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COVER PHOTO : North Korean leader Kim Jong-un casts a ballot at a polling station at Kim Il-sung University of Politics in Pyongyang on March 9 to elect deputies to the 13th Supreme People’s Assembly. It is the first election for the North’s rubber-stamp parliament since Kim took power in December 2011 after the death of his father, Kim Jong-il. (KCNA-Yonhap)

CONSOLIDATION OF POWER IN KIM JONG-UN REGIME

Kim Jong-un has emphasized the country's ideological work should ensure that "all shades of evil ideas and spirits never make inroads into our ranks."

■ By Lee Kwang-ho

In a despotic country like North Korea, propaganda campaigns are undoubtedly essential to maintaining the unitary ruling system. Every ideological campaign is mobilized to consolidate the power base of the Kim dynasty.

Such campaigns are manifested in the form of a personality cult surrounding the socialist country's top leadership descending from its founder Kim Il-sung and his son Kim Jong-il to his grandson and current leader Kim Jong-un.

North Koreans are often forced to take part in mass rallies at major state events and ceremonies, in a show of their allegiance to the North Korean leadership, as well as for propaganda purposes.

Worship of Kim Family

With its fanatical worship of the Kim family akin to a state religion, North Korea spares no expense each year to celebrate the birthdays of its deceased leaders Kim Jong-il and Kim Il-sung despite its moribund economy and impoverished populace. North Korea celebrates the birthdays of the two Kims as national holidays.

Since the execution of leader Kim Jong-un's uncle and No. 2 man, Jang Song-thaek, for treason in December last year, Pyongyang has stressed unity surrounding Kim and striven to reinforce ideological indoctrination of the populace. Analysts have explained that the North Korean regime uses such means to consolidate internal unity.

The North's recent election for its rubber-stamp legislature is supposed to have shown that there was no "objection" from voters to a single candidate in the country. North Korea's state-run media on



The 8th Conference of the Ideological Officials of the North's Worker's Party opens in Pyongyang on Feb. 25, with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un attending. The two-day meeting was held for the first time in 10 years. (KCNA-Yonhap)

March 11 revealed the names of the 687 members of the Supreme People's Assembly (SPA) it claimed were elected unanimously amid a 99.97 percent voter turnout.

The state media further claimed that leader Kim Jong-un was elected to the parliament with 100 percent of the vote, adding that the election results clearly demonstrated the "absolute support and trust of all service personnel and people."

In late February, North Korea held a meeting of ruling Workers' Party officials involved in crafting the state ideology for the first time in 10 years in an apparent attempt to reinforce the indoctrination of its people. It was the first time for the

country to convene the officials since February 2004 under the rule of the late leader Kim Jong-il.

The eighth Conference of Ideological Officials of the Workers' Party of (North) Korea (WPK) was held in Pyongyang from Feb. 24 to 25 on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the late leader Kim Jong-il's program for modeling North Korean society on "Kimilsungism." Kim Il-sung was the North's founding president who died in 1994.

Marking the 40th anniversary of the proclamation of its key leadership ideology, North Korea called for loyalty to its leader Kim Jong-un on Feb. 19. Former leader Kim Il-sung in 1974 introduced the

state ideology that calls for the whole of society to be modeled in accordance with the leadership of the Kim family.

The dictate also outlines the importance of unconditional obedience to the Kim family and actions required to be taken by the country as a whole to express allegiance.

Ever since its recent indoctrination officials' meeting, North Korea has been intensifying its campaign to promote the country's "superior" socialist system, revolutionary ideology and monolithic ruling structure.

Pyongyang's campaign is aimed at consolidating the people's loyalty -- an essential step for the dynastic country to maintain its unitary political system. Kim Jong-un is heavily reliant on the legacy of his father and grandfather to justify his ascension to power. In addition to invoking the legacy of Kim Il-sung, North Korea has ramped up efforts to build up Kim Jong-il's personality cult since the leader's death on Dec. 17, 2011.

