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DELAY IN WPK CONFERENCE FOR UNKNOWN REASON

As the scheduled ruling party convention has been delayed, a deluge of guesswork spread over Pyongyang's leadership succession scheme.

By Lee Kwang-ho

As North Korea was preparing for one of the most significant meetings of its ruling Workers' Party of (North) Korea (WPK) in decades, prospects of the meeting came to a screeching halt. A wide range of speculations surrounded the true reason behind the delayed national conference. Unconfirmed guesswork ranges from severe flood damages to the deteriorating health of leader Kim Jong-il to internal discord among power elite for the leadership succession. Nevertheless, an exact cause for the delay is unclear.

The socialist country announced in June that the party conference would be held in early September to elect the party's "highest leading body." But the rare WPK conference appeared to be postponed due to floods from a typhoon and torrential downpour that recently pounded the country. The conference, which would be the biggest political gathering in three decades since a party congress was held in October 1980, was expected to pave the way for an eventual leadership succession and other important state issues.

Observers predict that the conference will be held when the nation recovers from the floods damage, which could come around the time when the country celebrates the party's founding anniversary on Oct. 10. Outside analysts often have to rely on unconfirmed news reports, second-hand information relayed through recent North Korean defectors and occasional intelligence reports to make often conflicting conjectures.

Various Speculation on Delayed Conference

Some analysts speculated that Pyongyang delayed the conference because the 68-year-old Kim's health deteriorated after his trip to China late August or because not all of the power elite were happy with the choice of Kim's successor at a time of difficulty stemming from heavy floods. Others guess that the delicate leadership issue of the socialist state has not yet concluded because of internal discord or a power struggle among key elites in the country. They claim there is a hot debate or

even power struggle among key party members on the future course of the party through the leadership reorganization.

In any case, the delay could lead to potential speculation about the health of leader Kim Jong-il, who suffered a stroke in 2008 and has since tried to transfer his power to his third son, possibly through the party meeting. Whatever the reasons, it is evident that something unusual is happening in Pyongyang these days, a North Korean observer said.

Asked about the delay, South Korea's Unification Minister Hyun In-taek said on Sept. 15 that the North appeared to have postponed the party conference as publicly scheduled. "We don't exactly know why, but presume that internal problems caused a delay. It could be floods or any other various reasons."

Good Friends, a South Korean relief group that focuses on the socialist state, said on Sept. 15 that Pyongyang decided to postpone the crucial meeting because of severe damage from floods. "The meeting was postponed as of Sept. 14 evening," it said on its Web site, citing an unidentified delegate, who said floods cut off roads, making it difficult for his fellow members to reach Pyongyang. The aid group also said that party delegates waiting in Pyongyang were notified that the conference was postponed. Many of the delegates who came from provincial areas were returning home as of Sept. 15, it added.

The country was reportedly under hardship from floods and the people were suffering from the floods, making it a difficult time to announce a succession, analysts said. In a belated report, the North's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said that Typhoon Kompasu, which rolled across the Korean Peninsula in early September, left dozens of people dead. The report from the impoverished country, which is usually shy about publicizing natural disaster-related damage, reinforced speculation among South Korean experts that the party meeting could be delayed until the North recovers from the floods.



A large campaign poster is posted in a street, promoting a Workers' Party conference scheduled for early September in Pyongyang on Sept. 6. North Korea has planned to convene the political meeting amid predictions that leader Kim Jong-il would use it to give a key party position to one of his sons. (AP-Yonhap Photo)

The KCNA said the country was struck by torrential rains, rainstorms and landslides. More than 8,380 people lost their properties as 3,300 dwelling blocks collapsed, causing families to live in makeshift shelters. It said some 65,980 meters of railroad were ruined by landslides. Electricity and water have been cut off and traffic stopped in the affected areas causing residents to suffer from a lack of food and medicine, according to the news agency.

Pyongyang's media, nonetheless, sought to heighten the mood for the conference by heaping praise on the Workers' Party. The *Rodong Sinmun*, an organ of the Workers' Party, reported on Sept. 14 that the WPK is demonstrating its invincible might, enjoying high leadership authority. "The WPK is a great guide helping the people go along the way of worthwhile life enjoying the noblest political life, a reliable guardian protecting and taking care of the independent dignity and destiny of the people."

The North's official Korean Central Television Broadcasting Station said that the *Chongnyon Jonwi* newspaper, published by the Kimilsung Socialist Youth League (the North's youth guard militia), on Sept. 15 reported that party members described the meeting as having "high political passion and shining progress." *Minju Joson*, the Cabinet daily, also "covered the news of various regional units greeting the Workers' Party delegates' meeting with shining progress," and encouraged North Koreans to "achieve a breakthrough" in honor of the meeting.

Paving the Way for Power Succession

North Korea observers and officials have said the meeting could be used as an opportunity for North Korean leader Kim Jong-il to officially begin the process of anointing his third son, Jong-un, as his successor. In a 1980 congress, the Workers' Party made public Kim Jong-il's succession to his father and North Korean founder Kim Il-sung, bestowing on him a top party post. Kim Jong-il took over when his father died of a heart attack in 1994.

Information is lacking on Kim Jong-il's third son, Jong-un, who is known to be around 27 and to have spent some of his teenage years in Switzerland. No photo of him as an adult has been seen outside the North. The North's propaganda organs have been hinting of his status as successor by spreading songs and poems, without directly naming the son. Following his father's stroke in 2008, however, his grooming as heir picked up speed.

In a clear indication that North Korea is paving the way for a power succession, a Web site operated by a university in the socialist state is calling for appointment of the right successor to leader Kim Jong-il, possibly alluding to his son. "Only

when the successor to the leader is selected right can the leader's ideas and revolutionary exploits be firmly maintained and spectacularly passed down," said a post on Kim Il-Sung Broadcasting University's Web site, *uriminzokgangdang*, as seen in Seoul on Sept. 15.

Analysts say Kim Jong-il sought to secure China's recognition of his son as successor when he made a surprise visit to Pyongyang's foremost benefactor late August. They also believe it is likely that the North Korean regime will rule its 24-million population through an oligarchy with Kim Jong-un posing as its figurehead when Kim Jong-il dies. In addition, the conference would likely place prominent supporters of the son, such as Kim Jong-il's brother-in-law Jang Song-thaek, in top party positions, according to North Korea watchers. But Jong-un is thought unlikely at this stage to emerge from the shadows and might not be given a top party post, others said.

For the past months, the North has launched a propaganda campaign promoting the succession, including songs and poems praising the junior Kim. North Korean soldiers and workers reportedly pledged allegiance to the son on his birthday in January. North Korean media has not mentioned the son by name, but propaganda has hinted at the virtues of transferring power to a younger generation. Kim Jong-il himself began building his *songun* or "military-first" leadership, 50 years ago as a teenager, according to official media.

But there is also a negative view on the father-to-son succession. Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter said recently that Kim Jong-il denied in talks with China that he would anoint his youngest son as his heir. Carter, who visited North Korea in late August to free a detained American and China in early September, said he later spoke about his Pyongyang trip with Chinese Premier Wen Jiabo. Wen "surprised us by quoting the North Korean leader regarding the prospective promotion of his son, Kim Jong-un, as a false rumor from the West," Carter wrote on his Web site in mid-September.

North Korea's Move Ahead of Party Conference

Until early September, North Korean media reported that the party representatives arrived in Pyongyang, signaling the imminent start of the key event aimed at anointing the state's next leader and addressing other important issues. For the past weeks until early September, North Korea has held elections across the country and among major state organizations such as the police and the army, picking delegates to participate in the first meeting of party leaders in 44 years.

Amid continuing outside speculation over when North Korea will hold a rare

top-level communist party meeting, its leader Kim Jong-il was seemingly busy continuing his usual “field inspections,” arousing more speculation. After his return from China on Aug. 30, Kim disappeared from the public scene for a week. He then resumed his activities again, which, according to the North’s media, included watching a few art performances. On Sept. 12, Kim visited a chemical plant in a northern town and provided field guidance to the plant in Jagang Province that borders China.

Thus, Kim Jong-il’s trip to the North’s main ally China brought about questions and speculations regarding the upcoming meeting and suspected power transition. The North’s official media have touted the meeting as an event that will change the course of the nation. Less clear is whether Kim feels confident enough to place his son in the Politburo and the party’s Central Military Commission. A professor at a Seoul university said Kim might start his son in a rather modest post to “lessen the shock” and buy time to build his leadership credentials.

Kim Jong-il was appointed as a member of the central committee of the WPK when he emerged as Kim Il-sung’s successor in 1974. Analysts say he may be planning a similar path for his son as North Korea’s official media have been pouring praise on the committee since earlier this year. In July 1973, Kim Jong-il was named the head of the organization and guidance department of the Workers’ Party and became the secretary of organization and propaganda in September that year. In February 1974, he officially became the successor to his father. His position as successor was made public at the party congress in 1980. That historic succession took place when Kim Il-sung died of heart failure in 1994.

The upcoming party conference will be the third of its kind, and North Korea observers said the socialist regime saw important turning points when the previous conferences took place in 1956 and 1966. Kim Il-sung formally purged his opponents during the first meeting, and he became general secretary of the Workers’ Party during the second.

Possibility of Massive Generational Change

In addition to Kim Jong-un’s political debut, a massive generational change will likely be endorsed at the upcoming conference, observers said. The Workers’ Party has held no national convention since December 1993 and the upcoming conference will likely be used to fill vacancies created by the deaths of political heavyweights, they said.

As part of North Korea’s effort to establish a third-generation power succession, Jang Song-thaek, brother-in-law of leader Kim Jong-il, will be appointed to the sec-

ond most powerful post in the Workers' Party, according to intelligence sources. Jang, the director of the Workers' Party with responsibility for the police, judiciary and other areas of internal security, is the husband of the North Korean leader's younger sister Kim Kyong-hui.

Jang is also known to have played the role of guardian to heir-apparent Jong-un. Jang and hard-line generals in Kim's National Defense Commission, the country's top ruling body, are expected to move into key party posts to ensure a smooth transition of power, analysts said. "Jang will become the second most powerful man in the North," said an official. "If the appointment is realized, Jang will manage state affairs and assist Kim Jong-un's power succession." "But Kim Jong-un is young and he lacks achievements to back his rise as the next leader," the official said.

Another intelligence source said Kim Jong-un will likely have a grand political debut at the conference, but won't immediately become a member of the Standing Committee of the Politburo, the highest organ of the party.

In addition to Kim Jong-il and Jang, three other members of the country's power elite are expected to become members of the Standing Committee of the Politburo, the source said. They are Kim Yong-nam, president of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly and the nominal head of state, Kim Yong-chun, minister of the People's Armed Forces, and Choe Yong-rim, Cabinet Premier.

Historically, the Kim family has used party caucuses to purge political enemies, as well as to proclaim long-term visions for the country. An unusually large number of top-ranking North Korean officials are reported to have been executed, killed in mysterious "traffic accidents" or to have gone missing recently. If he doesn't follow his father's path, Jong-un could be named head of the military department of the party, sources said, pointing out that the post recently became vacant.

Of the members of the Politburo, only four, including Kim Jong-il and Kim Yong-nam are active. The other surviving members are in their 80s and are less active in politics. Senior military officials are likely to make their way into the Politburo and other key posts of the party, observers said. North Korea observers said a generational change will also take place in the lineup of the Workers' Party secretariat.

It is unclear what other changes might be on the meeting's agenda. During his summit meeting with Kim in Changchun in northeast China on Aug. 27, President Hu Jintao urged North Korea to follow China's example by adopting a "market mechanism," according to the Chinese news media. Kim toured factories and expressed interest in how China has sought to reinvigorate the region just across North Korean border. (Yonhap News)

ANOTHER INTER-KOREAN INDUSTRIAL PARK

President Lee said the two Koreas can open another joint industrial town should the North take various measures to develop the Kaesong facilities.

South Korean President Lee Myung-bak said on Sept. 10 his government hopes to build another inter-Korean industrial complex, but its feasibility would depend entirely on North Korea's attitude.

"Currently, the Kaesong Industrial Complex is perhaps the last channel for cooperation between South and North Korea," President Lee told Russia 24-TV, according to a transcript released by his office, Cheong Wa Dae. "Thus, the South Korean government wants to maintain and develop it, and I think so does North Korea."

Lee said the two Koreas can open another such joint industrial town should the North take various measures to develop the Kaesong facilities. "But it is entirely up to North Korea," he said. "I think North Korea should apologize for the Cheonan incident and inter-Korean relations should be normalized."

Inter-Korean relations have come to a virtual standstill after the sinking of the Cheonan, a South Korean warship, near the two Korea's western sea border in March. A Seoul-led multinational investigation team concluded two months later that the North downed the 1,200-ton patrol ship in a torpedo attack. Seoul has since cut off all joint economic projects with the North, except for the industrial complex jointly run with Pyongyang in the North Korean border town of Kaesong.

The Kaesong park opened in 2004 following a historic first-ever cross-border summit four years prior and stands as a symbol of inter-Korean reconciliation efforts. Around 44,000 North Korean workers are employed by more than 100 South Korean firms operating there.

Lee's remarks came as Seoul is considering a shipment of rice and other emergency aid to the North, which is struggling to recover from recent floods in its northwestern region bordering China.

Some observers see the move, although based on humanitarian consideration, as a sign of new flexibility by the conservative Lee administration in dealing with the North for an eventual thaw in inter-Korean ties. Lee's remarks on prospects of another joint industrial complex, they say, are also an overture to the North.

Lee said inter-Korean relations may get back on track earlier than expected. "I don't know when (inter-Korean ties will be normalized). (The normalization of the relations) may or may not come quickly," he said in the interview. "We want the

South-North relations to move toward normalization, and in that sense, the international community is showing keen attention and closely cooperating.”

In an interview with a Russian state broadcaster, Lee also said it is premature to define Kim Jong-un, the third son of current North Korean leader Kim Jong-il, as his counterpart.

Unusual for the South Korean president, Lee, when asked about the apparent transfer of power under way in Pyongyang, talked about the North’s purported next leader, Kim Jong-un.

Lee made clear that he would not define the junior Kim as his counterpart even if he is formally designated as the heir to the socialist regime. “(Jong-un) does not become my counterpart (automatically) although he is appointed as the next leader,” Lee said.

It is the first time that the South Korean president has publicly commented on Jong-un, shrouded in heavy secrecy and known only to be a young man in his 20s who studied abroad.

The North’s powerful Workers’ Party is preparing to convene sometime in September a meeting of its delegates from across the country, during which analysts expect the younger Kim to be given a key post as a sign that he is being groomed to become the North’s next leader. They do not rule out the possibility that Jong-un will be officially nominated as the heir to his 68-year-old father, who is said to be growing frail after suffering a stroke in 2008.

“(The leadership) will be eventually inherited by the third generation from Kim Il-sung and Chairman Kim Jong-il,” Lee said, referring to the father of the incumbent leader and the late founding leader of the North. Lee refused to go into details, however, saying it is an internal affair of North Korea, and he has no concrete information.

Responding to a hypothetical question that he may meet Jong-un someday, Lee said, “If I meet Chairman Kim Jong-il and (Jong-un) sits in, I will be able to meet him naturally, but I would not attach a special meaning to that as he is not my counterpart.”

With regard to his earlier proposal for a “unification tax” to foot the huge financial costs anticipated when the capitalist South reunites with the impoverished North, Lee said his country needs to prepare during normal times for “peaceful reunification.”

