact, the North has imposed far more strict restrictions not only on the Internet but other arenas regarding information technology, including cell phones, than other countries. But it has given the impression in recent years that it is turning somewhat flexible. In December 2008 the North launched a 3G mobile phone service, establishing Koryolink, a joint venture between the Egyptian company Orascom Telecom Media and Technology Holding (OTMT) and the state-owned Korea Post and Telecommunications Corporation (KPTC).

And as many as more than 2.5 million North Korean citizens reportedly own and use cell phones today.

**IV. An Analysis of Political Influence of the Internet in North Korea**

**1. State Control**

In North Korea social control is constant and even information flow is under strict state control. The nature of this police state is well shown in measures of concerned authorities taken with its Internet regime and other arenas regarding information technology. The North has trumpeted its policy for fostering the software industry early in the first 10 years of the 21st century. But it has only paid lip service to that policy, because of its obsession with “juche science” and the principle of “self-reliant rehabilitation.”

The North is probably the last country to join cyberspace, and moreover it allows most of its citizens to access only its own intranet completely isolated from the global Internet network. The way it operates its Internet regime is extremely defensive and restrictive—unprecedented in the world. The North allowed its citizens to own and use cell phones in 2002, but banned their use of mobile phones after a bombing and explosion took place in the Yongchon railway station in June 2004, probably aimed at killing North Korean leader Kim Jong-il.

But it lifted the ban between late 2010 and sometime in 2011, the period of power transition from Kim to his third son Kim Jong-un. This indicated that the new North Korean leader is more flexible in its policy regarding the arenas related to information technology. In other words, the North has turned more flexible and open-minded during the 15 years or so since it joined the cyber world.

The North launched cell phone service in early 2002, for the first time through the 2G Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) service provided by Loxley Pacific Company Limited, a subsidiary of Loxiey Public Company Limited, a key trading conglomerate in Thailand.

The number of cell phone owners reportedly crossed the 1-million mark in February 2012 and 2.5 million recently. As aforementioned, the 2G mobile communications service
was replaced by 3G. Reportedly also used in the North is the iPad, an iOS-based line of tablet computers designed and marketed by Apple Inc., plus a tablet computer developed by the North, referring to a mobile computer with a touchscreen display, circuitry and battery in a single device.

In remarks on land management and environment protection to senior officials from the Workers’ Party, the government and workers’ organizations on April 27, 2012, barely two week after the inauguration of his regime, North Korea’s new young leader Kim Jong-un urged them to read world-class data provided by scientists and technicians in advanced countries -- through the Internet.

Developments in the North related to information technology arenas indicate that the North controlled them completely in the initial phase after it joined the cyber world and then softened the complete control, replacing it with partial control aimed mainly at monitoring the behavior of their users. Probably, these developments indicate the policy judgement made by the Kim Jong-un regime that the Internet can help maintain and reinforce the North Korean socialist regime if and when it can manage to counter the political risk caused by the Internet.

2. Democratization

It might be premature to discuss the possibility of democratization of North Korean society by means of the Internet at a time when the regime is imposing unprecedented strict restrictions on Internet users in the country. In a move to block the political influence of the Internet over its citizens, the North is running its own intranet which is completely isolated from global Internet networks while allowing an extremely small number of specific citizens to access foreign websites. But in recent years the North allowed foreign residents in the country to approach the international Internet network, according to a report by Free Radio Asia in 2013. With an ever increasing number of North Koreans using cell phones taken into consideration, no North Korea watcher in Seoul and elsewhere can totally deny the possibility of the democratization of North Korean society, albeit gradually over a long period of time, thanks to the surprising functions of the Internet and cell phones.

The Arab Spring that ran to early 2011, which refers to a revolutionary wave of demonstrations and protests (both non-violent and violent), riots, and civil wars in the Arab world that began on Dec. 18, 2010 in Tunisia and spread throughout the countries of the Arab League, has provided North Korea watchers with an occasion to discuss vigorously the possibility of democratization in the North through the Internet and cell phones.

“Will China, whose control of the Internet is tough despite its high Internet supply rate, be free from the impacts of the Arab movement for democracy?” This is among the questions raised then by many North Korea watchers. The questions also included: “Will the North remain intact if and when China is affected the Arab Spring?”

Undoubtedly affected by the Arab Spring, the North Korean media aired two lengthy articles against information on the movement in February 2011.

One of the articles came from the KCNA on Feb. 11, under the heading “Warnings against false propaganda aimed at luring our people,” and another one from the Central Korean Broadcasting Station on Feb. 19, “Efforts
aimed at deterring the ideological, cultural infiltration of the West.”

Quoting informed sources, Yonhap News Agency in Seoul reported on Feb. 22 that year that the North Korean authorities concerned have temporarily suspended cell phone rental service to foreigners visiting the country. Free Radio Asia aired a similar article on March 3 that year.

In North Korea where the flow of any information is under strict control, it will not be easy even to assume the achievement of democratization thanks to the role of the Internet or cell phones. But really at stake is the consciousness of North Korean citizens, rather than the environment. In other words, we need to consider the possibility of democratization on a long-term basis, focusing on an ever increasing rate of Internet supply and a change in citizens’ consciousness in the North.

The Internet can be a place and a tool for struggles even in the North. If and when the Internet supply rate reaches 10 percent and there occurs a politico-economic crisis in the country, as indicated by Nina Hachigian in her paper “China’s Cyber-Strategy,” which was published in 2001.

3. Emulation and Learning

People’s or countries’ conception of the Internet is not uniform around the world. The United States and China, which are proud of their world status as the G2, have maintained their own positions on the Internet which are different from each other. In a February 2005 United Nations conference on the Internet, the U.S. asserted its laissez-faire policy on the Internet, while China expressed its stand against the Internet ruled by one state through its ambassador to the U.N. Earlier in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) held in December 2003, China expressed its opposition to a hands-off approach to the Internet.

Despite the Chinese resistance to its position to the Internet, the U.S. has continued to stress the importance of a free Internet. Speaking on Internet freedom on Jan. 21, 2010, Hillary Clinton, then U.S. secretary of state, asserted, “On their own, new technologies do not take sides in the struggle for freedom and progress, but the United States does. We stand for a single internet where all of humanity has equal access to knowledge and ideas...” Evident is the fact that despite this position of the U.S. and many international organizations, all authoritative states have continued to control their Internet regimes in their own ways and in the center of these countries is China.

The Internet policy of China serves as a model to be copied by most socialist countries and other authoritative regimes who want to utilize the Internet but feel the need to control their Internet systems. Vietnam has emulated an advanced Internet control system established by China and learned many other matters regarding the Internet from China. Under these developments, possibilities are high that North Korea has accepted many of the experiences of other socialist countries in the course of introducing the Internet, in an effort to block political influence of the Internet. Cuba is taking up policies and measures regarding the Internet that are similar to ones adopted by the North. The Cuban measures for controlling its Internet system have remained unchanged for nearly 20 years since the country debuted in cyberspace in 1996.

Judging on a short-term basis, North Korea will likely adopt a strategy on the Internet that
is similar to the Cuban one, if the North makes changes in its Internet policy. The Cuban strategy calls for restricting public access to the Internet while allowing access to the Internet only to specific classes engaging in such sectors as tourism and information technology which are useful for economic cooperation with foreign countries.

North Korea is employing a mechanism for managing its Internet regime regarding the operation of an intranet dubbed a “mosquito net,” among other things, which resembles the Cuban one. The North will most likely learn much from experience of other socialist countries and other authoritative regimes which are front-runners as far as the Internet is concerned, if and when it will take more of measures aimed at blocking political influence of the Internet.

4. Inter-Korean Relationship

The Korean Wave, which refers to South Korean films and dramas among other things, is reportedly proliferating throughout the North and enjoying popularity among young North Koreans. Popularity of the Korean Wave is presumably ascribable not only to the high quality of its contents but to such IT appliances as mobile phones and the Internet, which help the public have easier access to Korean cultural products. In the North, however, the Internet has yet to serve as a means of proliferating the Korean Wave because of the tight control over the Internet there today. Instead of the Internet, compact discs (CD), digital versatile discs (DVD) and universal serial buses (USB) carrying South Korean films and dramas are useful for North Koreans to access the Korean Wave.