Monolithic Leadership

North Korea attached significance to the latest political meeting as Kim said the conference convened on a scale unprecedented in the history of the Workers' Party. He said the conference exalted the "brilliance of the imperishable exploits" performed by the late North Korean leaders.

Kim Jong-un said the most powerful weapon for a party that wages a revolution shouldering the people's destiny is ideology. "Without ideology, a party cannot be founded nor can it exist, and its work and revolutionary struggle are inconceivable

separated from ideological work."

Stressing the need to solidify his monolithic leadership, Kim also called for the construction of a thriving country through a self-reliance economy and the removal of the toxic elements of capitalism from North Korean society.

"The cause of dyeing the revolutionary ranks with the monolithic ideology had made more dynamic progress and new changes had taken place in all fields of revolution and construction ... since the modeling of the whole society on Kimilsungism was proclaimed," the North's main newspaper Rodong Sinmun said in an editorial.

Calling for the achievement of "the great cause of Mount Paektu under the leadership of Marshal Kim Jong-un," the newspaper also stressed the importance of ideological education of the people "to make them key members of spreading the ideology."

Every North Korean is taught to pledge loyalty to each generation of the Kim family, known in the communist country as the Mount Paektu bloodline, which has run the country since its founding in 1948.

The North claims the mountain, the highest peak on the Korean Peninsula and located on the Sino-North Korean border, is the sacred birthplace of Kim Jong-il. North Korea's Kim dynasty has long tried to tie itself to Mount Paektu, the sacred, mystical birthplace of the Korean race. Kim Il-sung claimed to have formed his resistance to the Japanese there.

According to a North Korean radio broadcast monitored in Seoul, North Koreans have said they will faithfully "follow the ideology and leadership of the

Kim Jong-un said the struggle to defend socialism should be an offensive operation to gain a political and ideological upper hand over imperialists that hinder the country's onward movement and, inwardly, sweep up non-socialist practices and decadent ideology and culture by means of the revolutionary ideology and culture.

Marshal of the Paektu bloodline,” in a series of allegiance letters addressed to the leader. Kim was named marshal, the North Korean military's highest rank, in 2012 as part of the consolidation of his leadership after his father's death.

The new tasks presented by the leader are follow-ups to the policy goals and tasks he outlined in his New Year's day address, in which Kim called on the two Koreas to work toward better relations and emphasized economic growth and ideological consolidation to build a “thriving socialist country.” Kim defined 2014 as a year of “grandiose struggle to make a fresh leap forward ushering in a golden age of songun (military-first) Korea.”

In his latest speech to a party meeting, however, the North Korean leader warned against factionalism in the nation's ruling Workers' Party as part of ongoing efforts to reinforce the state ideology after the stunning execution of his uncle for treason.

“We failed to learn and root out the emergence of a modern-era faction within the party in advance” despite efforts to strengthen the monolithic ruling system, Kim was quoted as saying by the North's Korean Central News Agency (KCNA). He made the remarks in his speech during the closing ceremony of the meeting of officials

responsible for crafting the state ideology.

His comment on factional activity is seen as referring to Jang Song-thaek. Then Kim stressed the need to concentrate all efforts on firmly establishing the party's monolithic leadership. “All efforts of the party's ideological projects should be poured into the firm establishment of the monolithic control system... and to eradicate factionalism,” he said.

Warning against Factionalism

“The objective of the revolutionary ideological offensive for establishing the Party's monolithic leadership system is to make the great Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism and its embodiment, the Party's lines and policies, an element of unshakable conviction of the masses of the people,” Kim said.

He said the revolutionaries of Korea rallied comrades and obtained weapons on the strength of ideology and on its strength they defeated imperialist powers and built a prospering form of socialism. Then he called for the party's propagandists to conduct their work in an aggressive manner.