He stressed that South Korea is not seeking reunification from a sudden collapse of North Korea, a charge Pyongyang often levels at Seoul.

“After establishing peaceful relations with North Korea first, we plan to seek peaceful reunification in the next stage,” Lee said. (Yonhap News)

KIM JONG-IL'S SECOND VISIT TO CHINA THIS YEAR

Kim's abrupt trip to China came at a sensitive time ahead of his nation's crucial ruling party conference amid soaring regional tension and enmity.

By Lee Kwang-ho

North Korean leader Kim Jong-il made a surprise five-day trip to China in late August as uncertainties prevailed over his own country amid a complicated international situation. The ailing 68-year-old Kim held summit talks with Chinese President Hu Jintao to bolster their traditional friendship and to deepen economic cooperation.

China, the North's staunchest ally, gave a warm reception to the North Korean leader who toured China's northeastern region that borders North Korea. It is quite symbolic that the two leaders held the summit in Changchun, the capital of Jilin Province. The city, home to many ethnic Koreans, has many historic sites that bear the footprints of Korean struggles against Japanese imperialists during the early part of the last century.

Kim's abrupt visit to the neighboring country came at a sensitive time, ahead of his nation's crucial national conference of the ruling Workers' Party delegates in September. Regional tension and enmity has soared to a level unseen for years, particularly since the South Korean warship, Cheonan, sank

in March. Despite the worsening situation surrounding the Korean Peninsula, China is pushing to jump-start the six-nation talks on ending North Korea's nuclear programs.

North Korea watchers said the primary purpose of Kim's China trip was to obtain economic aid from the socialist ally and traditional benefactor as his impoverished nation suffers troubles from international sanctions and recent floods that pounded many areas of the country. The two leaders might have reached a deal to boost trade and economic cooperation, they said.

Purpose of Kim's China Trip

The hostile circumstances facing the North was another reason that forced Kim to make the trip. The country has been under tightened sanctions since it test-fired several missiles and conducted a second nuclear test last year. Worse yet, sources of hard currency have dried up due to the increasing pressure.

Details on Kim's trip to China were largely concealed. Of what was revealed, Kim in the summit reportedly called for reopening international nuclear talks, though North Korea's offi-

cial media did not report on the need for the stalled six-party talks.

China's official Xinhua news agency reported that Hu emphasized the need to facilitate economic exchanges and strategic communication between the two countries, while Kim expressed his appreciation for China's economic achievements since its opening and reform.

Kim embarked on the five-day trip to China on Aug. 26, just three months after his last visit to his country's closest ally, an unusual move by the reclusive leader who rarely travels abroad. Neither Beijing nor Pyongyang officially mentioned Kim's trip to China until he returned home on Aug. 30.

Beijing broke its silence about Kim's tour only minutes after he crossed the Tumen River in the afternoon of Aug. 30 to return to Pyongyang. As Kim returned home, official media in North Korea and China announced that both leaders affirmed deepening ties and promised greater cooperation.

Media reports have speculated that Kim's youngest son and heir apparent, Jong-un, accompanied his father on the trip. Jong-un, believed to be 27 years old, has been shrouded in secrecy but could be named to a key post when North Korea holds its first meeting of ruling party delegates in 44 years in September. But there was no mention by Xinhua or the KCNA of Kim's son.



In this image made on Aug. 30 from China Central Television footage, North Korea's Kim Jong-il, third from left, applauds with Chinese President Hu Jintao, at right, during a banquet held in Changchun in northeast China's Jilin Province on Aug. 27. (AP-Yonhap Photo)

China said Jong-un's name was not on the official list of Kim's entourage.

"With the international situation remaining complicated, it is our important historical mission to hand over to the rising generation the baton of the traditional friendship passed over by the revolutionary forerunners of the two countries as a precious asset so as to carry it forward through generations," Kim said at a banquet with Chinese President Hu Jintao, according to the North's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA).

By the "rising generation," Kim is believed to be referring to his plan to hand power over to his youngest son, Jong-un, which would mark the second hereditary transfer of power in the socialist country. Kim himself took over

the family dynasty after his father and national founder Kim Il-sung died in 1994. Kim is said to have accelerated the succession process after he suffered a stroke in 2008.

North Korea observers said that Pyongyang hopes Beijing will give solid support to its power succession plan from Kim Jong-il to Kim Jong-un. They said that the succession issue must have been the focus of Kim's latest trip as the itinerary included a pilgrimage to sites considered holy in North Korea for the anti-Japanese activity of Kim Il-sung, who is still revered as eternal president amid a strong cult of personality.

Kim Jong-il's Remarks

While the North Korean leader was traveling to China, Pyongyang's state media reported that the country has started holding lower-level meetings of party delegations in the run-up to the Workers' Party conference. "The meetings were unanimous in saying that the WPK conference ... will be a significant conference which will be a landmark of an epochal turn in strengthening the party and a great jubilee of great significance in ushering in a new surge in the revolution and construction," the KCNA said.

"Steadily developing the friendship through generations is an important issue in defending peace and security in Northeast Asia and the rest of the world," Kim said at the banquet with

Hu. "It is an unswerving policy of our party and government to further develop through generations and centuries Korea-China friendship, which has overcome all sorts of hardship through history."

Another important issue discussed at the summit was the resumption of the deadlocked six-party talks. China's Xinhua news agency said that Kim hoped for an early resumption of the six-nation talks on the country's nuclear programs at the summit. It also quoted Kim claiming that North Korea's stance on adhering to denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula had remained unchanged, and the country "is not willing to see tensions on the peninsula."

But the KCNA made no mention of the nuclear talks in its dispatches on the outcome of Kim's latest trip, only saying that the two sides had a "frank and sincere exchange of views" on international and regional issues, and "reached a full consensus of views."

The nuclear talks have been stalled since the last session in late 2008 due to Pyongyang's boycott. The prospects of reopening the forum have been further overshadowed by North Korea's deadly sinking of the Cheonan in March.

Kim's trip also came as a surprise because he left Pyongyang while former U.S. President Jimmy Carter was in the North to secure the release of a jailed American citizen. By refusing to meet Carter and instead heading to China, Kim appears to have sought to show the strength of Pyongyang-Beijing ties

and send a clear message that his regime will not bow to U.S. pressure, analysts said.

Carter arrived in Pyongyang on Aug. 25 to secure the release of Aijalon Mahli Gomes, who had been detained in the North since January for illegal entry. Carter headed home Aug. 27 with the freed American.

Analysts said China has secured momentum to expand its clout in the region by apparently embracing isolated North Korea and its succession scheme, while Pyongyang has increased its chances of surviving deepening sanctions against it in the latest summit.

Expectation of Six-party Talks

The summit underscored the growing need for Pyongyang to turn to its traditional ally for a reprieve from the pressure that South Korea and the United States have mounted on it for months. China has a track record of blunting international sanctions on North Korea by giving the neighboring regime assistance through back doors.

China is pushing for a “three-step” proposal for resuming the nuclear talks. The proposal calls for Pyongyang and Washington to first hold bilateral talks before all six parties hold an informal preparatory meeting and then an official session.

South Korea has expressed its reluctance to reopen the dialogue unless the North shows a “responsible” attitude

over the warship sinking and proves through action that it is serious about abandoning its nuclear programs.

Since May, when a South Korean- and U.S.-led multinational investigation found North Korea responsible for the sinking of the Cheonan that killed 46 South Korean sailors, North Korea has vehemently denied its role and threatened war for any punishment. South Korea has nonetheless gone ahead with large-scale naval exercises in the region, sometimes teaming up with the U.S. – and also raising the hackles of the leadership in Beijing.

Soon after Kim’s return, the U.S. government slapped additional sanctions on North Korea as U.S. President Barack Obama issued an executive order to reinforce existing sanctions. The U.S. currently blacklists more than 20 North Korean entities and individuals.

Under the latest order, Washington added a total of eight North Korean entities and four individuals to its sanctions blacklist for their alleged involvement in the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, trade in conventional arms, procurement of luxury goods and other illicit activities.

Xinhua news agency summarized the conversation between the two leaders, which exposed what the two allies wanted from each other. First, Hu called for the maintenance of high-level contact on a regular basis. Second, the two leaders agreed that bilateral trade and economic cooperation should be

advanced through market operations at the initiative of enterprises under government guidance. Third, they concurred that strategic communication should be strengthened via prompt, thorough and in-depth dialogues to cope with regional and international situations.

North Korea's bilateral trade with China accounted for approximately 50 percent of its entire trade in 2008. The figure could have soared after the sinking of the Cheonan because South Korea severed trade ties with the North. About 76 percent of the bilateral trade was concentrated in the three northeastern provinces near the border where about 2 million ethnic Koreans reside.

Progress in Cooperation with China

Chinese investments will buffer the North from the possible economic shock and therefore Pyongyang will feel less pain than Washington had intended even after additional pressure is imposed. China is believed to have consented to a certain level of aid to the North to help stabilize its economy, which is staggering after the botched currency reform late last year.

There is also speculation that the two countries made significant progress in developing the northeastern region of China that connects the three cities of Changchun, Jilin and Tumen. Since there are no harbors, the Chinese provinces will have easy access to the

Pacific through North Korea's east coast.

Meanwhile, the North is trying to open up Rajin port and push for development in cooperation with China and Russia. The development project is gaining momentum steadily because the three countries share common ground in the Tumen River estuary – something they can all profit from. China has shown great interest in the project as the port gives its three northeastern provinces easy access to the Pacific. The Chinese side plans to pave a 93-kilometer road linking Hunchun in its Jilin Province to the North Korean port.

For this latest diplomatic effort, Kim's itinerary was veiled from the public eye for the most part. He crossed into China around midnight Aug. 25 aboard his luxurious personal train. On Aug. 26, Kim paid a visit to Jilin's Yuwen Middle School, which his father, Kim Il-sung, attended for two and a half years starting in 1927. Kim also visited Beishan Park in Jilin, where the remains of anti-Japanese independence fighters are buried.

After his trip to Changchun, where he held the summit with Hu, Kim stopped by Harbin, Heilongjiang Province. He also paid a visit to a historic site there on Aug. 29 symbolic of the anti-Japanese activity of Kim Il-sung. On his way home on Aug. 30, Kim stopped by the northeastern city of Mudanjiang to pay tribute his late father in a move highlighting the heritage his family bears as the rulers of the socialist state for decades. (Yonhap News)

FRESH U.S. SANCTIONS ON N.K. AND THEIR MEANING

Under the Obama executive order, Washington added a total of eight North Korean entities and four individuals to its sanctions blacklist.

By Tony Chang

The United States on Aug. 30 unveiled fresh sanctions on North Korea in response to the socialist nation's alleged torpedoing of a South Korean warship. U.S. President Barack Obama issued an executive order to "expand the scope of the national emergency declared in Executive Order 13466 of June 26, 2008" to reinforce existing sanctions on North Korea.

Under the latest order, Washington added a total of eight North Korean entities and four individuals to its sanctions blacklist for their alleged involvement in the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, trade in conventional arms, procurement of luxury goods and other illicit activities.

The U.S. had previously blacklisted more than 20 North Korean entities and individuals. The new sanctions came after Obama ordered his administration in June to toughen sanctions on North Korea after the torpedoing of the Cheonan. A South Korean-led investigation carried out by a team of international experts ruled the sinking was caused by a North Korean torpedo. North Korea denies responsibility.

To discuss placing additional sanctions, Robert Einhorn, the State Department's special adviser for non-proliferation and arms control, who oversees U.S. sanctions on North Korea and Iran, visited Seoul in early August for talks on the matter and will travel to Beijing in September to seek Chinese support for new sanctions on North Korea and Iran.

Obama's Executive Order

The new executive order takes note of the "unprovoked attack" on the Cheonan, which resulted in the deaths of 46 sailors in March, and North Korea's nuclear and missile tests, which "destabilize the Korean Peninsula and imperil U.S. Armed Forces, allies and trading partners in the region."

It also cites North Korean actions in violation of the U.N. Security Council resolutions 1718 and 1874, "including the procurement of luxury goods; and its illicit and deceptive activities in international markets through which it obtains financial and other support, including money laundering, the counterfeiting of goods and currency, bulk cash smuggling and narcotics trafficking."

The new additions to the blacklist are divided into two groups – those added under an existing anti-WMD executive order and those listed under a new executive order targeting Pyongyang’s trade in conventional arms, luxury goods and other illicit activities. Among the five North Korean entities and four North Korean individuals newly listed were Office 39 of the North’s ruling Workers’ Party, believed to manage slush funds for North Korean leader Kim Jong-il, and Ri Je-son and Ri Hong-sop of the General Bureau of Atomic Energy.

Also on the list were the Reconnaissance General Bureau, North Korea’s premiere intelligence organization which is suspected of being involved in the sinking of the Cheonan, along with Green Pine Associated Corp., the Korea Taesong Trading Co. and Korea Heungjin Trading Co.

U.S. officials said they would try to persuade the international community to voluntarily cut off ties with listed North Korean entities and individuals amid concerns that sanctions will be ineffective without support from China.

South Korea welcomed the fresh U.S. sanctions on North Korea, saying the move shows the socialist nation that there are consequences for its bad behavior.

“The United States has said there would be consequences for North Korea’s bad behavior, and I think the sanctions announcement showed it

through specific action,” a South Korean government official said on condition of anonymity.

The sanctions on North Korea are seen as less stringent than those on Iran, as Washington did not embody them in laws as it did with Iran. Many observers do not expect the sanctions to have much impact on Pyongyang, as the communist nation has few assets and financial transactions in the U.S. But they could prove painful if Washington’s blacklisting leads to financial institutions in other nations halting dealings with targeted entities. Officials in Seoul have said that the success of the new sanctions will depend on how much cooperation Washington can get from other nations in carrying out the measures.

Targeting Pyongyang’s Leadership

The new U.S. sanctions against North Korea are highly symbolic as they target Pyongyang’s leadership, but it is unclear how hard they will hit the socialist regime that has already been under an array of international sanctions, analysts said.

“I think this is an expression of the U.S. intention to push strongly for bilateral sanctions against North Korea,” said Dong Yong-seung, a senior analyst at the Samsung Economic Research Institute in Seoul. “But I don’t think we will be able to see its impact immediately.”

Dong said that it is unlikely for a

third country to voluntarily join the U.S. sanctions campaign “until there is a specific case” of Washington taking punitive steps against a foreign institution that continues dealing with those blacklisted.

A government official in Seoul said that Office 39 is called Kim Jong-il’s “personal safe” for its role in raising and managing secret funds and procuring luxury goods for the reclusive leader. The Reconnaissance General Bureau has also been suspected of orchestrating March’s ship sinking.

Dong also said that the naming of the North’s Reconnaissance General Bureau and its chief, Gen. Kim Yong-chol, could be a U.S. message to Pyongyang that the regime should punish them, holding them responsible for the ship sinking. Other analysts expressed doubts over the sanctions’ impact, saying that China could blunt them. “The sanctions won’t have a big impact if China remains passive about it,” said Yang Moo-jin, a professor at Seoul’s University of North Korean Studies.

In 2005, the U.S. imposed similar financial sanctions on Pyongyang by blacklisting a bank in the Chinese territory of Macau with links to the North. That led to the freezing of US\$24 million in North Korean money held at the bank, Banco Delta Asia, and scared away other global financial institutions from dealing with Pyongyang for fear they would also be blacklisted.