They are reportedly traded in the market-place and North Koreans are using players for enhanced versatile discs (EVD), an optical-medium-based digital audio/video format, developed by Beijing E-World, a multi-company partnership in China.

Worrying about an inflow of foreign information from South Korea and its proliferation throughout the country, the North is reluctant to allow its citizens access to the Internet while operating an intranet, an indication that the North has learned much from Cuba, a fore-runner in the Internet arena. The U.S. has long served as a key factor responsible for Cuba’s control of its people’s access to the Internet. In a move to seek a peaceful transition to democracy in Cuba, the U.S. enacted the Cuban Democracy Act in 1992.

Undoubtedly, in the eyes of the North Korean authorities the Korean Wave is not only taboo, but information on the economic situation and living conditions in South Korea, which are much better than in the North. For this reason, the North is on the alert for an inflow of foreign information through South Korean media or foreign websites. They may threaten the survival of the North Korean socialist regime if and when they are available for most North Korean citizens.

In the meantime, in negotiations on the issues regarding communication in the Kaesong industrial park on Feb. 7, 2014 the two Koreas reached an agreement on linking their Internet systems as reported by Yonhap News Agency on Feb. 22, 2014. The agreement regards the formation and channel of the Internet linkage, the service formula, secret security and measures to prevent Internet accidents, among other things. But the North has yet to take follow-up measures and the South on Sept. 15 that year called on the North to take the measure as soon as possible.
V. Conclusion

Virtually, North Korea has taken few active measures for the Internet since it made its debut on cyberspace in early 1997. It simply has launched websites under its national domain name. It has yet to allow public access to the global Internet network and link its intranet with the worldwide network although the North claims, and some North Korea watchers view, that it has opened up its Internet regime.

This essay analyzed the impact of the Internet on the North since it debuted in cyberspace, focusing on some political factors. In the internal arena, it covered the top-down factor regarding state control and the bottom-up factor concerning democratization. In the external arena, it dealt with the North’s emulation and learning of experiences from other socialist countries as front-runners in the Internet, plus the influence of inter-Korean relationship.

First of all, there has been no change in the state control of the Internet, but the North has eased tight restrictions on the information technology sector on the occasion of the launch of its websites under its national domain name in October 2010. Under this development, a change in the North’s policy on the Internet could be perceived.

Noteworthy is the fact that the North has continued to allow its citizens to use cell phones, which played a significant role in the Arab Spring. Also noteworthy is the North's policy behavior to launch its websites under its own national domain name during the power transfer when the domestic political situation could have turned uneasy.

As aforementioned, the KCNA launched its website under the North Korean national domain name <.kp> on Oct. 9, 2010. This fell less than half a month after the North held the fourth conference of Workers’ Party representatives to designate Kim Jong-un as successor to his ailing father Kim Jong-il, who ruled the country for 16 years since the death of his father Kim Il-sung. Despite these encouraging developments, however, it is evident that North Korea is still imposing more tougher restrictions on the IT arenas, including the Internet and cell phones, than other authoritative regimes.

Second, in a short-term viewpoint, the Internet will serve as a favorable factor for North Korea, helping maintain and reinforce its socialist regime. And a more active policy on the Internet in the future, if any, will likely be based on its emulation and learning experiences from other socialist countries or authoritative regimes which are fore-runners as far as the Internet is concerned.

Third, it is evident that it is premature for North Korea watchers to discuss the political influence of the Internet in the North, especially influence oriented with North’s democrati-
zation. Products of information technology such as the Internet and mobile phones are not enough to foster North Koreans’ revolutionary potential for a democratization campaign. Their role for democratizing North Korean society can be valid only when there is democracy-minded change in North Koreans’ consciousness, along with a politico-economic crisis in the North.

Fourth, North Korea is nervous about the inflow of foreign information from South Korea. Undoubtedly, the North will continue to exert its best efforts to block the information inflow from the South as done in the past. Even if the two Koreas will manage to establish a single Internet system in the Kaesong industry complex, it will have no influence upon general North Korean citizens and there will be no trouble for the North to cut off any influence of the Internet system there upon the North Korean public if and when it maintains its tight social control.

Notes:

1) Kyung-min Ko, “‘The Dictator’s Dilemma’, or Authoritative ‘Cyberocracy’? The Political Impacts of the Internet and Control Mechanism under Authoritarian Regimes,” Journal of International Area Studies, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Center for International Area Studies, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, 2008), pp 31-56.

2) China opened up its Internet regime in January 1995 after more than 10 years of preparations, and Vietnam in December 1997 after experiments from the early 1990s. Cuba began in 1993 to prepare to take a similar measure, but it has been reluctant to open up its Internet regime because of the political consideration of “state security and external threat“ until 1996 when it decided to do so. Kyung-min Ko, “Internet Opening up North Korea: Implications and Prospects from Cuba’s Experience,” State Strategy, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Seongnam of South Korea, the Sejong Institute, 2014), pp. 61-93.


4) The two-tier formula of North Korea’s Internet operation is nothing new. Until recently Cuba has operated the Internet for foreign visitors and an intranet separated completely from the global Internet network for its citizens. Kyung-min Ko, op. cit., p. 74.

Internal Affairs

N. Korean leader joins test operation of subway train

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un visited a subway station in Pyongyang for a test operation of a newly manufactured subway train, the North’s state media said on Nov. 20.

Aboard the subway train built with the North’s indigenous technology, Kim expressed satisfaction about its performance, according to the Korean Central News Agency.

In the public activity on Nov. 19, he shuttled from Kaesong Station in the capital to several stations aboard the train to learn about its trial operation in detail, the KCNA said.

Han Kwang-sang, a party official dealing with finance and accounting, was among Kim’s entourage, which also included Pak Pong-ju, premier of the Cabinet, it said.

Han, 58, who came back to the public eye for the first time since March, was reportedly under investigation due to corruption allegations.

South Korea’s spy agency earlier said that the North Korean leader has tightened his grip on his power base in a brutal way, including the execution of the North’s former defense chief Hyon Yong-chol and about 70 senior officials. (Yonhap)

N. Korea needs to split roles of Cabinet, firms: newspaper

It is important to clarify the authority and roles given to the Cabinet and companies, as giving more autonomy to workers can boost labor efficiency, according to a North Korean college newspaper on Nov. 23.

North Korea’s Cabinet mainly handles the implementation of the North’s economic policies within the state-controlled rationing system.

Companies and workers can take the initiative and show creativity when the authority and role of the Cabinet and companies are clarified, according to an article in the newspaper issued by Kim Il Sung University, a prestigious institution named after the country’s founder.

How well the economy performs depends on how extensively businesses and workers are able to play their roles, the newspaper added.

The article came amid the growth of marketplaces, as North Korean leader Kim Jong-un is trying to give autonomy to companies in the North’s special economic zone to some degree, in a bid to prop up the feeble economy.

In the previous week, North Korea unveiled detailed plans to upgrade its special economic zone in the border city of Rason in a bid to lure foreign investment amid an economic slowdown and a series of U.N. sanctions.

The North said that profits and other proceeds generated in the zone can be repatriated outside North Korea “without restriction,” in what is seen as investment incentives to foreign investors. It also hinted at assuring autonomous operations for firms in the zone. (Yonhap)
More key officials fleeing N. Korea amid leader’s brutal rule: source

A growing number of North Korean key party and military officials has been fleeing the communist country to evade leader Kim Jong-un’s reign of terror, a source familiar with North Korean affairs said on Nov. 23.

Kim has purged or executed many North Korean officials, Seoul’s intelligence agency earlier said, putting the number of those killed at about 70.

The source said that in the past, North Koreans had fled their home country due mainly to their livelihoods and other personal reasons, but since Kim took office in late 2011, more of the North’s power elites have escaped from the country due to the leader’s iron-fisted rule.