Kim said they should ensure that “all shades of evil ideas and spirits never make inroads into the country's ranks by giving uninterrupted publicity to the Party's inten-

tions and leading the continuous advance of the ideological struggle.”

Kim said the struggle to defend socialism should be an offensive operation to gain a political and ideological upper hand over imperialists that hinder the country’s onward movement and, inwardly, sweep up non-socialist practices and decadent ideology and culture by means of the revolutionary ideology and culture.

“It is necessary to explain to the masses the Party’s policies for a given period in a logical and convincing way so that they can sympathize with them and accept them as their own by themselves,” he said. Stressing that such sectarianism is caused by changes in ideology, the young leader called for “proactive operations to prevent the toxin of capitalism from encroaching on us and to nullify their imperialistic ideological movements.”

He then encouraged propaganda and agitation activities. “We must launch an information offensive to ideologically and morally overpower the imperialist reactionary forces who are trying to stamp out socialism by all means.

“The sector of ideological work and related units should work out elaborate plans for putting mass media and external publicity means on a modern and IT basis and make persevering efforts to carry them out,” he said. “We should ideologically support the efforts to make a breach in imperialist maneuvers to monopolize high technology, and make advanced science and technology our own.”

Kim also emphasized that workers should find their worth in informing as many persons as possible of the Party’s

policies and ensuring innovation at the units under their charge. “The entire Party should become informational and motivational workers, and all officials should conduct political work.”

Other formulations in his speech warning about “alien ideologies” and “decadent lifestyles” as well as the “enemy’s schemes for ideological and cultural infiltration” indicate that outside information and ideas keep coming into the country despite efforts to stop them.

Defying 'Decadent' Capitalism

Moreover, Kim emphasized the importance of the mental strength of all service personnel and people. “The greatest potential for creation and innovation, the fundamental key to miraculous change, lies in giving play to the mental strength of all service personnel and people,” he noted.

North Korea’s mouthpiece newspaper has frequently condemned capitalist lifestyles and called for a new socialist order, in an apparent swipe at outside influences penetrating the country’s tightly controlled border with China. Rodong Sinmun said the country’s enemies were constantly scheming to overthrow the regime by spreading “superstitious beliefs” about capitalism.

It said that capitalist organizations calling for such things as religious freedom and human rights brought the demise of former socialist regimes in Eastern Europe. “The bourgeois lifestyle that dominates capitalist societies is founded upon extreme selfishness and egoism,” said the newspaper. “It corrupts our people, and the decadent

lifestyle undermines our national identity.”

North Korea watchers in Seoul said the rhetoric is likely aimed at preventing further South Korean, American and Japanese influence from seeping in through China. Washington-based Radio Free Asia reported that North Korean officials have tightened control of goods smuggled in from South Korea and that bribing officials and removing manufacturer labels were no longer enough for North Koreans to evade restrictions.

North Korea's news media praised Kim Jong-un's speech, encouraging people to defend the country's "superior socialist system." Rodong Sinmun said the collapse of socialist countries in the past was ascribable to the loosened zeal for revolution and the spread of lax attitudes among the people.

To this end, North Korea held an expanded plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the Journalists Union on Feb. 27. The meeting underscored the need for the media to fulfill its mission and duty to build a thriving nation through ideological offensives.

Cha Sung-su, chairman of the committee, said Kim Jong-un's speech serves as "a great program for media persons and an all-powerful treasured sword for fully ensuring the victory of the Korean revolution by dint of ideology." The participants underlined the need for an intensive media offensive and information and agitation campaigns for the country's *juche* (self-reliance) ideology.

Analysts said the North may still be in the midst of the glorification process for the young leader Kim Jong-un. Apparently,



North Korean leader Kim Jong-un speaks during the 8th Conference of the Ideological officials of the North's Worker's Party in Pyongyang on Feb. 25. (KCNA-Yonhap)

the personality cult for the leader is being formed in the North's media. He is often described as a sublime person of high morality, possessing ardent love for the fatherland and people and vast scientific knowledge. Since late last year, North Korean state media has begun to call Kim the "great leader."