The U.S. announcement of new sanc-

tions came just hours after Beijing and Pyongyang announced Kim Jong-il’s surprise trip to China, the neighboring ally that has provided the impoverished and provocative North with food and energy aid as well as diplomatic protection.

China’s Assistance

During the trip, the North Korean leader held a summit with Chinese President Hu Jintao, pledging to further bolster their traditional ties. China has a track record of blunting international sanctions on North Korea by giving the neighboring regime assistance through back doors. Beijing is also considered a key to effective sanctions on Pyongyang because it is a lifeline to its impoverished socialist neighbor, providing fuel, food and other necessities. China has been reluctant to slap sanctions on North Korea, focusing instead on reviving the six-party nuclear talks.

Accordingly, some officials in Seoul have said that the impact of the new sanctions won’t be big, as North Korea has already been under a series of international sanctions for its nuclear and missile tests. “North Korea is already under almost all possible sanctions. Additional measures will be to fill possible holes in the net of the sanctions,” a senior official said recently on condition of anonymity. “The question is how stringently they will be implemented.” (Yonhap News)

N.K.'S BEHAVIOR IN RELEASING DETAINED AMERICANS

North Korea has required high-profile visits from Washington for freeing American detainees in a bid to secure dialogue channels with the U.S.

By Oh Seok-min

North Korea on Aug. 27 released Aijalon Gomes, who was sentenced to eight years of hard labor and fined an equivalent of US\$700,000 in April for illegal entry into the socialist country in January, on the occasion of former U.S. President Jimmy Carter's visit to Pyongyang. North Korea's behavior seen in the process for setting Gomes free is similar to former cases in which the socialist country had set free detained Americans.

After a three-day trip to Pyongyang starting on Aug. 25, Carter won the release of Gomes. The 85-year-old former U.S. leader's visit was reportedly made after repeated demands from Pyongyang which snubbed a team of U.S. officials who had flown to North Korea in early August in a failed attempt to rescue the detainee.

After all, Carter is widely viewed as a crucial link between the two countries as his 1994 talks with the late Kim Il-sung, current North Korean leader Kim Jong-il's father, helped defuse soaring tensions on the Korean Peninsula and paved the way for the Agreed Framework later in the year, a pact designed to freeze the North's work on a nuclear reactor in return for benefits.

On the first day of his visit to Pyongyang in 16 years, Carter met with the North's nominal head of state, Kim Yong-nam, the country's foreign minister and other senior officials. Differing from observers' expectations, Carter was unable to meet with Kim Jong-il as the reclusive leader left the night Carter arrived in Pyongyang for a second trip to China in less than four months.

Kim Jong-il's Special Pardon

The socialist country, however, stressed that the leader made the decision on a special pardon. "After receiving a report on the request made by the U.S. government and Carter, Kim Jong-il issued an order of the chairman of the DPRK (North Korea) National Defense Commission on granting amnesty to Gomes," the North's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported on Aug. 27 in its English dispatch.

North Korea also emphasized Carter's apology on behalf of the U.S. government and the socialist country's measure of humanitarianism and peace-loving policy. "The measure taken by the DPRK to set free the illegal entrant is a manifestation of its humanitarianism and peace-loving policy," the KCNA said.

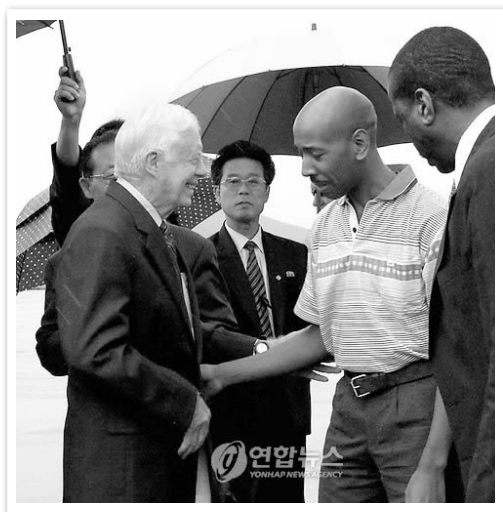
Although the U.S. stepped back from any political overtones, saying it did not "propose or arrange" the trip, Carter's visit to Pyongyang served as an opportunity for two sides to discuss wider issues, including the North's nuclear programs. The KCNA also observed, "The Pyongyang visit paid by Jimmy Carter, ex-president of the U.S., provided a favorable occasion of deepening the understanding and building confidence between the two countries."

Kim Yong-nam, while conversing with Carter about bilateral relations, reportedly reaffirmed the country's denuclearization pledge and intention to return to the denuclearization talks North Korea abandoned in April 2009. Those ideas, an about-face from the North's previous hard-line stance, were then echoed by Kim Jong-il during his summit with Chinese President Hu Jintao on Aug. 27.

"Carter successfully removed a major stumbling block standing in the way of their relations, which led to a series of positive signs about the multilateral talks and other major issues," said Kim Yong-hyun, a professor at Dongguk University in Seoul. "I think such a trigger is crucial, which is reminiscent of last year's case."

The detainee-releasing procedures seen in Gomes case have similarities in many aspects to those involving two American journalists who were set free after 140 days of detention in Pyongyang, thanks to a high-profile mission completed by former U.S. President Bill Clinton.

Euna Lee and Laura Ling were arrested at the Chinese border with North Korea in March 2009 while reporting for California-based Current Media and sentenced to 12 years in prison on charges of illegal entry. The sentence did not involve fines as was the case of Gomes's trial. Defying repeated U.S. calls for their immediate



Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter talks with American Aijalon Gomes (second from right) at the airport in the North Korean capital of Pyongyang before returning to the United States on Aug. 27. (KCNA-Yonhap Photo)

release, North Korea had not budged before Clinton traveled to Pyongyang to meet Kim Jong-il.

North Korea said the meetings during Clinton's visit "had candid and in-depth discussions on the pending issues between the DPRK and the U.S. in a sincere atmosphere," implying that the trip was far from "a solely private mission" as Washington called it. Clinton's trip, which came three months after the second nuclear test by the North in May 2009, resulted in a softening of Pyongyang's position and led to its first high-level contact with the U.S. under the Barack Obama administration in December 2009.

That North Korea insisted on a high-profile trip in exchange for granting amnesty has revealed its intention to exploit the situation for gaining direct access to important U.S. figures and opening dialogue it has sought, according to experts.

"For North Korea, it would be one of the easiest options to reach the U.S. amid a lack of diplomatic ties and soured relations between them," said Yoo Ho-yeol, a North Korea expert at Seoul's Korea University.

Former Cases

It also appears that North Korea aims to redeem its tainted images and offset some pressure being brought on it for a series of belligerent behaviors by underlining its "lenient" decision. The North's official media, in fact, described the amnesty to the detained Americans, in cases of both the two journalists and Gomes, as "a manifestation of its humanitarianism and peace-loving policy," while reiterating apologies from the U.S.

The maximization of such humanitarian missions for fulfilling its political purposes was also witnessed in the 1990s when senior U.S. statesman flew to North Korea to negotiate for the release of American citizens. In 1994, then-Congressman Bill Richardson – the current governor of New Mexico – brought home U.S. Army pilot Bobby Hall, who was released 13 days after his helicopter was shot down while straying into North Korea. Experts attributed the North's quick response to its intention to maintain amicable relations with the U.S. which had been built by the conclusion of the Agreed Framework.

Richardson also secured the release in 1996 of Evan Hunziker, who had been captured in North Korea for three months on suspicion of spying while swimming in the Yalu River on North Korea's border with China. North Korean observers pointed out that the gesture of conciliation aimed to counter criticism over its infiltration into the South with a submarine for espionage and to secure aid the poverty-stricken country desperately needed. After all, the release of Hunziker led to

smooth funding from Washington to Pyongyang for oil supplies in return for freezing the North's nuclear programs and a continued flow of humanitarian aid from the international community.

Chances are North Korea will employ such tactics over foreign detainee cases down the road, as the socialist nation has few options to secure a channel for dialogue with the U.S., at least for now. Acknowledging possibilities of the repetition of such incidents, the U.S. State Department issued a travel warning immediately after Carter flew out of North Korea with Gomes, telling Americans not to enter the country without "explicit official permission and an entry visa from the government of North Korea."

"U.S. citizens crossing into North Korea without proper documentation, even accidentally, have been subject to arrest and long-term detention," the warning said in bold letters.

In a cheeky Twitter message, State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley also implored Americans to heed the warning, saying the country has "a handful of former presidents" available for rescue missions.

Some experts, in the meantime, warn the North's "detainee diplomacy" is neither helpful for bettering relations with the U.S. nor desirable in a longer term.

"It is nothing more than a by-product of their soured relationship," said Yang Moo-jin, a professor at Seoul's University of North Korean Studies. "Playing the card repeatedly will backfire, as such irregular tactics would lead to its further isolation and block constructive efforts to find more reasonable ways of improving relations." (Yonhap News)

Chinese Leaders Congratulate North Korea on Its Founding Anniversary

Chinese leaders, including President Hu Jintao, congratulated North Korea on its founding, which took place 62 years ago, pledging to further bolster their relations so as to "safeguard peace and stability in this region," Pyongyang's state media said on Sept. 9. In the congratulatory message, Chinese leaders, including Jintao, China's top legislator Wu Bangguo and Premier Wen Jiabao, said that the traditional friendships between the two countries have become "valuable assets of the peoples of the two countries after overcoming the hardship" of changing international situations. "We will safeguard peace and stability in this region and bring the peoples of the two countries better well-being by deepening exchanges and cooperation in every sector of the two countries and pushing incessantly" to move the relations forward, the KCNA quoted the message as saying. (Yonhap News)

North Korea Releases South Korean Fishing Boat, Crew

The North's release of the South Korean boat signaled a thaw in icy relations between the two Koreas, analysts said.

After being held in captivity for a month, a South Korean fishing boat and its seven crew members were released by North Korea on Sept. 7, in a potential sign of easing months of confrontation on the Korean Peninsula.

North Korea returned the four South Korean and three Chinese fishermen and their 41-ton squid fishing vessel at the sea border off the peninsula's east coast, coast guard officials said. The boat was seized on Aug. 8 after it allegedly violated the North's eastern exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

The North accused the South Korean boat Daeseung 55 of illegally entering its waters, but said on Sept. 6 it decided to send the boat and its crew back to South Korea "from the humanitarian points of view."

The boat and crew members arrived at a South Korean port in Sokcho, 210 kilometers east of Seoul, as of 8:19 p.m. under the escort of two South Korean patrol ships, coast guard officials said.

When the crew members appeared at the Sokcho port, they looked somewhat tired, but captain Kim Chil-ee told reporters, "There was no sick crew members."

"I apologize for causing concerns to people and I thank for the public support that helped us return quickly," Kim said, adding that he would give further details to investigators.

The crew members were taken by government investigators to an unknown place for questioning.

Announcing the release, the North's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said the decision to release the 55 Daesung has been made "from the compatriotic and humanitarian points of view."

Referring to the four South Korean and three Chinese crew members, the KCNA said the fishermen admitted to having trespassed in the EEZ in the East Sea, calling it "an intolerable infringement upon the sovereignty" of North Korea.

"But it decided to send the boat and its crew back to South Korea from the compatriotic and humanitarian points of view, taking into consideration the fact that they admitted to the seriousness of their act" and promised they would not "repeat such an act," the KCNA said.

The squid fishing boat disappeared on Aug. 8 while operating in the East Sea.

The South had repeatedly urged the North to release it, sending messages in the name of the Red Cross, which is Seoul's main channel on humanitarian issues involving North Korea.

"It is fortunate" that the North decided to release the boat, Chun Hae-sung, spokesman for the South's Unification Ministry, told reporters. The ministry said in a statement that the North had notified the South that it would hand over the boat at 4 p.m. on Sept. 7 at the maritime border in the East Sea.

The decision to release the boat came ahead of the North's largest political meeting in 30 years. It also came about a week after the South's Red Cross offered to send 10 billion won (US\$ 8.4 million) in flood aid to help the North recover from heavy flooding that ravaged parts of the country in August.

After remaining silent for more than 10 days, North Korea said in mid-August that it had seized a South Korean fishing boat with seven crew members on board that apparently strayed into its waters.

It was North Korea's first confirmation on the fate of the ship and its crew since they disappeared on Aug. 8. In a short dispatch from Pyongyang, the KCNA on Aug. 19 claimed the boat, Daeseung, had violated the inter-Korean border in the East Sea.

South Korea has urged the North to release the abducted fishing boat and explain the circumstances surrounding the seizure. But Pyongyang had refused to respond to several inquiries by Seoul on the fate of the ship and its crew.

"A South Korean boat that was fishing in our exclusive economic zone in the East Sea was seized by the (North) Korean People's Army (KPA) Navy on Aug. 8," the KCNA dispatch said. "A preliminary investigation revealed the boat, with four South Koreans and three Chinese on board, intruded into our economic zone."

The seizure came amid high military tensions between the Koreas over the deadly sinking of a South Korean warship near their western sea border in March. Forty-six sailors died in the sinking that North Korea denies any role in.

At the North's confirmation of the seizure, South Korea renewed calls for the release of the detainees. On Aug. 20, South Korea's Red Cross sent North Korea another message calling for the release of the crew amid high tensions between the divided states.

"As the North has notified us of its seizure of the Daeseung, our Red Cross just now sent another message to North Korea at 10:00 a.m." through a western military hotline, Unification Ministry spokeswoman Lee Jong-joo said in a briefing.

The North's release of the South Korean boat and the South's apparent moves to resume large-scale aid to the North signaled a thaw in icy relations between the two Koreas, one analyst said. (Yonhap News)

Koreas to Hold Working-level Talks on Family Reunions in Kaesong

The North proposed that working-level Red Cross officials from two Koreas meet “at an earliest possible date” to discuss the family reunions.

Working-level Red Cross officials from South and North Korea plan to hold talks in the North’s border town of Kaesong on Sept. 17 to discuss arranging additional reunions of families separated by the 1950-53 Korean War, Seoul’s Unification Ministry said on Sept. 13.

“South Korea’s Red Cross earlier Sept. 13 proposed holding working-level contacts in Kaesong on Sept. 17 to prepare reunions of separated families and its North Korean counterpart accepted the offer,” said the ministry said in a release.

In its written answer, the North said it will send two working-level officials to the Red Cross talks scheduled to take place at Kaesong’s Janamsan Hotel, according to the ministry.

It is very rare that Pyongyang has responded to Seoul’s proposal for talks in less than one day, ministry officials said, adding the North’s swift reaction seems to display its strong intention to push for the reunions of separated families and other cooperation projects.

Earlier, North Korea proposed the resumption of reunions between families living separately on the divided Korean Peninsula. The North also proposed that working-level Red Cross officials from two Koreas meet “at an earliest possible date” to discuss the resumption.

The proposal, which was made by the North’s Red Cross Society in a message sent to its South Korean counterpart on Sept. 10, encouraged a fresh round of family reunions to be held at the resort mountain of Kumgang on the east coast around the Korean fall harvest holiday, which falls on Sept. 22, the North’s official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported on the next day.

South Korea has positively considered North Korea’s proposal to resume reunions of families living separately on the divided Korean Peninsula amid signs of a turnaround in the frozen cross-border relationship.

“We received a message from the North Korean Red Cross Society on Sept. 10, proposing reunions of separated families on the peninsula,” an official in Seoul on Sept. 11 said, confirming a North Korean media report on the proposal.