“Apparently, Kim seems to be consolidating his power, but the real situation is that the North is not stable,” the source said.

He did not elaborate but added that some officials from the North’s state security department appear to be included on the list of North Korean defectors while generals may not be on the list.

Meanwhile, the source said that what matters to North Koreans most, ahead of the ruling party’s congress, is how much the North’s regime can improve its feeble economy.

The Worker’s Party of Korea (WPK) plans to convene the congress for the first time in more than three decades in early May, where the North is likely to unveil new policies.

North Korea has been fully mobilizing North Koreans for major construction projects and the WPK’s founding anniversary, which fell on Oct. 10. It is now pushing its people to prepare for the party congress.

“If the regime is not able to satisfy North Koreans, their disappointment will likely be jacked up,” the source added. (Yonhap)

Kim Jong-un inspects shoe factory, calling for world’s best footwear

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un inspected a shoe factory and called for the production of the world’s best quality shoes, the country’s official news media said on Nov. 27.

“The ruling party demands everything intended for the people should be the world’s best quality,” Kim said during his visit to the shoe factory in the east coast port city of Wonsan, according to the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA)’s report.

“Let’s fight vigorously to produce famous goods and produce what can compete in the world,” Kim stressed.

Kim expressed pleasure at the factory’s vibrant production, saying, “The environment of the factory is even brighter than the previous visit in January.”

The KCNA report said Kim was very pleased to see shoes made there with domestically produced vinyl chloride and synthetic leather as well as the “steady innovation and progress” of the factory.

Jo Yong-won, vice department director of the ruling party’s central committee, and high-ranking military official Han Kwang-sang accompanied Kim to the factory inspection. (Yonhap)
N. Korea apparently fails to launch ballistic missile from sub: official

North Korea apparently failed to launch a ballistic missile from a submarine, a South Korean official said on Nov. 28, in a sign that Pyongyang has yet to master the technology.

North Korea is believed to have fired a KN-11 missile from a submarine in the East Sea roughly between 2:20 p.m. and 2:40 p.m., but the submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) failed to soar from the waters, the official said.

“The North appears to have failed in its launch,” the official said, citing debris from the missile found on the ocean surface. The official asked not to be identified, citing the issue’s sensitivity.

It is the first time that North Korea has fired an SLBM since May when it claimed its leader Kim Jong-un oversaw a successful underwater test-launch of a “strategic submarine ballistic missile.”

In May, South Korea’s defense ministry described the North’s SLBM launch as “very serious and worrying,” though the missile appeared to have flown only about 100 or 150 meters from the surface of the water.

The Pentagon has denounced North Korea’s test-firing of the missile as a “blatant violation” of U.N. Security Council resolutions.

The North’s apparent failure shows that North Korea has yet to master the technology needed for SLBMs. (Yonhap)

N. Korean leader visits remodeled education center for students

North Korea’s leader Kim Jong-un has visited a recently remodeled facility for primary and middle school students’ extracurricular activities, the North’s media said on Dec. 1.

The leader visited the Mangyongdae Schoolchildren’s Palace, a comprehensive after-school education center for school students, according to the Korean Central News Agency. It did not specify the date of his visit.

Kim ordered the remodeling of the center, which includes a gym and a swimming pool, in May last year.

The leader expressed satisfaction of the new facility, adding that students will be able to learn more about the country’s revolutionary history, according to the KCNA.

At a science hall in the center, there is a model of a “Unha 3” rocket, which the North sent into orbit in December 2012, it added.

Kim’s entourage included Kim Yang-gon, Pyongyang’s top party official handling inter-Korean ties, and Jo Yong-won, a senior official in the North’s ruling party.

Seoul’s spy agency said Monday that the status of Jo is presumed to have sharply risen in the rankings of those in power in North Korea, given the frequency of his accompanying the leader on inspections. (Yonhap)
N. Korean envoy gets tour of Chinese herbal medicine

North Korean Ambassador to China Ji Jae-ryong took a rare tour of Chinese herbal medicine and traditional medical treatment at China’s southern resort city of Sanya, according to the city government on Dec. 1.

The tour took place on Nov. 27 at Chinese Medicine Hospital of Sanya, the Chinese city said in an article posted on its official website.

Reports of public activities by the North Korean envoy are incredibly rare.

A photo taken by the hospital shows Ji and his wife posing for the camera with hospital staff. Another photo shows Ji taking his blood pressure.

After receiving some treatment, Ji told hospital staff that the treatment was “very good,” according to the article.

The tour was aimed at promoting the traditional Chinese medical service for foreigners, the article said. (Yonhap)

N. Korea wants to learn from China’s Hainan on tourism: envoy

North Korea wants to learn tourism know-how from China’s southern resort island of Hainan as it seeks to set up an international tourism zone at its scenic Mount Kumgang, according to the North’s ambassador to China on Dec. 2.

Ji Jae-ryong, North Korea’s ambassador to China, made the remarks during a meeting with Luo Baoming, Hainan’s Communist Party chief and provincial governor, on Dec. 1, the Chinese Communist Party said in an article posted on its website.

North Korea is seeking to attract foreign tourists to the Mount Kumgang resort on its east coast after unveiling a project to build the “Wonsan-Mount Kumgang international tourism zone” earlier last year.

The North’s mountain resort, developed by the South Korean company Hyundai Asan, opened in 1998 as a symbol of inter-Korean reconciliation, but Seoul halted tours in July 2008 after a North Korean soldier shot and killed a South Korean tourist who had strayed into a restricted military zone there.

During the meeting with Luo in Hainan, Ji said that “North Korea is currently accelerating construction of the Wonsan-Mount Kumgang international tourist zone.”

“We would like to learn more from Hainan’s experience, expand cooperation in areas such as tourism and fisheries, and make efforts to further strengthen the North Korea-China friendship,” Ji told Luo, according to the statement.

Luo told Ji that Hainan wants to “facilitate pragmatic cooperation” with North Korea in the field of tourism.

Under international sanctions over nuclear and missile ambitions, North Korea has promoted tourism as a source of earning much-needed hard currency since Kim took power in late 2011. (Yonhap)
N. Korea excavating new tunnel at nuclear test site: 38 North

North Korea is believed to be excavating a new tunnel at its Punggye-ri nuclear test site for nuclear testing, a U.S. research institute said on Dec. 2, citing recent satellite imagery.

The new tunnel is in a new area of the site in addition to the three others where the North has either conducted nuclear tests or excavated tunnels in the past, 38 North said.

“While there are no indications that a nuclear test is imminent, the new tunnel adds to North Korea’s ability to conduct additional detonations at Punggye-ri over the coming years if it chooses to do so,” it said.

A review of imagery over the past year shows significant construction in the area beginning in April, and imagery from October and November shows an additional structure and what appear to be significant tailings, indicating excavation of a new tunnel is underway, 38 North said.

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

In the run-up to the 70th anniversary of the founding of the North’s ruling Workers’ Party on Oct. 10, fears had grown that the country could conduct its fourth nuclear test or a long-range rocket launch, but no such provocations took place.

In October, South Korea’s main intelligence agency, the National Intelligence Service, reported to lawmakers that the North is preparing for its fourth nuclear test, although a test is not imminent.

(Yonhap)

N. Korea looks to attract more tourists to Sinuiju economic zone

North Korea is believed to be seeking to attract more Chinese tourists to its special economic zone in the northwestern border city of Sinuiju, a report by U.S. experts showed on Dec. 3.

Satellite imagery showed a new complex set up in Sinuiju on reclaimed land under a bridge that spans the Amnok River and links the city to the neighboring Chinese city of Dandong. Andray Abrahamian and Curtis Melvin, experts on the North’s economy, included this information in a report carried by 38 North, a website specializing in North Korea issues.

The report cited media reports suggesting that accommodations, restaurants and shopping facilities are also being built to facilitate tourism for short-term visitors.