Glorification for Kim Jong-un

North Korea has also emphasized the spirit of "Masikryong speed" in carrying out the new ski resort projects for the country. Masikryong speed is a new spirit for grand socialist construction, a result of Kim Jong-un's plan to build a rich and powerful nation based on patriotic devotion, according to North Korean media. It said the completion of the construction of the world-class ski resort in little over a year is a historic miracle which could only have been achieved by service personnel

of the KPA equipped with “the revolutionary soldier spirit.”

Yet, North Korea sticks to its traditional songun politics. Kim Jong-un has said that the leadership of the Workers’ Party is the life of the (North) Korean People’s Army, emphasizing that without the party leadership, the military power of the socialist country cannot exist. Kim made the statement on Aug. 25 last year, marking the 53rd anniversary of “Day of Songun.” Songun is the North’s military-first politics that stresses the importance of its armed forces and its leading role in all matters of the state.

North Korea has said that songun politics “represents the proud tradition of the Korean revolution and the banner of victory and glory.” It was pioneered by North Korea’s founder Kim Il-sung and led by his son and late leader Kim Jong-il. But the socialist country has also said the songun revolution is now being creditably carried forward by its current leader Kim Jong-un.

Analysts say that songun politics is somewhat fading under the Kim Jong-un regime, but still influential. Kim Jong-un has said “songun politics is a mode of socialist politics that raises military affairs as the most important of all state affairs and defends the country, revolution and socialism, and accelerates the overall socialist construction with the KPA as the core, as the main force.”

With Kim Jong-un heavily reliant on the legacies of his father and grandfather to justify his ascension to power, North Korea has pushed efforts to build up Kim Jong-il’s personality cult into full gear since the leader’s death on Dec. 17, 2011. The Feb.

16 birthday of Kim Jong-il, known in the North as the Day of the “Kwangmyongsong,” or the Shining Star, was designated as an important national holiday in 1995, and has been widely celebrated every year since.

Reliance on Legacy

Kim Il-sung’s birthday on April 15 is called the “Day of the Sun.” Kim, who founded the socialist country in 1948, laid the foundation for the future of the state before his death in July 8, 1994. He is immortalized in the North and remains the “Eternal President of the Republic” even after his death.

Kim’s ascension to power was carried out rapidly. On Dec. 30, 2011, barely two weeks after his father’s death, the young Kim took the office of supreme commander of the North Korean People’s Army. He naturally succeeded the North’s leadership in his capacity as first secretary of the Party Central Committee, first chairman of the National Defense Commission, member of the Party Politburo Presidium and chairman of the Party’s Central Military Commission, concurrently. Those offices were given to him in two political functions held in April 2012.

Kim’s status as the pinnacle of the North’s power hierarchy culminated with his election as a deputy to the North’s parliament, the Supreme People’s Assembly. The election saw 55 percent of the 687 members replaced, suggesting that new officials were elected to support the leader. (Yonhap)

FIRST LEGISLATIVE ELECTION UNDER KIM JONG-UN

There seems to have been no big surprise in the North's power shift according to the new roster of the Supreme People's Assembly.

North Koreans went to the polls on March 9 to elect a new rubber-stamp parliament that could provide a rare glimpse of a power shift under the leadership of Kim Jong-un. As expected, the North Korean leader was elected to the Supreme People's Assembly (SPA) together with key military and party officials, all of whom won unanimous approval.

North Korea unveiled a new roster of deputies for parliament on March 11. In the tightly choreographed election, the first under the young leader, the 687 candidates for the SPA pulled in 100 percent of the vote with a 99.97 percent turnout, state media said.

All the voters of Kim's constituency voted for Kim, the North's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said in a dispatch, citing election results from the Central Election Committee.