“The South’s Korean National Red Cross is positively reviewing this and will come up with measures through consultations with the government down the

road,” the official added, asking not to be named due to the sensitivity of the issue.

But the reunion event is unlikely to be held before the Chuseok holiday as such events usually take at least a month to prepare, according to the unification ministry official.

The reunions began following the historic first inter-Korean summit in 2000. More than 127,000 people in the South have since signed up for the reunions, though nearly a third of them have died of old age. About one in 800 was selected.

Around 16,000 people have been reunited through face-to-face reunions so far. Some 600,000 South Koreans are believed to have family in the North.

The last round of family reunions was held in the North’s mountain resort in September last year for the first time in nearly two years. The Koreans failed the following month to agree on a new round of reunions.

The North’s offer for resuming reunions of separate families comes amid hopes for a possible rapprochement in inter-Korean ties.

The South’s Red Cross on Aug. 31 proposed to its North Korean counterpart that it would send 10 billion won (US\$8.4 million) in flood aid that excludes rice. The North’s Red Cross, in a reply to the offer, on Sept. 7 requested that the staple be sent along with cement and excavators.

Dialogue between the two Koreas has been cut off since South Korean President Lee Myung-bak took office in 2008 and vowed to link inter-Korean relations to progress in North Korea’s denuclearization.

Inter-Korean relations have come to a virtual standstill after the sinking of the Cheonan, a South Korean warship, near their western sea border in March. A Seoul-led multinational investigation team concluded two months later that the North downed the 1,200-ton patrol ship in a torpedo attack.

Also, the North on Sept. 13 accepted the South Korean Red Cross’ proposal to send about 10 billion won (US\$8.6 million) worth of emergency flood relief, including 5,000 tons of rice and 10,000 tons of cement, the Unification Ministry said.

“North Korea said in a separate oral message that it will be ready to accept the emergency flood relief, if the South sets the delivery date,” a ministry official said.

Earlier in the day, South Korea’s Red Cross announced that it would provide rice and cement aid to help North Korea recover from recent floods and proposed holding talks on reunions of families separated by war.

Yoo Chong-ha, chief of Seoul’s Red Cross, said in a press conference that the upcoming rice shipment to the North will be enough to feed 200,000 people for 50 days, adding it will be concentrated on the North’s border town of Sinuiju, which was hit hard last month when its river abutting China flooded and swamped houses, buildings and farmland. (Yonhap News)

NORTH KOREA'S USE OF ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORKS

Pyongyang has not officially claimed ownership of any of the accounts on online social networks but lashed out at Seoul's blocking access to the sites.

North Korea, one of the most reclusive nations in the world, appears to have entered the increasingly popular realm of online social networking to diffuse propaganda to the South and to tech-savvy people around the world, a move that has succeeded in creating quite a buzz.

In July, an account that appeared to be affiliated with North Korea was registered with the popular U.S.-based video-sharing site YouTube, uploading clips that praise the isolated regime and defend it against accusations that it attacked a South Korean warship.

The account, "uriminzokkiri" (meaning "among our people"), which also happens to be the name of North Korea's official Web site, has uploaded more than 100 clips.

As of Sept. 15, however, the account was no longer accessible from South Korea, as Seoul's communications watchdog and police blocked access from the South, citing a special law that bans South Koreans from accessing the North's propaganda material.

All North Korean-run Web sites are blocked in the South and can only be accessed with special government authorization.

Yonhap earlier observed that uploaded footage largely contained officials regurgitating praise for North Korean leader Kim Jong-il and the usual South Korea bashing.

North Korea's Account of YouTube and Twitter

A North Korean account also appeared on Twitter, the highly popular microblogging service, and began making posts from Aug. 12.

Twitter allows users to post messages up to 140 characters, known as "tweets." Subscribers, or "followers," can choose to receive a user's feed via their mobile phones or personal computers.

The account, under the name "uriminzok" (meaning "our people"), had over 5,000 subscribers to its Twitter feed as of early August.

All of the tweets on the uriminzok account contained short headlines and links

to different Web pages, but the pages couldn't be accessed from South Korea, suggesting that they most likely contain pro-Pyongyang content.

Seoul's Unification Ministry warned of possible punishment for local netizens seeking to reply to and "retweet" posts from the North Korean Twitter feed.

The North also purportedly opened an account on Facebook recently but the account, which drew hundreds of "friends" to its postings, later was deleted after the company reportedly accused it of violating the terms of use.

A Facebook representative in Seoul said she does not know why the account has disappeared. An email seeking comment from the U.S. headquarters of Facebook has yet to be replied.

PC World, a U.S. news outlet on information technology, recently quoted a Facebook spokesperson as saying that a previous version of the page with a slightly different username "was removed because it violated our terms of use."

PC World had suggested that the violation may have to do with a section in the terms of use that stipulates that entities based in countries embargoed by the U.S. cannot "operate a Platform application or website" on Facebook. North Korea is under U.S. sanctions for its development of weapons of mass destruction.

North Korea has not officially claimed ownership of any of the accounts on the aforementioned social networking services.

An operator of the purported North Korean Facebook page told Yonhap News in a memo that he or she was a member of the North's organ handling the socialist state's relations with South Korea.

Impersonation has been a challenge for Twitter, which earlier this year suspended a bogus account set up in the name of the Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama. The U.S. company has introduced "authenticity badges" to fight identity theft through its services.

Extended Use of Internet

Last year, one Twitter account was created that initially claimed to be run by the North's Korean Central News Agency. It was, however, later revealed as a hoax by those who claim to be "unofficial activists" with Reporters Without Borders, an international journalists' organization, and writers for the satirical German-language Web site Stupedia.org.

Despite a lack of confirmation that the social networking accounts are operated by the North, the regime's Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland on Aug. 30 lashed out at Seoul's blocking access to the sites.

North Korea is one of the world's most secretive nations, restricting its people's

access to the Internet and any other flow of information in and out of its territory. But its elite are seen as having a keen interest in information technology.

Observers, however, have taken note of North Korea's expanded use of the Internet for its propaganda offensive to the outside world. In June, a North Korean woman believed to be an agent uploaded a clip praising the socialist country on YouTube, drawing media attention here and abroad.

North Korea is also believed to be operating a unit dedicated to hacking foreign Web sites, including those of the United States and South Korea. Early this year, South Korea set up a cyber defense command to deal with such threats from the North.

It has also been expanding its propaganda warfare as South Korea and the United States push Pyongyang to admit to sinking the South Korean warship Cheonan in March, killing 46 sailors.

The North denies its role. It has posted a number of statements lashing out at Seoul and Washington on its Twitter page, which had at least 8,700 subscribers before it was blocked here.

The U.S. on Aug. 18 lauded North Korea's entry into the Twitter and YouTube global networking systems, expressing hope that technology will help information reach deep into the reclusive regime.

"We welcome North Korea to Twitter and the networked world," State Department spokesman Philip Crowley said from his own Twitter account. "We use Twitter to connect, to inform, and to debate."

The spokesman also questioned the North on whether it would allow its citizens to join Facebook, asking, "What is Facebook without friends?" (Yonhap News)

N. Korea to Send Vice FM to U.N. General Assembly

North Korean Vice Foreign Minister Pak Kil-yon is scheduled to attend this year's U.N. General Assembly, a senior U.N. official said on Sept. 15. Pak, a veteran diplomat who served as the North's ambassador to the U.N., will represent the North in the assembly and deliver a keynote speech, the official said on condition of anonymity. Pak also requested a meeting with U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, the official said. South Korea is scheduled to send acting foreign minister Shin Kak-soo to the assembly. (Yonhap News)

<Internal Affairs>

North Korean Ex-PM Pak Pong-ju Appears to Be Back in Power

North Korea's former Premier Pak Pong-ju appears to have returned to power with the Workers' Party, according to a Pyongyang report on Aug. 21, more than three years after he was said to have been ousted due to his failed economic reform drive.

The (North) Korean Central Broadcasting Station (KCBS) introduced Pak as the "first-deputy director of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of (North) Korea" in a report on the 50th founding ceremony of famed Okryu Restaurant in Pyongyang on Aug. 20 with a number of senior government and party officials.

There is no other known figure with the same name among the North Korean power-holding elite.

Pak, a long-time industry technocrat and pragmatist, was named to premier of the North's Cabinet in September 2003. He spearheaded the North's so-called July 1st economic reform drive toward market economy, which aimed to give more autonomy to state firms and gradually reduce state rationing of food and daily necessities.

But his strong initiative triggered a backlash from the party and the military that resulted in his dismissal. Pak was suspended from duty in June 2006 on charges of fund apprehension and was fired in April the following year. Kim Yong-il, then land and marine transport minister, replaced him.

Pak was believed to have been demoted to a managerial post at a clothing factory outside Pyongyang.

The broadcast report did not specify which Pak joined, but it is likely that he was posted to the light industry department, considering the ceremony involving a restaurant and the fact that he was the department's first deputy director in 1993.

Pak is believed to be a close confidant to Jang Song-thaek, vice chairman of the National Defense Commission and brother-in-law of North Korean leader Kim Jong-il. Jang is seen as the central figure in grooming Kim's third and youngest son, Jong-un, as the next leader.

Japan's *Mainichi Shimbun* reported on Aug. 15, quoting multiple sources, that Pak and about 20 other figures close to Jang had been reinstated for the past two years. The report also said Pak has risen to the second highest spot in the party's light industry department, which is headed by Kim Kyong-hui, Kim Jong-il's sister and Jang's wife. (Yonhap News)

Rodong Sinmun Carries Poem Suggesting Power Transfer to Heir Apparent

The newspaper of North Korea's ruling party recently carried a poem that contained several parts that suggest an expected power succession from leader Kim Jong-il to his third son.

The *Rodong Sinmun* carried the piece with a title that roughly translates to "Shine, Young Men of Songun (military-first)" on Aug. 22, three days ahead of the 50th anniversary of the start of Kim Jong-il's "Songun revolutionary leadership."

The poem carries the word "footstep," which coincides with the title of a song that has been widely interpreted by North Korea watchers in South Korea as extolling the valiancy of the heir apparent, Kim Jong-un.

Kim Jong-il, who reportedly suffered a stroke in the summer of 2008 and is still ailing in the aftermath, is believed to be preparing to hand over power to his youngest son.

The passage, which reads, "the courage and spirit of the general lasted as is," can be interpreted as a justification of the likely power succession to Jong-un.

A part of the poem also reads, "Let's protect our commander in chief, the center of our party with our lives." Many observers interpret "the center of our party" as suggesting the heir apparent.

When Kim Jong-il was named as a member of the Workers' Party's Political Bureau in 1974, the *Rodong Sinmun* then also used the phrase in referring to the current leader.

The heir-apparent is heavily shrouded in secrecy, and even his age has yet to be confirmed other than that he is in his 20s.

North Korea watchers speculate the younger Kim will make his public debut at the party's September session, which opens for the first time in 44 years. The date of the meeting has not been announced. (Yonhap News)

Kim Jong-il Inspects Chicken Farm Amid Health Exam Report

North Korean leader Kim Jong-il recently appeared at a chicken farm as part of his routine field guidance in light of a report that he was examined by French doctors for his ailing health.

The (North) Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported on Aug. 24 that Kim "gave field guidance to (the) 927 Chicken Farm which set an example of implementing the Workers' Party of (North) Korea's policy on stockbreeding," without revealing when the trip was made.

According to the report, Kim was “very pleased” and expressed satisfaction in the farm’s updated facilities and increased production, and lauded the workers for implementing the party’s policy on stockbreeding. The report did not say where the farm was located.

Kim’s latest whereabouts were followed by a report from the Seoul-based Open Radio for North Korea, which said that Kim received a thorough examination of his cerebral and central nerves by French doctors, citing unidentified “high-level North Korean sources.”

The KCNA on Aug. 25 reported that Kim Jong-il gave field guidance to the Pyongyang Cornstarch Factory. According to the report, two French doctors visited the northeastern city of Hamhung from Aug. 2 to 14 and, together with Kim’s North Korean physicians, examined the leader’s health through magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and other exams.

The report added that the two doctors also were in charge of Kim’s health when he reportedly suffered a stroke in August 2008. The latest exam was made considering that recent heat waves and heavy rains could affect Kim’s condition, it said.

On Aug. 17, the KCNA suggested that Kim Jong-il stayed in Hamhung in mid-August, while reporting that Kim viewed the light comedy “Echo of Mountain” at the Hamhung Grand Theatre together with servicepersons of the (North) Korean People’s Army. (Yonhap News)

N. Korea Marks 50th Anniversary of Military-first Leadership

North Korea last month celebrated the 50th anniversary of the country’s military-first politics in Pyongyang and vowed to launch a holy war to defend its regime based on nuclear deterrent.

According to the KCNA, North Korea held a “national meeting” on Aug. 24 at the Pyongyang Indoor Stadium to mark the 50th anniversary of leader Kim Jong-il’s start of the “Songun,” or military-first, revolutionary leadership.

Kim Jong-il has ruled the North through the army rather than the ruling party, chartering the songun politics to deal with both domestic and foreign challenges.

In 2006 and 2009, the country conducted nuclear tests, billing them as major tokens of his policy that focuses on deterring what it calls U.S. hostilities against Pyongyang.

Present at the event were “senior party, army and state officials,” the KCNA said, but did not say whether the country’s leader showed up at the meeting.

Kim Yong-nam, the North’s ceremonial head of state, delivered an address at the

meeting, in which he lauded the songun leadership for bringing about “epoch-making miracles and changes in the confrontation with the United States and other imperialists.”

He stressed that the North will “never tolerate any reckless moves of the U.S. imperialists and that its military was prepared to launch a sacred retaliatory war ... based on nuclear deterrent any time we deem necessary” as a self-defense measure. (Yonhap News)

N. Korea Hit Hard by Monsoon Rain, Receives Aid from China

Recent torrential rains and floods have inflicted serious damage to North Korea’s northwestern city of Sinuiju and neighboring Uiju County in August destroying about 7,100 houses and submerging about 7,200 hectares of farmland.

According to the report by the KCNA on Aug. 26, rivers have overflowed by unprecedented downpour that fell on the Sinuiju area bordering China’s northeastern city of Dandong from Aug. 19-21.

Citing information from a relevant organ, KCNA said, “More than 7,100 dwelling blocks for 7,750 families have been totally or partially destroyed or submerged.”

“An estimated 7,200 hectares of farmland have been flooded, buried or washed away and more than 300 production-related and public buildings, 400 meters of bridges, 7,700 cubic meters of railroad, many structures, vehicles, water pumps and electromotors damaged,” said the agency in its English news service.

The KCNA reported earlier on Aug. 22 that “unprecedented downpours” hit China’s northeastern regions from Aug. 19 to 20, sparking flash floods in the Amnok River that marks the border between the two nations.

In response, Chinese President Hu Jintao offered condolences to North Korean leader Kim Jong-il while Beijing decided to grant emergency relief aid to flood-stricken North Korea to help the country expedite its recovery.

“The Chinese government decided to provide emergency relief materials,” to the North after “some areas of North Korea, including Sinuiju, North Pyongan Province, were hit by floods recently,” the KCNA reported. (Yonhap News)

North Korean TV Airs Documentary on Kim Jong-il’s Trip to China

A North Korean television station recently aired a detailed documentary on its leader Kim Jong-il’s surprise trip to China in August during which he met with

Chinese President Hu Jintao.