Sinuiju was designated a special administrative zone in 2002, but it quickly fizzled out, as Chinese-Dutch businessman Yang Bin was jailed for tax evasion and other charges in China after being named the first governor of the zone.

The area was renamed Sinuiju International Economic Zone in 2013 amid North Korean leader Kim Jong-un’s push for economic development.

“Assuming the strained relations between Pyongyang and Beijing gradually mend, Sinuiju may be able to attract other small or medium-sized investments, if North Korean policy makers can build an economic environment that is seen as safe and stable for investors,” it said.

But they also remained cautious about whether the North could achieve such a goal.
The report said that Chinese investors may prefer “importing North Korean labor or making small consignment orders from North Korean firms, rather than exporting their capital to North Korea.” (Yonhap)

**N. Korea’s flag carrier redesigns homepage**

North Korea’s flag carrier Air Koryo has redesigned its homepage to serve customers only in English.

The website (www.airkoryo.com.kp), which used to be in both Korean and English, offers booking services and other airline information in English.

Much of the site remains bare, however, with only three items under “latest news,” including one on the launch of a new aircraft, the Tupolev 204-100, on the Pyongyang-Beijing route in April 2010.

Another article, dated Oct. 1, 2015, says the airline launched a website in August 2012.

“The website will provide you with easier, quicker, reliable booking and ticketing services,” it reads. “We hope you enjoy a great experience with quality services provided on the site.”

Online booking is available for flights between Pyongyang and Shenyang, Beijing and Vladivostok. Depending on the route, air fares can be paid in Korean won, Japanese yen or the euro. (Yonhap)

**N. Korea develops H-bomb, Kim Jong-un says**

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un stated that his country has developed not only nuclear weapons but also hydrogen bombs, according to Pyongyang’s state media on Dec. 10.

He made the remark while inspecting a historic site for the nation’s arms industry a day earlier, according to reports.

The North has been turned into a “powerful nuclear weapons state ready to detonate a self-reliant A-bomb and H-bomb to reliably defend its sovereignty and the dignity of the nation” thanks to tireless efforts by his late grandfather Kim Il-sung, founder of the nation, the Korean Central News Agency said in a report on Kim’s “field guidance” at the Phyongchon Revolutionary Site in Pyongyang.

It marks the first time that Kim has publicly mentioned the North’s development of an H-bomb, experts here noted.

“Kim has revealed on a number of occasions that North Korea possesses nuclear bombs. But this appears to be the first time that he talked about an H-bomb,” Chang Yong-seok, a researcher at the Seoul National University Institute for Peace and Unification Studies said.

Lee Chun-geun, research fellow at the Science and Technology Policy Institute, was cautious.

“It’s hard to regard North Korea as possessing an H-bomb. I think it seems to be developing it,” he said.

The North’s young leader, who is ending his fourth year of ruling, called on the nation to step up efforts to promote the munitions industry.
The Phyongchon Revolutionary Site is intended to commemorate the North’s first munitions factory set up there in 1945 at the instruction of Kim Il-sung. (Yonhap)

**N. Korean leader inspects catfish farm**

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un inspected a catfish farm, calling it a “model and standard farm” for the country’s pisciculture, the North’s state media said on Dec. 12.

It was his first visit to the May 9 Catfish Farm since December 2014, when he named it after the day his father and late leader Kim Jong-il visited the farm for the first time.

“Kim Jong-un, first secretary of the Workers’ Party of Korea, first chairman of the DPRK National Defense Commission and supreme commander of the Korean People’s Army, visited the May 9 Catfish Farm which has turned into another model and standard farm for the country’s pisciculture by putting its fish breeding on a scientific, intensive and industrial basis of high level,” the Korean Central News Agency said in an English dispatch, monitored in Seoul.

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

Kim toured the farm’s facilities and praised officials and employees there for successfully renovating it while fulfilling their production duties.

“He said that the farm has made a lot of achievements in the work to drastically raise the production of catfish without increasing manpower and production area, as instructed by him during his last year’s visit,” KCNA said. (Yonhap)

**External Affairs**

**N. Korean human rights resolution passes through U.N. committee**

The Third Committee of the U.N. General Assembly on Nov. 19 (New York time) passed a resolution on North Korea’s human rights situation that calls for referring the communist regime to the International Criminal Court (ICC).

The resolution passed in a 112-19 vote, with 50 abstentions. The overwhelming passage almost guarantees its formal adoption at the General Assembly expected for mid-December as the General Assembly process is seen largely as a formality.

The resolution, which was introduced by the European Union and Japan on Oct. 30, is largely similar to a landmark resolution that was adopted at last year’s General Assembly with a call for referring the North’s human rights situation to the ICC for the first time.

“The General Assembly ... encourages the Security Council to continue its consideration of the relevant conclusions and recommendations of the commission of inquiry and take appropriate action to ensure accountability, including through consideration of the referral of the situation in the
Democratic People’s Republic of Korea to the International Criminal Court,” the resolution said.

The resolution also calls for “effective targeted sanctions against those who appear to be most responsible for acts that the commission has said may constitute crimes against humanity” and encourages the Security Council to continue discussions and active engagement on the issue.

The resolution reflects the seriousness the international community attaches to the problem, and is expected to increase pressure on Pyongyang. After the adoption of 2014’s resolution, the Security Council held its first meeting on the North’s human rights issue. The council could do the same once the new resolution is adopted.

“For now, it’s hard to say whether (the Security Council) will convene a meeting in December just as it did last year or take more time” before convening a meeting, South Korea’s U.N. Ambassador Oh Joon told Yonhap News Agency. (Yonhap)

**U.S. updates travel warning for North Korea**

The United States on Nov. 20 (Washington time) updated its warning against traveling to North Korea, citing the risk of arrest and long-term detention in the communist nation due to Pyongyang’s “inconsistent application of its criminal laws.”

“U.S. citizens have been subject to arrest and long-term detention for actions that would not be cause for arrest in the United States or other countries,” the State Department said, “strongly” recommending against all travel by U.S. citizens to the North.

“North Korean authorities have arrested U.S. citizens who entered the DPRK legally on valid DPRK visas as well as U.S. citizens who accidentally or intentionally crossed into DPRK territory without valid visas,” said the advisory, updated from the last one issued in April.

American citizens have often been detained in North Korea on charges of anti-state and other unspecified crimes. Widespread views are that the communist nation has often used the detentions as bargaining chips in its negotiations with Washington.

It has often taken high-profile U.S. visits to Pyongyang to get detained citizens released. In November 2014, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper made an unannounced trip to the country to win the release of two detainees -- Kenneth Bae and Matthew Todd Miller.

“Foreign visitors to North Korea may be arrested, detained, or expelled for activities that would not be considered criminal outside North Korea, including involvement in unsanctioned religious and/or political activities, unauthorized travel, or unauthorized interaction with the local population,” the travel warning said. (Yonhap)

**Orascom thinks it has lost control over N. Korea’s mobile network provider Koryolink**

Egyptian telecommunications firm Orascom, which launched North Korea’s first mobile network provider Koryolink in 2008, believes it has now lost control of the joint venture with Pyongyang, the company’s latest financial results report said.
The report was obtained on Nov. 20 (Washington time)

The assessment underscores the difficulty in doing business in and with North Korea, one of the world’s most closed nations that is known for flouting international norms and has long been under a string of international sanctions for its nuclear and missile programs.

Orascom has struggled with a series of problems in the North, including its inability to bring profits out of the heavily sanctioned nation. Adding to Orascom’s woes, the North’s government has also launched a competing local telecom operator wholly owned by the state.

Orascom has been in talks to merge the two operators, but Pyongyang wants to take control in case of a merger.

“In the group’s management view, the control over the Koryolink’s activities was lost,” Orascom said in its third-quarter financial results report, citing “a disagreement from the Korean side to grant the management the rights to control in case of the merger.”

Orascom has a 75 percent stake in Koryolink, with the North’s communications ministry holding the rest.

Since starting the service in 2008, the number of subscribers has grown steadily to 3 million today, an impressive number considering that the North is one of the poorest nations in the world and government permission is necessary to buy mobile phones.