The dispatch said Kim's election demonstrated soldiers' and citizens' "absolute support and profound trust" in their young leader, who took over the country in December 2011 following the death of his father, long-time leader Kim Jong-il.

Kim ran for a seat in Constituency No. 111 Mount Paektu, the highest peak

on the Korean Peninsula, which Pyongyang claims is the sacred birthplace of Kim's late father. North Korea's propaganda machine uses Mount Paektu when it refers to the country's royal bloodline.

Election, a Formality

The socialist state holds the election every five years, with the last one held in March 2009.

Except for the physical voting, it is largely considered a formality because North Korean voters can cast their ballot for only one candidate standing for each of the 687 constituencies.

The current president of the SPA Presidium is North Korea's ceremonial head of state, Kim Yong-nam, who has held the position since 1998. The 86-year-old is North Korea's official No. 2 figure, following leader Kim, who chairs the powerful National Defense Commission.

The KCNA also said March 9 that Kim Jong-un cast his vote at the Kim Il-sung University of Politics, along with officials of the North's Korean People's Army (KPA), including Choe Ryong-hae, director of the KPA's General Political Bureau.

The KCNA added that the North Korean leader was accompanied by his younger sister, Kim Yo-jong. It marked the first time that the younger Kim, 27, was identified in the state media. She had previously appeared on North Korean television attending key national functions, but Pyongyang media had made no mention of her until the latest elections.

Kim Jong-un's younger sister Yo-jong, who was photographed accompanying her brother to a polling station, was not on the final list of candidates. But she made her first public appearance on the election day on March 9 on state television, emerging as a powerful royal family member after the brutal death of her uncle Jang Song-thaek.

Kim Jong-un's Sister

The 27-year-old Kim is described by North's state media as "a core worker of the Workers' Party's Central Committee." This is widely interpreted as meaning that she will assist her brother as a member of the Paektu family bloodline.

As Jang's widow, Kim Kyong-hui, the younger sister of late leader Kim Jong-il, has not made any public appearance since her husband's demise, Kim Yo-jong may take the place once occupied by her and her husband, other analysts said. They also view her role as to build up the political image of Kim Jong-un.

According to the new roster of the SPA, there seems to have been no big surprise in the North's power shift.

Rather, most of the officials close to North Korean leader Kim's executed uncle Jang Song-thaek were elected to the SPA, an outcome that suggests that Kim may be confident of having consolidated his power.

The elections, the first since Kim took power in December 2011 following the death of his father and long-time leader Kim Jong-il, had been widely seen as an opportunity to either eliminate or sideline Jang's supporters from the Supreme People's Assembly.

The uncontested elections of 687 deputies came three months after the North executed the once-powerful Jang on charges of treason. The bloody purge sparked speculation over the fate of officials close to Jang.

The results of the election released on March 11 by the North's official KCNA showed that most officials believed to be close to Jang, including Kim Yang-gon, Pyongyang's point man on inter-Korean relations, were elected deputies to the legislature.

Also included in the list is People's Security Minister Choe Pu-il, who is one of Jang's old associates and friends.

North Korea's ambassador to China, Ji Jae-ryong, was also elected as a new deputy to the legislature. Ji's political fate had been the focus of intense media attention because he was considered one of the closest aides to Jang.

However, two other officials close to Jang -- Mun Kyong-dok, a senior Workers' Party official in Pyongyang, and Ro Song-sil, former chairwoman of the

Central Committee of the Democratic Women's Union of North Korea -- were removed from the legislature.

Mun, who was last seen in public in a massive rally on Jan. 6, appears to have been dismissed from his post or purged, said Cheong Seong-chang, a senior research fellow at the Sejong Institute, a private security think tank near Seoul.

Cheong said the election results "indirectly confirmed that there aren't as many of Jang's proteges in the North's leadership as believed by the outside world."