Kim made an unofficial trip to China's northeastern region from Aug. 26-30, during which he had a summit with Hu. It was Kim's sixth known journey to China since he seized power in 1994 after the sudden death of his father, Kim Il-sung, who founded the North.

The (North) Korean Central TV Broadcasting Station on Sept. 4 aired a detailed 45-minute documentary on Kim's China trip. The first 10 minutes focused on the summit and the rest of the film revealed his other trip itineraries.

Kim Jong-un, the North Korean leader's third and youngest son, and heir apparent, who many speculated may have accompanied his father on the trip, was not shown in the film.

Despite showing somewhat awkwardness in walking and left-hand use, Kim's health appeared in relatively fair condition and he often appeared to hold candid talks with attending Chinese officials.

The documentary also showed footage of Kim visiting his late father's middle school in Jilin, an agricultural exhibition in Changchun and industrial facilities in Harbin. (Yonhap News)

N.K. Ups Reports on IT Modernization Ahead of Ruling Party Conference

North Korean media has notably increased the number of reports on the country's modernization of computer-related infrastructures in production facilities, drawing speculation that such achievements may be credited to leader Kim Jong-il's third son, Jong-un, who may be virtually crowned as the heir, in a conference of the country's ruling party.

According to Uriminzokkiri, a Web Site operated by the North's Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland, the *Rodong Sinmun* carried an editorial on Sept. 5 praising the workers in Jagang Province, which it described as the home of computer numerical controlled (CNC) technology.

The *Rodong Sinmun*, in a separate article, and the Uriminzokkiri also praised the country's recent CNC technology feats.

The KCBS and Radio Pyongyang said on Sept. 4 that factories in North Hamgyong Province were undergoing CNC technology makeovers. The KCNA also reported on Aug. 31 that a confectionery factory in Pyongyang saw its output tripled after introducing a CNC system.

Good Friends, a Seoul-based relief and human rights group on North Korea, said on Sept. 1 that it expects Jong-un to be touted as his father's successor and

predicted that the heir apparent will report on the feats of increased CNC system introductions at the party's 65th founding anniversary event on October 10. (Yonhap News)

North Korean Leader Appears in Public After China Trip

Following his second trip to China in four months in August, North Korean leader Kim Jong-il made a series of public appearances throughout his country in early September.

The KCNA reported on Sept. 8 that Kim attended a concert given by the State Merited Chorus to mark the 62nd anniversary of the nation's founding.

On Sept. 11, the KCNA said that the North Korean leader traveled to the March 5 Youth Mine, a coal mine in Jagang Province that borders China, and praised workers there for setting "an example in modernization."

"He went round different production processes including open-cast mining sites, large crushing plants and ore dressing plants for hours to acquaint himself in detail with their technological updating and production there," the KCNA said.

A day later, the KCNA also reported that Kim gave field guidance to the Manpho Unhwa Factory, a chemical factory also in Jagang Province.

The leader was accompanied by Jang Song-thaek, vice chairman of the North's National Defense Commission and Kim Ki-nam, secretary of the ruling Workers' Party of Korea, the KCNA said. (Yonhap News)

N. Korea Marks Founding Anniversary Ahead of Key Party Meeting

North Korea held an event celebrating the 62nd anniversary of its founding ahead of a key conference of its ruling party, in which the country's premier called for an improvement of ties with the neighboring South.

The KCNA reported that a national meeting took place at the April 25 House of Culture in Pyongyang on Sept. 8 to celebrate the 62nd founding anniversary of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), the North's official name.

Attendees included Kim Yong-nam, president of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly, and other senior party, military and state officials, as well as diplomatic envoys.

The event took place in light of a scheduled conference of its ruling Workers' Party of (North) Korea to elect the party's "highest leading body" amid speculation

that Kim Jong-un, the leader's youngest and third son, will be appointed to the political bureau to speed up the power succession process.

In a speech at the event, Premier Choe Yong-rim observed that the country "has greeted the golden age of its development, demonstrating the invincible might" under Kim Jong-il's leadership, the report said.

Choe also underscored the importance of improving the strained inter-Korean relations on the basis of the historic summits in 2000 and 2007, which he said would "pave the way for national reunification." (Yonhap News)

North Korean Flood Victims Suffer Food Shortage: Report

The North Korean city of Sinuiju is in dire need of food and building materials for recovery work after a massive flood swept through the border town late last month, a pro-Pyongyang newspaper in Japan reported on Sept. 12.

The *Choson Sinbo* quoted a North Korean government official at the country's disaster management headquarters as saying that many homeless residents in Sinuiju have been staying in public shelters and the Pyongyang government has moved to provide construction materials and food to flood victims.

"Some of them returned to their home, but others are still in the safe house together," Hong Chong-ho was quoted as saying. "The government has rolled up its sleeves to provide construction materials, including cement and lumber, to the devastated area and to send relief supplies to thousands of flood victims on time."

Flooded islands in the river and other riverside areas are being restored, but workers lack earth to carry out restoration works, he said. "A great deal of labor is required to restore the area," said Hong.

According to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the flood in Sinuiju killed 14 people and prompted tens of thousands of others to evacuate to a North Korean border area.

Earlier, North Korea's official media said that over 7,750 houses were flooded and a vast tract of farmland was inundated as heavy rain hit the area along the Amnok (Yalu) River that marks the border with China.

North Korea is prone to natural disasters because of its lack of investment in disaster control and severe deforestation.

Also, the North's official Korean Central News Agency on Sept. 15 said that Typhoon Kompasu, which rolled across the Korean Peninsula early September, left dozens of people dead. (Yonhap News)

North Korea Urges Establishing Party-centric Leadership

North Korea called for a firm establishment of a ruling system based solely and centered around the party amid a scheduled conference of its delegates for the first time in 44 years.

The *Rodong Sinmun*, the paper for the North's Workers' Party of Korea (WPK), praised the party in an editorial on Sept. 14, and argued that a "leadership system based solely on the party must be further and thoroughly established in the party and the entire society."

The comments were made as the WPK was reportedly prepared to kick off the conference of delegates to elect the party's "highest leading body" amid speculation that Kim Jong-un, the leader's youngest and third son, will be appointed to the political bureau to speed up the power succession process.

The paper demanded that "iron-like" rules that mandate unified movement under the "sole leadership" be established through bolstering the spirit of revolution.

It also further highlighted the need to consolidate power in the party, arguing that the fate of the country and the people lies on strengthening the WPK.

It added that the party, the military and the people must protect the party's central committee headed by Kim Jong-il "with their lives," and stressed the entities to unite around it.

Regarding the conference, the paper described the event as "upcoming," suggesting that it hasn't begun as of Sept. 14.

The current North Korean leader was appointed as a member of the central committee of the Workers' Party when he emerged as Kim Il-sung's successor in 1974. Analysts say he may be planning a similar path for his son as North Korea's official media have been praising the committee since earlier this year. (Yonhap News)

N. Korean Website Raises Succession Issue Ahead of Party Meeting

In a clear indication North Korea is paving the ground for a power succession, a Web site operated by a university in the socialist country is calling for picking the right successor to leader Kim Jong-il, possibly alluding to his son.

"Only when the successor to the leader is selected right can the leader's ideas and revolutionary exploits be firmly maintained and spectacularly passed down," said a posting on the North's Kimilsung Broadcasting University's website, *uriminzokgangdang*, seen in Seoul on Sept. 15. *Uriminzokgangdang* means "lecture hall of our nation" in English.

Citizens in South Korea, which bans the socialist state's propaganda material citing years of enmity between them, are blocked from accessing the Web site at <http://www.ournation-school.com>.

North Korean Web sites and media strictly refrain from raising the issue of succession, even though it is widely believed from outside that Kim, 68, has been trying to hand over power to his third son since he suffered a stroke in the summer of 2008.

During the forthcoming Workers' Party meeting in Pyongyang, Kim Jong-un, around 27, is expected to be given a ranking position that could help pave the way for him to eventually take over the regime.

The uriminzokgangdang post, written in early September in the form of an answer to an apparently pre-arranged question, also said the successor must establish exclusive authority because, until that happens, political turmoil could emerge.

"Not everyone can be a successor to the leader, and just because someone is presented as a successor, it does not mean he can carry out significant tasks as such," it said, making it clear that the country faces a "succession issue." (Yonhap News)

<Foreign Affairs>

N. Korea, China Reaches Consensus on Six-way Talks Resumption

North Korea said on Aug. 19 it has reached a consensus with China on issues related to the resumption of the six-party talks on ending its nuclear weapons programs.

The KCNA made the report in a dispatch from Pyongyang while confirming the visit to the North Korean capital by a Chinese delegation, led by chief nuclear envoy Wu Dawei, for three days from Aug. 16.

"The two sides had in-depth discussions on the regional situation, the bilateral relations of friendship and matters of mutual concern including the resumption of the six-party talks and the denuclearization of the whole Korean Peninsula," the KCNA said. "They reached a full consensus of views on all the matters discussed."

While in Pyongyang, Wu met with Foreign Minister Pak Ui-chun and Kim Yong-il, department director of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of (North) Korea, the KCNA said.

The multilateral nuclear talks have been on hold since the sinking of a South

Korean warship in March.

South Korea and the U.S. blame the North for the torpedoing of the Cheonan with the loss of 46 lives, and call for North Korea's apology and commitment to its denuclearization prior to the reopening of the nuclear talks. North Korea denies responsibility. (Yonhap News)

N. Korea, Laos Hold Vice Prime Ministerial Talks in Pyongyang

The vice prime minister of Laos on Aug. 17 met with his North Korean counterpart in Pyongyang and discussed ways to bolster bilateral exchanges.

Somsavath Lengsavath, standing vice prime minister of Laos, held a meeting with Ro Tu-chol, deputy premier of the DPRK, at the Mansudae Assembly Hall in Pyongyang, according to the KCNA. Lengsavath arrived in the North a day earlier.

The KCNA said that both sides "exchanged views on the matter of boosting the friendly and cooperative relations between the two countries and other issues of mutual concern."

Pak Ui-chun, North Korea's foreign minister, in late July traveled to Laos and met with Lao President Choummaly Saynasone and his counterpart to exchange views on boosting two-way ties, according to the KCNA. (Yonhap News)

N. Korea Renews Demand for Colonial Compensation from Japan

North Korea on Aug. 20 called for Japan's apology and compensation for all victims of Japan's 1910-1945 colonial rule and denounced the annexation as "state terrorism."

An unidentified spokesman for the North's Foreign Ministry issued a statement to renew Pyongyang's demand ahead of the centenary of the annexation treaty, which took effect on Aug. 29, 1910.

"Had the present Japanese regime had nothing to do with the past militarist regime and had it not had any dream of reviving it, it might have repented and apologized to all victims for the past without any precondition and discrimination," the statement, released by the KCNA, read.

The statement added, "It should make immediate apology and reparation for the hideous crimes committed against the Korean people after usurping their national sovereignty through the fabrication of invalid 'treaties.' If it fails to do so, it can never be uprooted in the international community."

The spokesman's statement claimed that more than 1 million Koreans were killed and at least 8.4 million others were coerced into labor and thrown onto battlefields, while 200,000 Korean women were forced into sexual slavery.

Earlier in the day, the KCNA issued a lengthy indictment denouncing the annexation as "state terrorism committed by the Japanese authorities against a sovereign state by use of government and military power."

Japanese Prime Minister Naoto Kan on Aug. 10 offered his "heartfelt apology" for the suffering imposed on Koreans during the colonial rule, the first acknowledgment that the colonial rule was enforced against the will of the Korean people.

"We totally don't understand what Japan apologizes for and whom it apologizes to," Song Il-ho, North Korea's ambassador for normalization talks with Japan, told Kyodo in Pyongyang on Aug. 13. (Yonhap News)

North Korea Blasts Joint South Korea-U.S. Anti-sub Drill

North Korea condemned a scheduled joint military drill between South Korea and the U.S. in the Yellow Sea set for September, saying its combat readiness was well prepared to counter any threats.

South Korea and the U.S. planned to conduct anti-submarine warfare drills in the Yellow Sea in early September, the latest in a series of military maneuvers the allies have held or plan to hold to send a message of deterrence to Pyongyang following the March 26 sinking of a South Korean warship.

The *Rodong Sinmun*, the newspaper of the North's ruling party, said in an editorial on Aug. 30 that the U.S. "should clearly look at the opponent and not make a military-strategic mistake."

"Our military and people are prepared with combat readiness to crush even thousands of foes in a single blow," the paper said.

The denunciation aimed at the U.S. was the first since former U.S. President Jimmy Carter traveled to Pyongyang late August to secure the freedom of Aijalon Mahli Gomes, an American who had been detained after having illegally entered the North in January. (Yonhap News)

North Korean Paper Praises China's Economic Development

The newspaper for North Korea's ruling party lauded China's economic development achieved through reform in light of its leader Kim Jong-il having tout-

ed Beijing's reform efforts.

The *Rodong Sinmun*, the newspaper for the Workers' Party (North) Korea (WPK), carried an editorial on Sept. 2 that said "leaping progress is being made in socialist China to provide a guarantee for the prosperity of the country."

The comments are in line with those made by Kim during his summit with Chinese President Hu Jintao, in which the North Korean leader saw China as "filled with liveliness" owing to the country's rapid development from its reform policies.

The paper observed that the Chinese people, under the leadership of Hu, were fighting to build a socialist nation under the banner of the "Deng Xiaoping Theory," armed with a scientific approach on development.

The paper added that "the (North) Korean people are rejoiced over the daily change of the appearance of China and the great achievements made in all fields."

The *Rodong Sinmun* also said China was "extending unreserved support and encouragement" to the North Koreans and highlighted that the WPK will strive to boost the friendly ties between the two nations. (Yonhap News)

North Korean, Laotian Public Security Chiefs Hold Talks

North Korea's minister of public security met with his Laotian counterpart and discussed ways of cooperating in security in light of the Southeast Asian nation increasingly becoming a popular stopover destination for defectors from the socialist state.

Ju Sang-song, the North's minister of people's security, held talks with Laos' Minister of Public Security Thongbanh Seng A Phone, the (North) Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported on Sept. 14.

The KCNA said that the two officials "exchanged views on the matter of developing cooperation ... in the field of security and issues of mutual concern." It did not give further details of the meeting.

A growing number of North Koreans are choosing to take the risky journey across the border into China to evade hunger and harsh political oppression at home. And given China's policy of repatriating defectors to the North, many are increasingly heading to Laos, Thailand or other Southeast Asian nations before seeking asylum in South Korea.

Over 14,000 North Korean defectors have settled in the South, which provides limited financial support and rehabilitation training. (Yonhap News)

South Koreans Cross into North Korea to Deliver Anti-malaria Aid

A group of five South Koreans crossed the heavily armed border into North Korea on Aug. 17, delivering 400 million won (US\$340,000) worth of anti-malaria aid despite tension between the divided states.

The crossing marked the first South Korean civilian visit to the socialist state since Seoul banned trips to North Korea in May in protest over the sinking of a South Korean warship in March near their Yellow Sea border.

A doctor and four others, including two drivers, traveled to the North Korean border city of Kaesong in Aug. 17, Unification Ministry spokesman Chun Hae-sung told reporters. The doctor was needed to explain to North Korean authorities how to use the aid kits.

Malaria is a persistent problem along the border areas. More than 360 South Koreans living south of the border reported infections this year, according to the government of Gyeonggi Province.

The Unification Ministry said the aid to North Korea, which was donated by a South Korean relief group, would help alleviate the spread of malaria across the border and should be seen as a humanitarian program.