But the Egyptian firm has been unable to transfer its profits home due in part to international sanctions on Pyongyang and in part to problems associated with huge gaps between the government-set official exchange rate and the black market rate.

The North’s government maintains the official exchange rate at about 100 won per the U.S. dollar, more than 80 times higher than black market rates, which are seen as the real value of the North Korean won.

At the official rate, Orascom’s holding at the end of last year was worth $585 million, but it’s worth only about $7.2 million at black market rates, according to Martyn Williams, a U.S. expert who operates North Korea Tech, a website specializing in North Korean affairs.

The dilemma is the North can neither pay the money at the official rate nor recognize the black market rate.

Orascom’s “problem is that conversion at the official rate is only possible with permission from the government, and the government clearly doesn’t want to let such a large amount of money leave the country and might not even be able to afford it,” Williams said in an article on his website.

Still, Orascom Chairman Naguib Sawiris held out hope for a resolution.

“We are very proud of the success of our operation Koryolink. We have around 3 million people today carrying our phones in the DPRK,” he said in a statement. “We are still hopeful that we will be able to resolve all pending issues to continue this successful journey.” (Yonhap)

**Pentagon declines comment on N.K.’s SLBM test**

The Pentagon declined on Nov. 30 (Washington time) to comment on North Korea’s recent failed test of a submarine-launched ballistic missile, citing intelligence matters.
Yonhap News Agency reported that the North fired a KN-11 missile from a submarine in the East Sea on Nov. 28, but the test ended in failure as the missile failed to soar from the waters.

“As far as whether North Korea attempted an SLBM launch, we will not discuss intelligence matters,” said Cmdr. Bill Urban, a U.S. Defense Department spokesman.

In May, North Korea claimed it successfully carried out an SLBM test underwater, renewing tensions on the Korean Peninsula amid concern that the North’s SLBM capability, if fully developed, would pose a serious threat because its mobile nature would make it very difficult to detect preparations for a launch.

But experts said it was believed to be not a full-scale test, but an “ejection” test conducted in an early stage of developing SLBM capabilities. U.S. officials said the North also exaggerated progress and is many years away from developing an SLBM. (Yonhap)

**U.S. bill calls for moratorium on refugee admissions from high-risk countries like N. Korea**

A U.S. senator has introduced a bill calling for a temporary moratorium on accepting refugees from dozens of “high-risk” countries that include Syria and North Korea.

The bill, submitted by Sen. Rand Paul (R-KY) in November, is aimed mainly at preventing the entry of extremists into the U.S. under the refugee program. It came after revelations that one of the terrorists in November’s deadly attacks in Paris posed as a refugee to enter France.

A total of 34 countries were classified as high-risk countries, including Syria, Iran, Afghanistan, Turkey and Russia. Asian nations included Bangladesh, Indonesia and North Korea.

The legislation enables the secretary of homeland security not to approve any application for entry to the U.S. from nationals of high-risk countries or those seeking entry to the U.S. from high-risk nations until after certain conditions are met, including the establishment of a better screening process.

But the moratorium is not applied to those enrolled in the Global Entry trusted traveler program, it said.

The prospects of the bill’s passage are unclear as the U.S. is divided over how to deal with such refugee issues. It also remains to be seen how this legislation, if enacted, would affect North Korean defectors trying to enter the U.S. as refugees. (Yonhap)

**More Iranian oil likely to reach N. Korea after nuclear deal: CRS report**

More Iranian oil is expected to reach North Korea after the removal of international sanctions on the Middle Eastern nation under a landmark deal on Tehran’s nuclear program, a congressional report said.

The Congressional Research Service made the assessment in a recent report on Iran’s foreign policy, saying that Tehran and Pyongyang have generally been allies, in part because both have been considered by the United States and its allies as “outcasts” or “pariah states” subjected to wide-rang-
ing international sanctions.

“North Korea is one of the few countries with which Iran has formal military-to-military relations, and the two countries have cooperated on a wide range of military and WMD-related ventures, particularly the development of ballistic missile technology,” said the report which was obtained on Dec. 6 (Washington time).

In addition, Iran reportedly funded and assisted in the retransfer of missile and possibly nuclear technology from North Korea to Syria in the past, the report said.

Though the North has never announced a public commitment to comply with international sanctions against Iran, the nation’s economy is too small to significantly help Iran, the report said. (Yonhap)

**China vows to improve relations with N. Korea to ‘new level’**

A key official of the Chinese Communist Party in charge of political relations with North Korea has said that he wants to improve ties with Pyongyang to a “new level,” in the latest sign of warmer relations between the allies.

Song Tao, who was recently appointed head of the Chinese Communist Party’s international department, made the remarks on Dec. 7 during a meeting with North Korea’s Ambassador to China Ji Jae-ryong in Beijing, according to the Chinese Communist Party’s website.

Song was believed to have succeeded Wang Jiarui in November. Wang had held the post over the last 12 years and played a key role when leaders of the two nations held summits.

“Party-to-party exchanges played an important role in the development of China-North Korea relations,” Song told Ji, according to a statement posted on the party’s website.

Song said he is “willing to promote China-North Korea relations to a new level.”

The alliance between North Korea and China has often been described as being “forged in blood,” as China fought alongside the North in the 1950-53 Korean War. However, political ties between the allies were strained following North Korea’s third nuclear test in early 2013.

There have been signs of improvement since Liu Yunshan, the Chinese Communist Party’s fifth-ranked official, visited Pyongyang in October and held talks with North Korea’s young leader Kim Jong-un.

Liu was accompanied by Song during his visit to Pyongyang.

Despite signs of warming ties, questions still remain about how China can do more to reign in North Korea’s unruly behavior and persuade the North to abandon its nuclear weapons ambitions. (Yonhap)

**U.N. Security Council holds discussions on N. Korea’s human rights situation**

The U.N. Security Council held a meeting on North Korea’s human rights situation on Dec. 10 (New York time), the second time the issue has been discussed at the top global security body after
the first such meeting last year.

The meeting took place after a proposal for the meeting was passed in a 9-4 vote with two abstentions.

In 2014, the Security Council held its first-ever meeting on the North’s human rights issue after the adoption of a landmark U.N. General Assembly resolution calling for referring the communist nation to the International Criminal Court (ICC).

A similar resolution has been proposed in 2015, passed the Third Committee November and is expected to be formally adopted at the General Assembly later in December. The measure also calls for referring the issue to the ICC.

The resolution and the Dec. 10’s Security Council meeting underscored the seriousness the international community attaches to the problem, and is expected to increase pressure on Pyongyang.

The United States presided over the meeting as it has the presidency of the Council for December.

“One again this year, the General Assembly may call on the Security Council to take action by referring the situation in the DPRK to the International Criminal Court, which I believe to be essential given the scale and extreme gravity of the allegations,” Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, U.N. high commissioner for human rights, told the meeting.

Zeid also said that any call for accountability must “go hand-in-hand with an open dialogue” with the North.

China, the North’s last-remaining major ally and a permanent member of the Council, had opposed convening the meeting, forcing Council President and U.S. Ambassador Samantha Power to hold a vote. Beijing claimed that it is not appropriate for the Council to discuss the human rights situation of a specific country.

Despite calls for the North’s referral to the ICC, however, it is unlikely that the Security Council will actually be able to refer the matter to the ICC because China and Russia, which have friendlier ties with North Korea than any other countries, are expected to veto such a move.

North Korea has long been labeled as one of the worst human rights violators. 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 the North has bristled at such criticism, calling it a U.S.-led attempt to topple its regime.

In June, the State Department said in its annual human rights report that the North’s human rights record “remained among the worst in the world” last year with public executions, political prison camps, torture and other abuses. (Yonhap)

**N. Korean museum opens near Angkor Wat**

North Korea’s museum near the Angkor Wat temple in Cambodia has begun its operations, Pyongyang’s state news agency reported on Dec. 12.