Other high-profile officials who were elected to the parliament include Choe Ryong-hae, the chief political officer of the Korean People's Army, and Won Tong-yon, the vice head of the United Front Department, who represented North Korea during last month's high-level talks with South Korea.

Those elected may also possibly include Kim Kyong-hui, a senior party secretary and Jang's wife. The unification ministry, which handles inter-Korean affairs, said it remains unclear whether the Kim Kyong-hui who was elected is Kim Jong-un's aunt or a different person with the same name.

An official said that the mentioned Kim Kyong-hui may be a different person. The official said the leader's aunt could not have been elected to the parliament either because of voluntary reasons or due to friction with leader Kim Jong-un.



North Korean soldiers dance after casting their votes in the election of deputies to the 13th Supreme People's Assembly at the Constituency No. 111 Mount Paektu in Pyongyang on March 9. (KCNA-Yonhap)

The newly elected deputies also include Jang Jong-nam, minister of the People's Armed Forces; Kim Su-kil, vice director of the General Political Bureau of the Korean People's Army; Jo Yon-jun, senior vice director of the ruling Workers' Party's organization guidance department; and Ma Won-chun, vice director of the party's finance and accounting department.

Almost all of Kim Jong-un's confidants retained their seats, including Ri Yong-gil, chief of the military general staff; Kim Won-hong, minister of state security; Pak Pong-ju, cabinet premier; and Kim Yong-nam, president of the SPA presidium.

Some old military officials, including Hyon Chol-hae, a former first-vice minister of the People's Armed Forces, were removed from the legislature in a sign of a shift in power.

Also missing were retired senior army personnel, apparently reflecting Kim Jong-un's drive to dilute the influence of the potent, rigid military within his regime. (Yonhap)

PRESIDENT PARK'S PITCH FOR UNIFICATION

A unification preparatory committee is likely to take the role as a control tower to establish North Korea policies and carry out preparations for unification.

■ By Kim Tae-shik

South Korean President Park Geun-hye, who has made a strong pitch for unification in recent months, revealed a plan on Feb. 25 to launch a “preparatory committee for unification” with North Korea to map out a blueprint for how best to become one nation with the impoverished socialist neighbor.

Park announced the plan in a nationwide televised address on the first anniversary of her inauguration as president. She also pledged to expand dialogue and civilian exchanges with the North through the proposed committee.

The move underscores Park's commitment to inter-Korean unification, which has been a key policy goal of her government. She drew media attention recently by saying it will be an economic “bonanza” and a blessing for South and North Korea to reunite.

The committee will be chaired by President Park herself and composed of a vice chairperson and some 50 members, including government officials and civilian experts.

The government plans to formally launch the committee in April after legal and other necessary preparations, and the committee is expected to hold a regular meeting once every quarter.

Commitment to Unification

Park's plan to launch a preparatory committee for unification is the manifestation of her determination to carry out preparations for unification on a national dimension, experts said.

“If we are going to realize genuine peace on the Korean Peninsula

and a quantum leap of the Republic of Korea (South Korea), it is necessary to make preparations for unification that would open up a new era for the Korean Peninsula,” Park said during the address to announce a three-year economic innovation plan.

Germany successfully realized unification as it made preparations step by step, she said, stressing the need to best prepare for the national task.

“I will do my best to lay the cornerstone and realize unification of the Korean Peninsula without fail,” she said. “To this end, I will launch the unification preparatory committee under direct control of the president to study systematic and constructive directions for unification.”

Park also revealed an idea to use the committee as a tool to expand dialogue and civilian exchanges with the North.

Relations between the two Koreas have shown some signs of improving in recent months, including the staging of reunions of separated families after more than three years.

In February, the two sides held their first high-level talks in seven years and agreed to hold reunions of families separated since the 1950-53 Korean War and to work together for better relations.