South Korea has only allowed a handful of infant-related humanitarian shipments to the North since a multinational probe in May found Pyongyang responsible for the sinking of the South Korean warship Cheonan.

Forty-six South Korean sailors died in the sinking, and the North denies any involvement in the attack. Tension is running high between the countries as North Korea has threatened war in response to South Korean military drills held in protest of the sinking. (Yonhap News)

S. Korea's Pan-religious Delegation Travels to N. Korea with Flour Aid

A joint delegation of five major religious organizations in South Korea traveled to North Korea on Aug. 27 to deliver food aid, the second civilian visit to the socialist state since Seoul imposed a travel ban in May.

The nine-member delegation of the Catholic, Protestant, Cheondo, Buddhist and Won-Buddhist orders drove to the North from the western border town of Paju, Gyeonggi Province, accompanied by about a dozen trucks carrying 300 tons of flour.

The 250 million won (US\$209,170) worth of aid is the second inter-Korean assistance since Seoul imposed a North Korea travel ban in May in protest of the sink-

ing of a South Korean warship two months earlier. North Korea denied involvement in the sinking that killed 46 sailors.

“The denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula is important, but the lives of the people on the Korean Peninsula take priority over any other issues,” the group said in a joint statement at a ceremony attended by some 150 people, ahead of its departure. “We religious communities from the left and the right are taking a step toward opening the door for reconciliation and peace in the inter-Korean relations.”

During its one-day visit, the delegation was delivered the flour to Kaesong, just north of the inter-Korean border, which will be distributed to inhabitants in the border town and counties in North Hwanghae Province. (Yonhap News)

N. Korea Requests Rice, Cement, Equipment from S. Korea

North Korea has requested rice, cement and heavy machinery from South Korea to help recover from its recent floods, government officials in Seoul said on Sept. 7, amid looming signs that the divided states are seeking to alleviate their tension.

The request, made on Sept. 4, was made public by South Korea three days later. On Sept. 7, North Korea carried out its earlier promise to release seven crew members of a South Korean fishing boat that its Navy had seized nearly a month ago for trespassing into its eastern exclusive economic zone.

South Korea has twice informed North Korea that its Red Cross, Seoul’s main channel for humanitarian cooperation with Pyongyang, is willing to help the North recover from floods that submerged houses, farmland and buildings last month.

In response to the Aug. 31 message that contained an offer of 10 billion won (US\$8.5 million), the North’s Red Cross said it hopes to receive rice, cement and excavators rather than the initially proposed emergency food, basic necessities and medical aid, Chun Hae-sung, spokesman for the Unification Ministry, told reporters.

North Korea, which denies any involvement, has threatened physical retaliation for punishment by the South, which has held a series of naval exercises in protest, sometimes teaming with the U.S. that has 28,500 forces stationed in the South.

North Korea is vulnerable to floods because of its lack of investment in disaster control and severe deforestation, often relying on handouts to recover. In 2006, 86.3 billion won worth of flood aid was shipped from South Korea to North Korea and 58.9 billion won the following year amid a detente in inter-Korean relations, according to the Unification Ministry.

The relations worsened after President Lee Myung-bak took office in Seoul with a policy linking aid to progress in North Korea's denuclearization. Supporters of the policy also raised fears that Pyongyang may divert rice and heavy equipment aid to its military.

"Providing construction equipment would be an unrealistic option for the South because there is possibility that it could later be used for military purposes," Yang said. "Cement wouldn't draw too much controversy." (Yonhap News)

S. Korea to Ease Cap on Citizens Allowed to Stay in N. Korea

South Korea plans to ease its months-long cap on the number of its citizens allowed to stay overnight at a joint factory park in the North Korean border town of Kaesong, an official said on Sept. 14.

The measure, which would raise the number to as many as 900 from the current 600 or so, is the latest sign that the divided sides are seeking to ease their tension that has soared since Seoul blamed Pyongyang in May for the deadly sinking of its warship.

"There is some seasonal demand from the companies, especially clothing manufacturers, so the number should increase to ensure production and quality control," the official said. The official, who spoke to reporters on the condition of anonymity because the measure has yet to be announced publicly, dismissed speculation that Seoul was easing its punitive steps against Pyongyang for the March 26 sinking that killed 46 sailors.

South Korea, citing a multinational investigation, blames a North Korean torpedo for the sinking, announcing in May a raft of penalties aimed at hurting the North politically and economically.

One of them included halving the number of South Korean workers in Kaesong, which houses an inter-Korean industrial estate seen as a symbol of reconciliation since it began running in 2004. The park has been a rare source of income for the cash-strapped North.

About 120 South Korean firms are operating in Kaesong near the west coast to produce mainly labor-intensive goods such as utensils and clothing, employing 44,000 North Korean workers.

The ministry official said the planned relaxation of the cap will likely take place following Chuseok, Korea's fall-harvest holiday that falls on Sept. 22. Over 1,000 South Korean workers were allowed to stay overnight in Kaesong before Seoul announced its penalties against Pyongyang. (Yonhap News)

DISTRIBUTION CHANNELS FOR SOUTH KOREAN OPTICAL MEDIA IN NORTH KOREA AND A CHANGE IN NORTH KOREANS' PERCEPTIONS

I. Introduction

Economic difficulties in North Korea triggered a famine there in the mid-1990s. At the time, most North Korean citizens had found their own food sources for survival because the decades-old centralized state rationing system in the North was dysfunctional. Since the course of this development, many North Koreans have frequently crossed the border into China for the smuggling of goods or meetings with their relatives, while North Koreans' domestic inter-region movements have turned vigorous. The collapse of the centralized state control system, backed by the rationing system, gave birth to spontaneous markets here and there in the North. Citizens took whatever goods they had to the marketplace and traded them for food grains. Such markets proliferated gradually throughout the North as state control weakened, and their dependence on the market has deepened.

It is noteworthy that foreign information and culture have flowed into the North and spread across the country through the marketplace and via North Koreans who travel often between China and their home country. These citizens introduced to the North optical media by marketing South Korean dramas, movies and TV programs. Information on the South has filtered through the country through the marketplace. The expansion of the market, followed by the diffusion of information, has triggered a change in

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North Koreans' perceptions. The optical media, which refer to various compact discs (CDs), digital video discs (DVDs), video home system (VHS), and the airing of live South Korean TV programs, have served as a window for North Koreans through which they could come into contact with foreign culture and information.

This essay, based on surveys and in-depth interviews with 33 North Korean refugees comprising six men and 27 women who have resided in South Korea since 2005, is aimed at showing the distribution structure of South Korean optical media in the North and the process of change in North Koreans' perceptions. This essay reviews methods of distribution of South Korean optical media in the North, in terms of both inter-regional and interpersonal distribution. It also analyzes the impact of optical media on North Koreans' perceptions in political, economic, social and cultural sectors.

II. N. Korea's Distribution Structure of S. Korea's Optical Media

1. Inter-regional Distribution

As testified by many North Korean refugees, it is easier for North Korean citizens living in the areas bordering China to buy or watch South Korean optical media. It is likely that many

North Korean citizens in the border areas near China have watched South Korean TV programs aired live since 2000 because the programs were available for them. The South's optical media has flowed into the North en masse since North Koreans' "painful march under trials" in the mid-1990s when it became easier for North Koreans to tour China because of the weakened state control and social disorder.¹⁾

But interviews with North Korean refugees have revealed that North Korean citizens in Pyongyang, the North's capital, North and South Pyongan provinces, North and South Hwanghae provinces and Kangwon Province, also have viewed the South's optical media, as well as those in North Hamgyong, Yanggang and Jagang provinces, which border China. It was also learned that North Koreans in almost all areas of the country, albeit limited in number, have watched South Korean TV programs broadcast live.

A North Korean woman polled in the survey, who resided in Samsu county in Yanggang Province, said that while she was in the North she watched a South Korean drama on a CD when she visited her elder sister living in Kimchaek City of North Hamgyong Pvince. She also viewed a similar drama at the residence of her friend in Hamhung, South Hamgyong Province. Her friend reportedly borrowed the CD from someone after paying a small fee.

Another woman polled, who lived in

Kyongwon County of North Hamgyong Province, said she watched a South Korean drama on a CD in Rajing, North Hamgyong Province, in 2006 when she went there for commercial purposes. In 2008, she saw her elder sister who lived in Wonsan City of Kangwon Province watching a South Korean drama on a CD at her home.

North Korean cities bordering China, such as Hyesan and Rajin, most likely serve as the locations in which South Korean optical media is smuggled from China to the North. North Korean merchants there supply the media to the North's major cities, including Pyongyang, Sunchon, Kimchaek, Hamhung, Wonsan, Sinpo and Chongjin, while touring the cities. Merchants in other areas visit the border cities to purchase goods from China, according to the survey of the 33 North Korean refugees.

A North Korean polled in the survey, said: "I have bought tape recorders and CDs carrying South Korean dramas in Hyesan and Rajin and sold them in other areas to make money. In the marketplace of Hyesan, there were also North Korean merchants from Chongjin because there, they can buy the goods they want easily."

2. Interpersonal Distribution

1) Trade on the Market

A. Focusing on Sellers

The North Korean government began to supply its citizens with food rations irregularly in the late 1980s. The food rationing system was suspended intermittently in the early 1990s and completely between 1994 and 1995, reportedly resulting in the starvation of many North Korean citizens. The dysfunctional system gave birth to a change in North Koreans' decision-making behaviors.²⁾ Many North Korean citizens gathered in the marketplace and began to engage themselves in commercial activities immediately after the collapse of the state rationing system. According to testimonies of those polled in the survey, the market turned so brisk that various commodities were traded there and citizens with money could buy nearly everything they wanted.

Brisk in the marketplaces in Chongjin, Rajin and Hyesan was the trade of video recorders and visual display units, including television sets, which were necessary mainly to watch South Korean optical media. The prices there were reportedly cheaper than in other areas. Merchants in the North bought commodities including television sets, CDs, DVDs and VHS systems and resold them in other areas at higher prices.³⁾ In the case of video recorders, most of the products traded on the North Korean market were made in China. When North Koreans traded products made in South Korea, they usually replaced their South Korean trademarks with Chinese emblems.

A North Korean polled in the survey reportedly smuggled video recorders from China into North Korea until 2007, shortly before he ran away from his homeland. When he smuggled the goods, he would go to China and pay 40,000 North Korean won for each video recorder in stock, which usually traded at 30,000 won on the Chinese market because of service charges for the Chinese sellers, who would deliver the goods to him through the customs offices in Hyesan. He usually paid 8,000 won to the Chinese office and 2,000 won to the North Korean office for each video recorder. He sold all of the goods to a North Korean merchant in the Hyesan market at 68,000 won per unit, taking 18,000 won per unit in profits. He raked in about 2 million won per month in profits as he toured China twice a month and smuggled in more than 100 video recorders.

Noteworthy is the case of the smuggling of compact disks recordable (CDRs), which involved a North Korean woman who acted as a merchant before her escape from the North and the wife of a senior official at the State Security Agency, the North's secret police agency, who will be codenamed as "Woman A." The merchant carried CDRs from China to the North for 50-100 won in profits per unit and passed them to Woman A for domestic sales. The smuggling plot began when Woman A made instructions on smuggling of CDRs. Woman A, who often watched South

Korean TV programs, was well aware of South Korean dramas and movies, the socio-political, economic situation facing the South and foreign exchange rates in the South. The North Korean female merchant purchased the goods under Woman A's instructions. Noteworthy is the fact that the merchant was not the only one in the border area where she lived, but one of scores of North Korean smugglers. Some North Korean refugees testified in the interview that if there are 1,000 households in a North Korean border village, 300 of them engage in commerce on the market and 700 others in smuggling from China. For this reason, thousands of CDRs could be smuggled into the North from China overnight, if and when the smuggling is profitable.

North Korean smugglers must cross the "front line," which is guarded by North Korean border guards bribing with the best of them, and the "rear line," referring to the area between the border line and the destination of smuggled goods, where the smugglers run the risk of encountering patrolling members of the Peasants-Workers Red Guards, members of the reserve forces, and the People's Security Guards, or policemen. If they encounter the guards, they have to bribe the guards with about 2,000 won for every package to transport the goods. Despite the bribery, a smuggler can reportedly earn up to 100,000 won overnight.

It is noteworthy that the North

Korean refugee's testimony explained that Woman A did not sell the smuggled goods in the province where she resided, but to the wives of senior officials in other provinces and Pyongyang. She did not sell them to normal North Korean citizens under any circumstances.

B. Focusing on Consumers

North Korean citizens purchase hardware necessary for watching optical media, including video recorders and TV sets, in the machinery section of the marketplace where the goods are displayed in stalls. Video recorders are traded freely on the market, but their buyers are required to place them on a police register. If not, their video recorders could be seized by the police. Some North Koreans who cannot afford a video recorder borrow the hardware from their relatives, friends or from rental shops.

Software for optical media, such as CDRs and DVDs, is not traded on the market overtly, but covertly, especially if it carries South Korean dramas, movies or TV programs. CDRs and DVDs carrying South Korean dramas are usually traded at 3,000 won per unit, but those carrying recent programs can run as high as 10,000 won per unit. Some North Koreans borrow them from video rental shops at 1,000 won per unit.

2) Groups of People Passing CDs Around to Watch Them in Turn

There are North Korean citizens who watch CDs of South Korean dramas, movies and TV programs completely alone and keep mum about it for fear of state punishment. Others, however, pass them to their relatives and close friends. Furthermore, some North Korean citizens are more active in sharing their information on South Korean dramas, movies and TV programs with others, advising them to watch the programs, or even passing the CDs to their neighbors. Some groups of North Koreans buy South Korean CDs and DVDs collectively and watch them together.

3. Proliferation of South Korean Optical Media in North Korea and Characteristics of Their Distribution in the North

It is likely that the inflow of South Korea's optical media into North Korea and their proliferation there came in the course of North Korean citizens' flexible adaptation to the recurrent intensification and relaxation of social control in the North. Inter-regional movements of the people in the country have turned brisk when unofficial economic activities increased in the country since the economic crisis there in the mid-1990s. North Korean citizens could make a free inter-regional travel because of the relaxation of social control touched off by a famine, and this social atmosphere has sparked the proliferation of the South's optical media throughout the

North at a rapid pace.

These developments were followed by an intensive campaign by the North Korean authorities concerned about cracking down on the watchers of South Korean dramas, movies or TV programs on CDs and DVDs. But the drive hardly paid off because many watchers of them could avoid punishment even if they were checked by the police and other authorities concerned by means of bribing the officials concerned. Moreover, the leaders of residential organizations usually notified in advance their members of the inspection of officials concerned.

Also traded in the North are CDs and DVDs carrying dramas and movies made in China and Hong Kong. The optical media made in South Korea, however, is said to be more attractive to North Koreans than others because North and South Koreans share the same language.

III. South Korean Optical Media's Impacts on North Korea: Focusing on a Change in North Koreans' Perceptions

1. North Koreans' Viewing of the South's Optical Media and the Process of a Change in Their Perceptions

The survey of 33 North Korean

refugees has revealed that the change in North Koreans' perceptions after viewing South Korean optical media can be categorized into two. The first sector regards those who had no prior information about South Korea, or capitalism, before viewing South Korean dramas, movies or TV programs. Upon their first viewing of South Korean optical media, they usually believed the information about the South was fabricated. When they repeatedly viewed similar information about South Korean society, they began to believe it and experienced a change in their perceptions.