The Angkor Panorama Hall, built in cooperation with the DPRK and Siem Reap Province of Cambodia, opened on Dec. 4, the North’s Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said in an

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

The museum is located near the entrance of the Angkor Archaeological Park in northern Cambodia, where the largest Hindu temple complex in the world is located.

The KCNA said several figures attended an opening ceremony, including a deputy prime minister who doubles as minister of the Council of Ministers and a DPRK ambassador to Cambodia.

The museum features a mega-size mosaic work by North Korean artists as well as a portrait of a Buddha, according to the report.

The overseas construction unit of the state-run Mansudae Art Studio, the North’s group of artists, began building the museum with a US$10 million investment from the North Korean regime in 2011. (Yonhap)

**Ban says his N.K. visit plan still under discussions with Pyongyang**

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said on Dec. 16 (New York time) that discussions are still under way with North Korea to set up what would be his first trip to the nation as U.N. chief.

“It’s still under discussions with the authorities of DPRK. I sincerely hope that we will be able to find a mutually convenient date as soon as possible. And this is what I can tell you at this time,” Ban said in a year-end news conference.

Ban also said he’s ready to use his role as secretary-general in any way possible for peace and stability and reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula.

Ban said that there have been positive developments in relations between the two Koreas, including a peace agreement in August that defused a tense military standoff and October’s reunions of families separated by the Korean War.

Ban said the latest high-level talks failed to produce progress, but added, “We should not be frustrated.”

“I sincerely hope that the parties will continue to engage in talks so that they can, first of all, expand the political space through dialogue and exchanges and cooperation, so that they can, first of all, build reconciliation between the two parties,” Ban said.

“In there, I’m ready to provide any service as the secretary-general and as one of the citizens coming from Korea,” he said.

Should Ban’s trip be realized, he will be the third U.N. secretary-general to visit North Korea after Kurt Waldheim in 1979 and Boutros Boutros-Ghali in 1993. Both Waldheim and Boutros-Ghali met with North Korea’s founding leader, Kim Il-sung, during their visits to Pyongyag.

Ban, a former South Korean foreign minister, has repeatedly said that he will do everything possible to promote inter-Korean reconciliation and a resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue.

In May, Ban planned to visit the North Korean border city of Kaesong, where South Korea runs an industrial complex, but the trip was called off at the last minute because Pyongyag abruptly withdrew its invitation for no clear reason. (Yonhap)
China denies media reports of arrests of its citizens in N. Korea

The Chinese Embassy in Pyongyang has denied some South Korean media reports that North Korea recently arrested about 100 Chinese citizens living in the reclusive state on alleged suspicions of espionage.

A spokesman at the embassy in North Korea said in a statement dated on Dec. 16 that such media reports are “false” and there were no “so-called spies” among thousands of Chinese people living in North Korea.

It is rare for the Chinese Embassy in Pyongyang to publicly deny media reports.

The embassy called Chinese people living in North Korea “an important force in developing China-North Korea relations, and they will continue to play an active role” in promoting ties between the allies. (Yonhap)

Koreas, Russia start third test run for logistics project

South and North Korea on Nov. 17 kicked off another test operation of their joint logistics project to ship Russian coal to the South through a port near the border with Russia, government officials said.

Some 120,000 tons of Russian coal will be delivered to three South Korean ports on a ship from the North Korean port city of Rajin after being transported from Russia’s border city of Khasan on a re-connected railway in the third run of the so-called Rajin-Khasan logistics project. The trilateral project will be carried out until Nov. 30.

It is a symbol of three-way cooperation at a time when inter-Korean exchanges have become stagnant following the deadly sinking of a South Korean warship by the North in 2010.

In November 2014, the first shipment carrying 40,500 tons of Russian coal smoothly arrived in South Korea in the first operation of the project. The second test was conducted in April.

The initiative involves three South Korean firms -- top steelmaker POSCO, shipper Hyundai Merchant Marine Co. and state train operator Korail Corp.

A group of some 20 government and company officials are set to cross the border between Russia and North Korea on a train later in the day as they departed from Vladivostok a day earlier, according to the Unification Ministry.

They will stay in the North’s city till Nov. 20 to check the Rajin port’s capacity to handle shipments and to see how smoothly vessels can be berthed there, the ministry said.

The South Korean firms will decide on whether to clinch a formal contract based on the outcome of the pilot operation. It is highly likely that the signing of a formal deal could be delayed into this year.

The project is also part of President Park Geun-hye’s vision for a united Eurasia, known as the Eurasia initiative, which calls for linking energy and logistics infrastructure across Asia and Europe.

The project is regarded as an exception to South Korea’s punitive sanctions on the North, which has suspended almost all trade and exchange programs, apart from a joint factory park project in the
North’s border city of Kaesong. (Yonhap)

**Inter-Korean Affairs**

**Military to develop unmanned sensors to beef up DMZ surveillance**

The South Korea military has signed a deal to develop unmanned ground surveillance sensors to boost its capacity to monitor North Korean forces in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), the defense procurement agency said on Nov. 17.

The deal between the Defense Acquisition Program Administration (DAPA) and the local defense manufacturer, Hanwha Thales, is worth 3.6 billion won (US$3.1 million).

The sensors will be installed in unmanned corners along the southern side of the DMZ, with the capacity to detect any infiltration attempts from the North and inform local military leadership of them.

“By next year, the exploratory development will be complete, while the system development will be carried out by 2019 before being deployed to the Army and the Marine Corps.,” a DAPA official said.

“The unmanned ground surveillance sensors will be able to detect infiltration by the enemy in an early stage and destroy them so we can cripple any disruption attempts behind the line,” the official said.

A series of recent cases, including North Korean defections, to the South via the DMZ sparked concerns over border security.

In August, North Korean soldiers crossed into the southern side of the DMZ and laid land mines, which blew up and maimed two South Korean soldiers. (Yonhap)

**N. Korea repatriates S. Korean man: ministry**

North Korea repatriated on Nov. 17 a South Korean man who crossed into the country through the border with China earlier last year, a government official said.

The 48-year-old man, identified only by his surname Lee, was handed over to the South through the truce village of Panmunjom along the inter-Korean border, according to the official from the Unification Ministry.

Lee entered the North through the Yalu River bordering China and North Korea’s upper western edge in September.

The motive of Lee’s move was not revealed immediately.

“The North side notified the South of its plan to send back one South Korean through a Red Cross message dispatched around 9:45 a.m.,” the official said.
North Korea said it returned Lee back to the South in a humanitarian move, he said. This is the third time the North has repatriated South Korean nationals so far 2015, actions which are widely interpreted as a gesture of reconciliation.

Previously a South Korean couple in their 50s were sent back home before one more South Korean, a 21-year-old student of a university in the U.S. was transferred to Seoul in October.

“It’s a relief that the North has repatriated our citizen and we call on the North to also release our nationals still held up in the country,” the official said, referring to other South Koreans detained there, including missionary Kim Jung-wook. (Yonhap)

Koreas’ experts to meet in China for joint dictionary project

South and North Korean lexicographers plan to meet in China in mid-December to discuss the details of an ongoing project to publish a joint dictionary of their language, government officials said on Dec. 1.

A group of 23 South Korean experts will visit China’s northeastern coastal city of Dalian from Dec. 7 to 13 to hold a meeting with their North Korean counterparts over the contents of the dictionary, the Ministry of Unification said. Similar forums were already held twice in 2015.

The joint dictionary project is being pursued in order to preserve Korea’s cultural assets and bridge the language gap between the two Koreas. The dictionary will contain around 330,000 words.

The two countries speak the same Korean language, but the gap between their daily uses of words has grown since they were divided 70 years ago, and the influx of foreign languages into the South has increased.

The project, which started in 2006, was suspended in 2010 when Seoul slapped economic sanctions on Pyongyang to punish the North for its deadly torpedoing of a South Korean warship.

The two sides resumed the project in July with the goal to complete it by 2019.