Case 20 of a North Korean refugee's testimony states: "I did not believe the affluent aspect of South Korea when I first watched it through a DVD. I thought it was a lie because I have been taught steadily since my elementary school days that most South Koreans are ragged and starving. I realized the information was true when I continued to watch South Korean CDs or DVDs, and dreamed of going to the South to live there. Life in the South, plus clothes, buildings, residences and foods I watched on the CDs were unimaginable."

The second category regards those who had an understanding of South Korea and capitalism through various channels before they viewed the South Korean optical media. Their emotional responses to South Korean dramas, movies or TV programs, and a change in

their perceptions came at a rapid pace.

Case 17 of a North Korean refugee's testimony states: "Upon viewing South Korean CDs and DVDs, I believed the wealthy life in South Korea because Chinese merchants told me, every time they met me, that South Korea is a paradise. I became a fan of Choe Ji-u (who is the heroine in a series of South Korean TV dramas titled 'The Ladder in Paradise'). It was touching and gave birth to my dream of going to the South."

Their testimonies indicate that South Korean dramas, movies and TV programs may serve as a catalyst for encouraging some North Koreans to flee their country and go to the South.

2. A Change in Their Perceptions by Sector

1) Political, Economic Perceptions

A. Understanding of South Korea: Illusion about and Longing for South Korea

Asked about their impression of South Korea after watching the South's optical media, the sweeping majority of the North Korean refugees taking part in the survey said they were surprised at the developed and open aspects of the South. They also said they had a feeling that South Koreans have no trouble getting food, in sharp contrast to the serious food shortages in the North, and that the South has achieved

economic development incomparable with the North. When asked about the scenes in the South Korean optical media that give that impression, the refugees pointed to the scenes that take place in residences, on streets, in automobiles, and those that show off fashionable clothing and food on kitchen tables. In particular, they said, the residences and their interior decorations for ordinary South Koreans were unimaginable for them, and they were impressed with bowls of white boiled rice and several side dishes on the table in the South.

Some of them said they were surprised at the scenes in South Korean dramas showing the residences of families with a room each for the couple, parents and children, while all members of a family in the North were usually living in one room. The refugees also said they felt that the South was much more developed in scenes showing actors and actresses changing their clothes frequently, which is not a reality for those in the North.

They were awakened to the fact that living standards in the South are completely different from those in the North when they saw scenes showing that even South Korean women drive cars. Some of them said that they first came to know the existence of casinos in a drama entitled "All-in," where they began to understand how the world is developing.

Noteworthy is the fact that their understanding of development in the

South has given birth to their illusions about South Korea and created a yearning for going to live there. A female refugee even said that she dreamed of decorating her home similar to that of a South Korean drama if and when she would live in the South.

B. A Change in Their Views of North Korea's Leadership

The North Korean refugees, who experienced illusions about South Korea's development and who felt a longing for the South, said they saw a change in their behaviors and overtly expressed their feelings against their leader, Kim Jong-il. Although there were no political remarks in the South Korean dramas, North Korean viewers of the dramas turned to politics while exchanging their views on the living standards of the South and how they differed from those in the North. They attributed their poor living conditions to Kim. Some of them said there were North Koreans who complained that Kim could hardly supply citizens with electricity even on his birthday designated as a national holiday, as the power supply to residences was often cut off that day.

Case 7 of a North Korean refugee's testimony states: "All clever, open-minded North Korean citizens know that Kim Jong-il is a bad leader. North Koreans in close relationships exchange their views on the bad nature of their leader. They say, 'How can a son of the

leader inherit the national leadership from his father (in this 21st century) like in the Koryo Dynasty?"

This complaint by North Korean citizens directed toward Kim has occasionally turned into criticism of their socialist system, as shown in Case 9 of a North Korean refugee's testimony: "We should not live this way and should attempt to achieve the unification of the two Koreas. Isn't it good for us to lead better lives in a unified Korea ruled by a South Korean president if Kim Jong-il is unable to make it? What matters is not politics but our living conditions for promoting better feeding and ending mistreatment."

While witnessing South Korea's developmental aspects, North Koreans are said to compare the era of Kim Jong-il with that of his father, Kim Il-sung. In many cases, North Koreans are dissatisfied with the younger Kim's rule, and they often recall and long for the elder Kim's days as leader, according to North Korean refugees interviewed for this essay. In other words, they said, when compared with Kim Jong-il's rule, North Koreans' living conditions during Kim Il-sung's era were not so bad. On many occasions, North Koreans reportedly express their distrust of Kim Jong-il and question his ability, while comparing him with his father.

Although there are differences in the socio-political views among generations and classes, most North Koreans are positive in their evaluations of Kim Il-

sung's virtue as the benevolent fatherly leader, despite the famine today, indicative of his charisma. In sharp contrast, Kim Jong-il is deemed poor in his charismatic authority. For some North Koreans, at stake in the North after its economic crisis was the limitation of Kim Jong-il's leadership.⁴⁾

Case 14 of a North Korean refugee's testimony states: "North Korea is not all that bad. Still, we have experiences of living under mutual cooperation. Once faced with a crisis, we have made a voice and are united in a move to give a solution to difficulties."

But North Korean citizens can hardly think of taking action against the North Korean regime and Kim Jong-il in collusion with their neighbors, although they are dissatisfied with them. North Koreans want someone to come out to the front, but they themselves can hardly think of taking a leading role in that direction.

Case 2 of a North Korean refugee's testimony states: "I wanted a turn in the political situation facing our country even if someone led a riot or made a bombing in a central area. But that area would turn into a sea of fire and all relatives of that person leading the riot would be killed if he or she failed to make a substantial change. For this reason, all of us can hardly play a leading role because of fear."

There is, however, the possibility that North Korean citizens will be more dissatisfied with their socialist system and

will become more firm in expressing their demand for change in the social structure. If and when a brisker inflow of foreign information touches off the spread of North Koreans' perceptions of the need for reforms and a specific monopoly for wealth, a more resolute demand for change in the social structure will be triggered among North Korean citizens.⁵⁾ At stake for North Koreans is that they can combine their complaints against the North Korean regime with their demand for change.

C. A Gap between the North's Propaganda against the South and Reality

In a propaganda campaign against South Korea, North Korea claimed that most Koreans are starving and clothed poorly, with the streets full of beggars. But in recent years, even normal North Korean citizens have come to know the real aspects of the South through South Korean dramas. For this reason, the North is reportedly educating its citizens today about the so-called "harmful consequences" of capitalism.

Case 7 of a North Korean refugee's testimony states: "In North Korean schools the students are still told that there are many beggars in South Korea and that U.S. soldiers are infringing upon South Koreans' human rights. I have been taught that way since I was a child. But in the South Korean dramas I have watched in recent years there were no beggars in South Korean streets. We can hardly conceal the real

aspects of the streets. Watching buildings on the streets and cars running there, I have thought that South Korea is a really advanced country.”

2) Socio-Cultural Perceptions

A. Perceptual Change and Imitation

North Koreans’ viewing of South Korean optical media has brought about a change in their socio-cultural perceptions and that change led to cultural imitation regarding South Korean fashions, fueled by the ever-spreading market functions in the North. This is because South Korean fashions, hair-styles and interior decorations in residences, among other things, are attractive to North Koreans, particularly to young people.⁶⁾

Case 11 of a North Korean refugee’s testimony states: “As for clothes, tight trousers were once in fashion in the North. Policemen cracked down on those trousers and tore them. But the young North Koreans sewed them up and wore them again.” Moreover, some youngsters in the North are learning South Korean dances and songs, while others imitate South Koreans’ way of drinking and having birthday parties.

B. Relationships Involving Romantic or Sexual Feelings

Most North Korean optical media are of political and ideological nature. The North Korean Central TV can hardly be free even for a moment from its job of

promoting the personality cults of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il.⁷⁾ The North Korean refugees said they were impressed by the fact that South Korean dramas cover mainly practical matters in real life, rather than political affairs, while North Korean movies are full of pretenses and lies. They said they were shocked by the fact that young South Korean men and women are having relationships freely and openly.

They said that the more they watched South Korean dramas, the more they became anxious to know how they ended, because most of them are about love affairs and events happening in people’s lives. In sharp contrast, they added, the conclusion of North Korean movies or dramas is self-evident because they are of political nature. They also said that relationships between South Korean men and women were very interesting because relationships have nothing to do with their ages, while in the North important factors in relationships between men and women are their ideological backgrounds, party memberships and economic statuses, among other things.

For some time the North Korean refugees in the South, while watching South Korean dramas in the North, could hardly accept scenes in the dramas showing men and women kissing each other and thought of South Korean society as decadent where sexual relationships be concerned. South Korean adult movies are proliferating in

the North at a rapid pace as evidenced by the fact that 15 of the 33 North Korean refugees taking part in the survey watched them while they were in the North. While watching South Korean dramas, many North Koreans attempt to know the differences between socialism and capitalism, they said. Some of them view the right to produce this kind of optical media as the characteristic of a capitalist society.

IV. Conclusion

This essay started with a fundamental question about the scope in the North reached by the South Korean optical media in terms of area and people. The optical media is generally distributed from one region to another in the North and has affected North Koreans from various walks of life, including their political, economic, social and cultural perceptions.

A survey and study for this essay have revealed that the distribution of South Korean optical media in the North began in the areas bordering China and spread to inland areas through the already established unofficial market channels. The optical media was also distributed through personal connections among neighbors, relatives and friends with close relationships, promoting North Koreans' familiarity with and trust in South Korean optical media.

The key concern of this essay was the process of a perceptual change undergone by the North Korean citizens who came into contact with South Korean optical media as well as the substance of the change in perceptions. The process of the perceptual change divides into two types of those who did not have prior information about South Korea before their contact with the media and those who did have prior knowledge. In the case where those with information about the South watched South Korean optical media, the media accelerated a change in their perceptions. In contrast, in the case where those with no prior information about the South viewed the optical media, they have usually showed an adverse reaction to the media because of their negative impression on the South formed through the North's ideological education and propaganda over a long period of time – at least during the initial phases after their first viewing of the media. Repeated viewing of the South Korean media led those with prior information on the South to believe what the media presented.

How and to what extent will a change in their perceptions lead to a change in their behavior? Will the conceptual change involving North Koreans lead to a change in the North's overall social atmosphere? These questions may represent the themes subject to North Korea watchers' further studies in years to come. But indications of the survey

for this essay are that North Koreans' perceptual change touched off by their viewing of South Korean optical media can lead to deviations from norms and their escapes from their country. The impacts of the South Korean optical media can hardly be ignorable because these developments influence North Koreans in all areas and in all social classes, indicating that the South Korean optical media can serve as a catalyst for a change in the North's overall social atmosphere. The findings of this survey that North Korean citizens came to yearn for South Korean society and culture after viewing South Korean optical media and even underwent a change in their behaviors have made significant suggestions for predicting a change in the North Korean socialist system. The accumulation of North Koreans' knowledge about South Korea's developmental aspects can spark their collective demand for a change in the North's socialist system.

In other words, if North Koreans' viewing of South Korean optical media is combined with other factors for spurring a change of North Korean society, they can serve as a driving force for triggering an overall change there. Thus, North Koreans' longing for South Korea, their acceptance of South Korean culture and the influence of South Korea's optical media upon them, can help reduce differences between the Koreans living in the divided states of the

Korean Peninsula, if and when they succeed in unifying their divided fatherland.

(This is an excerpt from one of the papers presented in a forum held in Seoul on Aug. 24, 2010, to mark the 10th founding anniversary of The Korean Society for Modern North Korea Studies in Seoul.)

Notes:

- 1) For further discussion, See Chon Hyun-joon et al, *A Study of Evaluation of North Korea's National Power* (Seoul, The Korea Institute for National Unification, 2009), p. 309.
- 2) Lee Kyo-duk et al, *A Change of North Korea as Shown in North Korean Refugees' Testimony* (Seoul, The Korea Institute for National Unification, 2009), pp. 48-49.
- 3) Chung Eun-i, "A Study of Spontaneous Market Development in North Korea," *The Korean Journal of Unification Affairs*, Edition for the latter half of 2009 (No. 52), p. 175.
- 4) Park Jeong-ran, Kang Dong-wan, "North Korea's Politics and Society, Plus a Change in North Koreans' Perception of their Leader," *Studies of Politics and Information*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (2009), p. 86.
- 5) Lee Moo-chul, "North Korean Citizens' Economic View and Their Consciousness of Reforms and an Opening-up," *Journal of the Korean Society of North Korea Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2, p. 210.
- 6) Rim Gun-o, "(North) Korea's Marketization and an Abnormal State, Plus a Change in People's Life," *The Imjin River*, Summer 2010, No. 8 (2010), p. 54.
- 7) Kim Hwan-seok, *An Analysis of the Role of North Korea's Central TV Broadcasting Station and Its Programs, Plus Their Impacts on South Korea* (in case the South allows its citizens to watch them), (The Institute for National Security Strategy, Aug. 13, 2010).

North Korean Media Unveils New Main Battle Tank

<Yonhap from SEOUL/ August 17, 2010>

— A North Korean TV station recently aired rare footage of the socialist regime's new main battle tank, coming under close scrutiny by South Korea's intelligence agency, an intelligence official said on Aug. 17.

— The North's new tank, named "Pokpung-ho," was believed to have been developed in the 1990s based on the Soviet Union's T-72 tanks and underwent performance trials in 2002, according to South Korean defense ministry officials.

— No photographs of the North Korean tank previously existed in public circulation, but the North's Korean Central TV Broadcasting Station recently broadcast the footage of the Pokpung-ho, which means "Storm Tiger" in Korean, the intelligence official said.

— "We are analyzing the footage of the Pokpung-ho aired by the North's Korean Central TV Station," the intelligence official said on the condition of anonymity. The official didn't say exactly when the North aired the footage.

North Korean Military Plane Crashes in China, Killing Pilot: Source

<Yonhap from SHENYANG, China/ August 18, 2010>

— A North Korean airplane that appeared to be a Soviet-era jet fighter crashed in a Chinese border area, killing the pilot aboard who may have been attempting to defect to Russia, intelligence sources in Shenyang said on Aug. 18.

— The crash occurred in Fushun Prefecture in the province of Liaoning on Aug. 17 afternoon, the sources said, adding the pilot was the only person aboard the plane when it crashed.

— "The pilot died on the spot," one source said, adding the Chinese authorities were able to identify the nationality of the airplane only after the crash.

— According to Hong Kong newspaper Ming Pao, the plane had two occupants, with one of them ejecting by parachute prior to the crash. The other occupant who died may have failed to eject, it said.

N. Korea Lukewarm to Children's Forest in DMZ: U.S. Teenager

<Yonhap from SEOUL/ August 19, 2010>

— An American teenager who traveled on a peace mission to North Korea in mid-August said he "felt very safe and was treated well," but his proposal for a children's forest along the inter-Korean border faced political barriers.

— Jonathan Lee, a 13-year-old Korean-American from Mississippi, returned to Beijing on Aug. 19 after an eight-day trip to the reclusive nation with positive impressions of the country and its people, although his request for a meeting with

North Korean leader Kim Jong-il fell through.

— “At first, I thought everybody was going to be kind of unfriendly, kind of cold,” he told reporters after arriving in Seoul on Aug. 20. “But once I got there, I saw that people were actually really friendly. They would wave and smile, and I would wave back.”

— As a youth environmental activist and founder of a Mississippi-based group called International Cooperation of Environmental Youth - Helping Our Polluted Earth, Jonathan started his adventure with hopes of convincing Kim Jong-il to plant chestnut and fruit trees within the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), a four-kilometer-wide strip of land separating the North from the South.

Stealth Camouflage Tactics Widespread in North Korea: Manual

<Yonhap from SEOUL/ August 23, 2010>

— The North Korean military was ordered in 2005 to cover its fighter jets and other key equipment in radar-absorbing paint and to mobilize fake warships and fighters to elude radar detection, a North Korean field manual obtained by a South Korean missionary body showed on Aug. 23.

— According to the manual released by Caleb Mission, a Christian organization based in Cheonan, about 92 kilometers south of Seoul, North Korea’s reference on its ‘electronic warfare’ detailed how the North’s armed forces should prepare against reconnaissance operations by South Korea and the United States.

— “I obtained the field manual which describes in specifics North Korean camouflage tactics,” said an official for the organization. He said he has other manuals but declined to elaborate on when or how he secured them.

President Lee Views North Korean Leader’s China Trip Positively

<Yonhap from SEOUL/ August 31, 2010>

— South Korean President Lee Myung-bak gave a positive assessment on Aug. 31 of North Korean leader Kim Jong-il’s trip to China, saying it must have allowed the leader to witness for himself the rapid economic growth of the socialist ally.

— “I positively evaluate that Chairman Kim frequents China,” Lee said during a Cabinet meeting, according to presidential spokeswoman Kim Hee-jung. Lee was referring to the North Korean leader’s official job title as chairman of the National Defense Commission.

— Lee was quoted as saying that Kim’s repeated trip to China would have a positive influence on North Korea’s economy as it would provide him with more opportunities to see China’s economic development firsthand.

— “I see China’s role positively as well,” the president added. Many experts advise the impoverished and secretive North to adopt a Chinese-style economic reform and market opening.

U.S. Committed to Early Resumption of Excavation of GI Remains in N.K.

<Yonhap from WASHINGTON/ September 3, 2010>

— The Pentagon has said it is committed to finding ways to resume the excavation of the remains of American soldiers in North Korea as soon as possible despite escalating tensions after the sinking of a South Korean warship.

— “I will continue to work in the inter-agency process to overcome the current barriers to remains recovery in North Korea,” Michelle Flournoy, undersecretary of defense for policy, told the Korean War/Cold War Annual Government Briefing on Aug. 26, according to a transcript released by the Pentagon on Sept. 3. “We will get through this difficult period, and we will do everything within our power to resume recovery operations and bring our servicemembers home.”

— Flournoy was discussing the North’s torpedoing of the Cheonan in the Yellow Sea in March that caused the loss of 46 sailors, in which Pyongyang denies involvement despite an international probe that blamed the North.

Mobile Phone Service Becomes Available Across North Korea

<Yonhap from SEOUL/ September 8, 2010>

— North Korea’s cell phone service has had nationwide coverage including its border regions, where the launch has been shelved on national security concerns, a Washington-based radio station reported on Sept. 8.

— “I could see several transmission towers on my way to Pyongyang,” an ethnic Korean businessman living in China who recently visited North Korea was quoted as saying by the Radio Free Asia (RFA).

— “Such transmitters were also installed in the North’s border town of Sinuiju, and many North Koreans strolling in the railway station carried their cell phones,” the RFA said.

— North Korea first launched mobile phone service in Pyongyang in November 2002, but it was banned after a deadly explosion in the northern Ryongchon train station in April 2004.

— In December 2008, however, the socialist country introduced a 3G mobile phone network in a joint venture with Cairo-based Orascom Telecom, marking the first time that the people had been allowed to use mobile phones since 2004.

N. Korean Heir Apparent Visited China in August: Report

<Yonhap from HONG KONG/ September 9, 2010>

— A Hong Kong media outlet reported on Sept. 9 that North Korean leader Kim Jong-il took his heir apparent on a China trip late August.

— Speculation has mounted on whether Kim Jong-un, the youngest of Kim Jong-il's three known sons, accompanied his 68-year-old father during the Aug. 26-30 visit to the North's foremost benefactor.

— According to Chinese-language international affairs newsweekly Yazhou Zhoukan, meaning "Asia Weekly" in English, Jong-un, believed to be 27, was present during his father's visit to China.

— His name, however, did not appear on the name list of the official delegation, as he was traveling together as "a member of Kim Jong-il's family," the report explained.

— Last week, the Chinese foreign ministry declined to confirm the presence of Kim Jong-un during the trip, saying, "It is clearly stated on the name list released by the Chinese government." Kim Jong-un's name was not on the list.

U.S. to Withhold Funding to N. Korea over Human Trafficking

<Yonhap from WASHINGTON/ September 13, 2010>

— President Barack Obama said on Sept. 13 the U.S. will withhold funding for North Korea and several other countries for their poor human rights records involving human trafficking.

— In a memorandum, Obama said, under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, he made "the determination, with respect to Cuba, the DPRK, Eritrea and Iran, not to provide certain assistance for those countries' governments for Fiscal Year 2011, until they comply with the minimum standards or make significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance."

— The socialist country was categorized in June by the State Department's "2010 Trafficking in Persons Report" as "Tier 3 countries" that "do not fully comply with the minimum standards and are not making significant efforts to do so" under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act.

— The U.S. government has imposed financial sanctions and a ban on humanitarian aid on Tier 3 countries for two straight years. North Korea has been on the list since 2003.

— "The DPRK is a source country for men, women and children who are subjected to trafficking in persons, specifically forced labor and forced prostitution," the human trafficking report said.

PEOPLE

Kim Jong-il (김정일): General Secretary of the Workers' Party of (North) Korea (WPK); Chairman of the National Defense Commission (NDC); Supreme Commander of the (North) Korean People's Army (KPA)

- Aug. 16 The KCNA says that Kim Jong-il sent a wreath to the bier of Yun Ki-jong. Yun, an alternate member of the Central Committee of the WPK and deputy to the SPA, passed away of acute cardiac insufficiency at the age of 81.
- 17 The KCNA reports that Kim Jong-il watched the light comedy, "Echo of Mountain," at the Hamhung Grand Theatre along with service personnel of the Korean People's Army.
- 22 The KCNA reports that Kim Jong-il attended a grand music and dance performance, "Long March for Victory of Songun," put on by artists of the State Merited Chorus, the KPA Song and the Dance Ensemble, the KPA Military Band, the song and dance ensembles of the Commands of the KPA Navy and Air Force, and other art organizations of the KPA.
- 23 The KCNA says that Kim Jong-il sent a wreath to the bier of Kwon Jong-ung, former writer of the April 15 Literary Production Company, to express condolences over his death.
- 24 The KCNA reports that Kim Jong-il gave field guidance to the 927 Chicken Farm.
- 25 receives a message of sympathy from Chinese President Hu Jintao over severe flood damages in North Korea.
- 25 The KCNA reports that Kim Jong-il gave a field guidance to the Pyongyang Cornstarch Factory.
- 26 sends a wreath to the bier of the late Kim Song-gyu, department director of the Central Committee of the WPK, expressing deep condolences over his death.
- 28 receives a message of sympathy from Dmitry Medvedev, President of the Russian Federation, over severe losses due to heavy rains and floods that hit the country's northern region.
- 30 returns home from a five-day trip to China. The KCNA and Chinese media confirm Kim's "unofficial" visit to China. Reports say that the trip was made at the invitation of the Chinese president and that Kim Jong-il held an unofficial summit with Chinese President Hu Jintao in the Chinese city of Changchun.
- Sept. 7 The KCNA reports that Kim Jong-il watched a performance given by the art squad of the KPA Unit 963.
- 8 The KCNA reports that Kim Jong-il extended his gratitude to Chinese President Hu Jintao for sending a consolatory message on the North's

recent flood damage.

- Sept. 8 The KCNA reports that Kim Jong-il watched a concert given by the State Merited Chorus to mark the 62nd anniversary of the nation's founding.
- 9 receives a message of greetings from Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, on the occasion of the 62nd founding anniversary of North Korea.
- 9 The KCNA reports that Kim Jong-il attended a concert by the Unhasu Orchestra to mark the 62nd anniversary of the country's founding.
- 11 The KCNA reports that Kim Jong-il gave field guidance to the March 5 Youth Mine in Jagang Province.
- 12 The KCNA reports that Kim Jong-il provided field guidance to the Manpho Unhwa Factory in Jagang Province.

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

- Aug. 19 meets with South Korea's pro-unification Rev. Han Sang-ryol at the Mansudae Assembly Hall. Han entered the North by air on June 12 and made speeches denouncing South Korean President Lee Myung-bak and praising the socialist regime.
- 30 holds talks with the delegation of political officials of the Vietnam People's Army headed by Lt. Gen. Ngo Xuan Lich, deputy head of the General Political Department, at the Mansudae Assembly Hall in Pyongyang.
- Sept. 1 receives a delegation of the Shenyang Military Area of the Chinese People's Liberation Army headed by Lt. Gen. Zhang Youxia at the Mansudae Assembly Hall.
- 15 Kim Yong-nam receives a delegation of the Lao Ministry of Public Security led by Minister Thongbanh Seng A Phone at the Mansudae Assembly Hall.

CHRONOLOGICAL REVIEW

(Local Events)

- Aug. 16 The KCNA blasts the "Ulchi Freedom Guardian," a joint South Korea-U.S. war game, in a commentary calling it a "grave military provocation to wreck peace and stability in the Korean Peninsula."
- 16 The 11th national exhibition of inventions and new technologies opens with due ceremony at the Three-Revolution Exhibition in Pyongyang.
- 21 A government science and technology delegation led by Ri Ja-bang, chairman of the State Science and Technology Commission, departs for China.
- 21 The Air Force and Navy are mobilized to the area of Sinuiju for rescue

- operations following severe floods.
- Aug. 22 The General Federation of Trade Unions of (North) Korea, Democratic Women's Union of (North) Korea and other workers' unions mark the 50th anniversary of the start of Kim Jong-il's "Songun revolutionary leadership."
- 23 The documentary film, "Providing a Great Turn with the Songun Revolutionary Leadership" was screened at the People's Palace of Culture in Pyongyang on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of leader Kim Jong-il's start of the Songun revolutionary leadership.
- 25-27 Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter visits Pyongyang on a mission to win the release of Aijalon Gomes, a 30-year-old American detained in the North for illegally entering the country in January. During the stay in Pyongyang Carter met titular head of state Kim Yong-nam "in a warm atmosphere" and he leaves North Korea after securing the freedom of Gomes.
- 26 A meeting of WPK delegates of South Pyongan Province is held in Pyongsong.
- 31 A national meeting takes place at the People's Palace of Culture in Pyongyang to commemorate the 50th anniversary of leader Kim Jong-il's start of leadership at Kimilsung University, with Kim Yong-nam, Choe Thae-bok and other senior officials in attendance.
- 31 The 65th plenary session of the Central Committee of the General Federation of Trade Unions of (North) Korea (GFTUK) takes place in Pyongyang and Hyon Sang-ju is elected as chairman of the GFTUK Central Committee.
- Sept. 1 North Korea names Jang Yong-chol as its new ambassador to Malaysia, according to a decree of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly.
- 2 The *Rodong Sinmun* hails Kim Jong-il's recent trip to China, calling it a "landmark event of weighty significance" in boosting bilateral relations.
- 4 The *Rodong Sinmun* snubs Seoul's proposed unification tax, calling it an "intolerable politically motivated provocation" against the North.
- 4 Meetings of delegates of North and South Hamgyong and Kangwon provinces and Rason City of the WPK are held to elect delegates who will attend the WPK conference.
- 8 North Korea celebrates the 62nd anniversary of its founding by holding a national meeting at the April 25 House of Culture in Pyongyang. In a speech, Kim Yong-nam calls for an improvement of the ties between the two Koreas based on the spirit of the past two inter-Korean summits.
- Sept. 9 North Korea marks its 62nd founding anniversary, with festivities held throughout Pyongyang and other parts of the country. Senior ruling party and state officials visit the Kumsusan Memorial Palace in Pyongyang to pay tribute to the late founder Kim Il-sung.

- Sept. 10 Jang Jae-on, the head of North Korea's Red Cross, sends a letter of proposal to his South Korean counterpart Ryu Jong-ha on holding a reunion of separated families on the occasion of the forthcoming Chuseok holidays.
- 12 The KCNA reports that North Korea produced a detailed electronic map on climate used for agricultural production.

(Foreign Events)

- Aug. 16 Somsavath Lengsavath, standing vice prime minister of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, and his party arrive in Pyongyang. A welcome reception is held, with the attendance of the North's senior officials, including Vice Premier Ro Tu-chol and Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Pak Kil-yon.
- 17 Vice Premier Ro Tu-chol and Somsavath Lengsavath, standing vice prime minister of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, hold talks at the Mansudae Assembly Hall on ways to strengthen bilateral ties.
- 18 A spokesman at the North's foreign ministry condemns the U.S. and South Korea for their Ulchi Freedom Guardian joint military exercise and threatens to respond with a "fearful" attack.
- 18 South Korean Rev. Han Sang-ryol meets with the North's media and foreign correspondents at the People's Palace of Culture in Pyongyang and holds talks about his planned return to the South. The trip was not approved by Seoul.
- 19 Pak Ui-chun meets with new German Ambassador to the DPRK, Gerhard Thiedemann, who paid a courtesy call to him at the Mansudae Assembly Hall in Pyongyang.
- 19 A meeting is held at the Taedong River Diplomatic Corps Club in Pyongyang to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the opening of diplomatic ties between the DPRK and Cuba.
- 20 South Korean Rev. Han Sang-ryol crosses the Military Demarcation Line at Panmunjom into South Korea and is detained by authorities.
- 26 The North's foreign ministry holds an event marking the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties with Cuba.
- 27 Kim Jong-gak, first-vice director of the General Political Bureau of the KPA, meets with the delegation of political officials of the Vietnam People's Army headed by Lt. Gen. Ngo Xuan Lich, deputy head of the General Political Department.
- 31 Kim Yong-chun, vice marshal of the KPA and minister of the People's Armed Forces, meets with the delegation of the Shenyang Military Area of the Chinese People's Liberation Army headed by Lt. Gen. Zhang Youxia, commander of the area.

- Sept. 6 An event is held to recognize the DPRK pavilion at the Expo 2010 Shanghai China.
- 7 North Korea releases a South Korean fishing boat and its seven crew members held in the North since early August.
- 10 Jang Jae-on, the head of North Korea's Red Cross, sends a letter of proposal to his South Korean counterpart Ryu Jong-ha on holding a reunion of separated families on the occasion of the forthcoming Chuseok holidays.
- 14 Minister of People's Security Ju Sang-song holds talks with his Laotian counterpart Thongbanh Seng A Phone at the Mansudae Assembly Hall. The two sides exchanged views on the matter of developing cooperation in the field of security and issues of mutual concern, according to the KCNA.
- 15 Choe Thae-bok, secretary of the WPK Central Committee, receives a delegation of the Austrian Social Democratic Party's Sankt Poelten City Committee led by Chairman Anton Heinzl at the Mansudae Assembly Hall. (Yonhap News)
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Subscription rates (mailing cost included) : US\$70.00 for one year, US\$7.00 per copy

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Publication Registration No : Culture RA-08259

Printed by The Korea Herald Company, Seoul, Korea