The ministry said in May that it will promote more civilian inter-Korean exchanges, as last year marks the 70th anniversary of Korea’s liberation from Japan’s 1910-45 colonial rule. (Yonhap)

S. Korea to collect loan from local firms investing in N. Korea

South Korea plans to retrieve part of special soft loans provided to local firms involved in economic cooperation with North Korea for the first time in five years, government officials said on Dec. 2.

Tapping into a state fund on inter-Korean cooperation, Seoul has provided loans with low rates to such companies to help them cope with financial troubles stemming from the South’s punitive sanctions against the North in 2010.

A considerable number of local firms that had invested in projects and assets in North Korea are suffering from financial setbacks as Seoul has banned most inter-Korean trade following the North’s fatal torpedoing of a South Korean warship in that year.

But the government said it has decided to collect part of such lending offered in 2010 as it would
not further extend loan maturity to local firms that cannot repay the principal. The special loans were also provided in 2012 and 2014.

“It is the government’s stance that it is desirable for companies to repay debt if they have other fields of business apart from their investment in the North,” said an official at the Unification Ministry.

The government said about 150 of a total 168 borrowers will be subject to the repayment of a combined 32.5 billion won (US$28.1 million) in loans.

But the move would not be applied to both South Korean firms that have invested in an inter-Korean tourism program at Mount Kumgang in the North and those investing in inland areas of the North except the mountain and a joint industrial park in the border city of Kaesong.

Seoul is currently extending a loan maturity to those firms regardless of the repayment of principal.

Local firms on the list of loan collection expressed complaints against the government’s decision. “Almost every company that invested in North Korea is suffering from financial troubles. It is not fair that the government gives favor to them,” said an official at one of such firms, asking not to be named. (Yonhap)

N. Korea returns S. Korean man’s body

North Korea on Dec. 4 returned the body of a South Korean man found drifting in waters off the east coast, the Unification Ministry said.

The North handed over the body, along with the man’s belongings, at the truce village of Panmunjom, along the inter-Korean border, at 9:30 a.m., according to ministry spokesman Jeong Joon-hee.

“The central committee of North Korea’s Red Cross said it found the body of someone who appeared to be a South Korean citizen in waters near Yodo of the North’s Kangwon Province, and yesterday expressed its will to hand it over,” Jeong said during a regular press briefing.

The body was found with a social security card that identified the man as a 72-year-old South Korean surnamed Choi.

His address is unclear, but the government plans to look into details, such as the cause of his death, a ministry official said on condition of anonymity.

Although the two Koreas remain technically at war following the 1950-53 Korean War that ended in a cease-fire, not a peace treaty, they have in similar situations returned the bodies of each other’s citizens from a humanitarian standpoint. (Yonhap)

Containers carrying bottled water arrive in S. Korea via N. Korean port

Containers carrying bottled water produced near North Korea arrived in South Korea on Dec. 7 via a North Korean port as part of a three-way logistics project involving the two Koreas and Russia, government officials said.
Ten containers full of bottled water produced at Erdaobaihe in northeastern China arrived at Busan, South Korea’s southeastern port city, earlier in the day after leaving from the North Korean city of Rajin bordering Russia, officials said.

The mineral water was produced at a factory run by Nongshim, South Korea’s largest noodle maker, in Erdaobaihe, a town close to Mount Paektu in North Korea, the highest peak on the Korean Peninsula.

The shipment is part of the two Koreas’ third pilot operation of the project, which calls for shipping some 120,000 tons of Russian coal to three South Korean ports from the North Korean port city of Rajin.

The coal, which was transported from Russia’s border city of Khasan on a re-connected railway, arrived in South Korea in late November.

The so-called Rajin-Khasan logistics project is a symbol of three-way cooperation and an exception to Seoul’s punitive sanctions against Pyongyang following the North’s deadly sinking of a South Korean warship in 2010.

In November 2014, the first shipment carrying 40,500 tons of Russian coal arrived in South Korea without incident in the first test run of the project. The second test was conducted in April.

The project is also part of President Park Geun-hye’s vision for a united Eurasia, known as the Eurasia Initiative, which calls for linking energy and logistics infrastructure across Asia and Europe. (Yonhap)

**S. Korean Catholic priests to visit N. Korea annually**

South Korean Catholic bishops said on Dec. 7 they will send a delegation of priests to North Korea on a regular basis to jointly celebrate major feasts.

The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Korea (CBCK) made the announcement after returning from a four-day trip to the country. The visit was made at the invitation of the North Korean Catholic association.

CBCK said the delegation will hold services at Changchung Cathedral in Pyongyang, the sole Catholic church in North Korea, on major Catholic feasts every year.

The South Korean organization also said it has discussed with its North Korean counterpart ways to enhance cooperation among Catholics in the two Koreas, with both agreeing to facilitate humanitarian and priesthood exchanges in the future.

“The meeting laid the foundation for further cooperation and exchange among Korean Catholics,” a CBCK official said at a press conference in Seoul.

The latest trip was aimed at helping promote reconciliation between South and North Korea as 2015 marks the 70th anniversary of Korea’s liberation from Japan’s 1910-45 colonial rule.

North Korea’s constitution guarantees freedom of religion, but in practice, the North’s regime deals harshly with those involved in “almost any religious practices,” meaning that religious freedom does not exist, the U.S. State Department said in November. (Yonhap)
Cargo ship caught fire; all 15 N. Korean sailors safe

A Sierra Leone-flagged cargo ship caught fire in waters off South Korea’s southern resort island of Jeju, but all 15 North Korean crew members are safe, a Coast Guard official said on Dec. 15.

The 2,516-ton ship called the South Korean center for monitoring marine traffic and informed that a fire broke out in its engine room.

The vessel traffic service in Jeju dispatched a helicopter and a patrol vessel to help put out the fire and rescue crew members.

But the North Korean crew members had put out the fire by themselves as they asked South Korean rescue crew members to standby. All 15 North Koreans are in healthy condition, said Coast Guard official Kim Dae-hong.

The vessel was heading to Shanghai, China’s financial hub, from North Korea’s northeastern port city of Rajin with a cargo of 1200 tons of lumber. (Yonhap)

N. Korea sentences Korean-Canadian pastor to life imprisonment

North Korea sentenced a Korean-Canadian pastor to life in prison, citing his “crimes” against the nation, news reports said on Dec. 16.

Lim Hyeon-soo of Light Korean Presbyterian Church near Toronto has been detained in the North since February, days after he entered the country via China on a humanitarian mission.

Pyongyang accused him of plotting to overthrow the regime through a human rights “racket.”

The North’s Supreme Court had a brief trial against him and delivered the ruling, said the Associated Press and China’s state-run Xinhua news agency.

If true, Lim would be forced into hard labor at a prison camp there.

Christian missionaries have often been detained in the North in recent years.

Kenneth Bae, a Korean-American missionary, was released in November 2014 after about two years of detention in the communist nation. Bae, who entered the North in late 2012, was sentenced to 15 years of hard labor for unspecified anti-state crimes. (Yonhap)
**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. 17 gives field guidance to the movable fish-breeding net ring newly set up on the River Taedong.

21 sends a letter to participants in the 4th Conference of Frontrunners of the Three-Revolution Red Flag Movement.

23 gives field guidance to the August 25 Fishery Station under KPA Unit 313, which has been updated.

24 enjoys an art performance given by soldiers of companies under KPA Air and Anti-Air Force and KPA units 549, 264, 233 and 630 who proved successful at the 37th Art Festival of KPA Servicepersons.

25 gives field guidance to the Fishery Station No. 15 under KPA Unit 549, which is catching big hauls.

27 gives field guidance to the Wonsan Shoes Factory.

Dec. 1 visits the Mangyongdae Schoolchildren’s Palace successfully remodeled as required by the new century.

2 sends a message of greeting to Choummaly Sayasone, president of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the country’s founding.

3 sends a wreath to the bier of professor and Dr. Ri Tong-gyu, vice-president of the Academy of Sports Science, expressing deep condolences over his death.

3 inspects Tree Nursery No. 122 of the Korean People’s Army and set forth the tasks for updating it.

5 has a photo session with the participants of the fourth conference of artillery personnel of the KPA.

12 visits the May 9 Catfish Farm, which “has turned into another model and standard farm for the country’s pisciculture by putting its fish breeding on a scientific, intensive and industrial basis of high level.”

15 gives field guidance to the Samchon Catfish Farm and sets forth the task to turn it into a world-level fish farm.
**Kim Yong-nam:** President of the Presidium of the Supreme People’s Assembly (SPA)

Nov. 21 sends a message of sympathy to Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, president of Mali, in connection with the extreme terrorist attack in its capital city that caused many casualties.

Nov. 28 sends a message of greeting to Mahmoud Abbas, president of the State of Palestine, on the occasion of the Day of World Solidarity with the Palestinian people.

Dec. 5 sends a message of greeting to Bhumibol Adulyadej, king of Thailand, on the occasion of the national day of Thailand.

**Pak Pong-ju:** Premier

Nov. 18 makes a field survey of construction of the stockbreeding base in Sepho.

Dec. 10 makes a field survey of the Hwanghae Iron and Steel Complex.

---

**CHRONOLOGICAL REVIEW**

**(Local Events)**

Nov. 18 Ten multi-tier power stations in the 80 km-long section of the River Chongchon goes operational with inaugural ceremony held at Huichon Power Station No. 9.

Nov. 20 A trial operation of the newly manufactured subway train is conducted with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un on board.

Nov. 22 North Korean weightlifter Om Yun-chol bags a gold medal at the 2015 World Weightlifting Championship setting a new world record.

Nov. 25 The 72nd Enlarged Plenary Meeting of the Central Committee of the Union of Agricultural Workers of Korea (UAWK) takes place in Pyongyang.

Nov. 26 A national food show takes place at Pyongyang Noodle House on Nov. 25-26.

Nov. 26 The national sci-tech presentation and exhibition in the field of paint takes place in Pyongyang on Nov. 25 and 26 under the sponsorship of the Central Committee of the General Federation of Science and Technology of Korea.

Nov. 26 The 5th National Exhibition of Liquor, Essential and Children’s Foodstuff takes place from Nov. 24-26.

Nov. 26 A symposium on space science and technology takes place at Kim Il Sung University on Nov. 25-26.

Nov. 27 The 4th national conference of chairpersons of exemplary primary organizations of the General Federation of Trade Unions of Korea takes place in Pyongyang.

Nov. 29 The Korean Central History Museum established by Kim Il-sung in 1945 marks its 70th
anniversary.

Nov. 29 Agricultural workers meet in Haeju City to vow to greet the 7th Congress of the Workers’ Party of Korea (WPK) with unprecedented labor feats.

30 The General Federation of Trade Unions of Korea (GFTUK) marks its 70th founding anniversary.

Dec. 1 An event takes place at the People’s Palace of Culture to mark World AIDS Day.

1 The Osandok prize sports contest opens with due ceremony at the Ice Rink in Pyongyang.

3 Workers of the Hwanghae Iron and Steel Complex hold a meeting to vow to greet the 7th Congress of the Workers’ Party of Korea (WPK) with high political enthusiasm and unprecedented labor achievements.

4 North Korea’s Cabinet gives a banquet at Okryu Restaurant for the athletes who achieved excellent results in the 2015 World Weightlifting Championship.

4 A national exhibition and presentation of successes made in the agricultural science and technology in 2015 takes place in Pyongyang from Dec. 2-4.

4 The fourth conference of artillery personnel of the Korean People’s Army (KPA) takes place at the April 25 House of Culture on Dec. 3 and 4.

8 The remodeled Mangyongdae Schoolchildren’s Palace is inaugurated as a modern comprehensive extracurricular education center for school youth and children and a pedigree establishment for training talents.

10 Participants in the 3rd National Conference of Financial and Banking Officials visit the Kumsusan Palace of the Sun to pay tribute to North Korea’s founder Kim Il-sung and late leader Kim Jong-II.

11 The 31st festival of science and technology of the State Academy of Sciences takes place from Dec. 8 to 11 at the academy.

13 The third national conference of financial and banking officials takes place at the People’s Palace of Culture.

14 The Workers’ Party of Korea Publishing House publishes Vol. 11 of the “Complete Collection of Kim Jong Il’s Works”, an encyclopedia of the Juche idea and the Songun idea, which comprehensively deals with his works in chronological order.

14 Officials and members of the Democratic Women’s Union of Korea held a meeting at the Central Youth Hall on the occasion of the 4th anniversary of the demise of leader Kim Jong-il.

(Foreign Events)

Nov. 16 Marius Vizer, president of the International Judo Federation, arrives in Pyongyang.

17 A film show at the Chollima Hall of Culture is held to mark the 67th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between North Korea and Poland.
Nov.

17 A treaty on mutual legal assistance in criminal cases and a treaty on the extradition of criminals between North Korea and Russia are signed in Pyongyang.

18 Diplomatic envoys and representatives of international organizations stationed in Pyongyang visit combined service boat Mujigae which recently started operation in Taedong River.

19 The Central Committee of the Workers’ Party of Korea (WPK) hosts a reception in honor of German Hermin Ferras Alvarez, the Cuban ambassador to North Korea.

19 A delegation of the Maritime Administration of North Korea leaves Pyongyang to attend the 29th Assembly of the International Maritime Organization in London.

20 The Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea (CPRK) proposes to the Ministry of Unification of South Korea to hold working-level contact for inter-Korean high-level talks at the Thongil House in the north side of Panmunjom on Nov. 26.

21 A delegation of the Kim Il Sung Socialist Youth League leaves Pyongyang to visit Laos and Vietnam.

21 A North Korean military delegation headed by Army General Pak Yong-sik, minister of the People’s Armed Forces, leaves Pyongyang to visit the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

23 Alexandr Matsegora, Russian ambassador to North Korea, is awarded the North Korean Order of Friendship 1st Class.

23 The Rodong Sinmun claims the U.S. attempted to play down the realistic and just proposal for concluding a peace treaty with North Korea.

23 Talks between the North Korean military delegation and the delegation of the Ministry of Defense of Laos takes place at the building of the Lao Ministry of Defense.

23 Armed Forces Minister Pak Yong-sik on an official goodwill visit to the Lao People’s Democratic Republic has talks with Choummaly Sayasone, president of Laos.

24 A spokesman for the Policy Department of the National Defense Commission (NDC) slams South Korean authorities for “staging a reckless artillery firing drill” in the hotspot of the West Sea.

27 Pak Yong-sik, who is heading the North Korean military delegation on an official goodwill visit to Vietnam, has a talk with its President Truong Tan Sang.


28 A delegation of the Supreme Public Prosecutors Office headed by Director Jang Pyong-gyu leaves Pyongyang to visit Vietnam.

Dec.

2 A spokesman for North Korean foreign ministry urges U.S. to discuss conclusion of peace treaty.

5 North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Su-yong, and his party leave Pyongyang to take part in the high-ranking officials’ meeting of the U.N. Climate Change Conference to be held in Paris.
Dec. 5 A delegation of the Supreme People’s Assembly headed by its Vice-Chairman An Tong-chun leaves Pyongyang to take part in the 8th Plenary Session of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly to be held in Cambodia.

9 North Korea’s State Merited Chorus and Moranbong Band leave Pyongyang to pay a friendship visit to China.

10 A delegation of the Ministry of Energy of Russia led by Vice-Minister Anton Inyutsin arrives in Pyongyang.

11 An agreement on cooperation in the field of electric power between the governments of North Korea and the Russian Federation is signed in Pyongyang.

12 South and North Korea end their talks between high-level authorities in the Kaesong Industrial Zone without an agreement.

12 Moranbong Band returns to Pyongyang after canceling friendship concerts in Beijing without revealing a reason.

15 The economic and commercial councilor corps in Pyongyang lay a floral basket before the statues of President Kim Il-sung and leader Kim Jong-il on Mansu Hill on the occasion of the 4th anniversary of Kim Jong-il’s demise.