North Korea has thwarted the family reunions linking the humanitarian issue to South Korea-U.S. joint military drills. Pyongyang demanded that the drills be put off until the reunions are held but withdrew its demand and agreed to hold the reunions as previously scheduled from Feb. 20-25. Hundreds of people from the two sides finally met their long-lost relatives in the first reunions held in more than three years at North Korea's Mount Kumgang resort.

Millions of Koreans remain separated across the border as a legacy of the Korean War, which ended in a truce, leaving the peninsula still technically in a state of war. The Koreans have held 19 rounds of reunions, including the latest one, since their landmark summit in 2000, but only about 25,000 people have been fortunate to be temporarily reunited with their long-lost family members across the border.



South Korean President Park Geun-hye discloses a plan to set up a presidential unification preparatory committee while announcing a three-year economic innovation plan at the presidential office Cheong Wa Dae in Seoul on Feb. 25. (Yonhap)

The committee is expected to serve as a forum to build a national consensus on the government's North Korea policy, including the unification.

Park expressed her hope to operate the committee not only as an organization for collecting opinions but also for making preparations for unification unlike existing presidential committees whose functions are mainly making advices for state issues.

It is noteworthy that Park said she would seek "systematic and constructive directions" for unification by establishing the committee and that the committee will contribute to expanding inter-Korean dialogue and civilian exchanges.

The committee is likely to take the role as a control tower to establish North Korea policies and carry out preparations for unification in an integrated manner with officials from the unification and foreign ministries as well as private experts and civilian organizations participating, government and private sources said.

Control Tower for N.K. Policy

A government source said the plan to launch the presidential preparatory committee means the president's intention to let the committee to openly handle the unification preparation works that have been discussed only inside the government.

Park's announcement to set up a preparatory body for unification is designed to stress again that national reunification is an essential condition for Korea's economic future.

Presidential spokesman Min Kyung-wook said the idea of the preparatory committee is in line with Park's earlier remarks that unification will be an economic bonanza for South Korea during her New Year's press conference.

"The three-year economic innovation plan has been drawn up to realize a great economic leap, and the establishment of the unification preparatory panel is the president's idea to help achieve the great economic leap," the spokesman explained.

In a related move, the government plans to establish a consultative body with Germany to learn Germany's experience in unification of East and West Germany.

In a telephone conversation on Feb. 12, South Korean Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se agreed with his German counterpart Frank-Walter Steinmeier to step up their cooperation in Seoul's push for the unification of the two Koreas.

Responding to Yun's remark that Seoul wants to get lessons from Germany's experience of accomplishing national unification, Steinmeier offered to discuss cooperation between the foreign ministries of the two countries, a Seoul official said, adding that Yun positively welcomed Steinmeier's suggestion.

Another official said the government is discussing with Germany on the establishment of the bilateral consultative panel. The government plans to launch the panel during the first half of this year.

As for a prerequisite to the unification, South Korea repeatedly urged the North to abandon its nuclear ambitions.

In an address at a regional leadership conference on March 3, Park said that the sooner North Korea gives up its nuclear program, the earlier unification with the communist nation will come.

Noting that the reunification on the Korean Peninsula would eventually bring forth new future for the peninsula, Northeast Asia and the whole world, Park stressed that the road to unification will be shortened if North Korea's nuclear abandonment comes early.

"If North Korea puts its nuclear program down and fills in that place with the trust of the international community and moves inter-Korean relations forward, we will be able to open an era of unification," she said.

N.K.'s Nuclear Program

"The decisive obstacle to economic cooperation between the South and the North is North Korea's nuclear program," Park said during a joint commissioning ceremony for graduating military cadets at the Gyeryongdae military headquarters in central South Korea on March 6.

Park also said Pyongyang should understand it is impossible for the regime to pursue nuclear weapons development and economic development at the same time. Should Pyongyang take serious steps toward denuclearization, the South and the international community will work for the North's economic development, she said.

"I urge North Korea to make a sincere decision to lay down its nuclear program as early as possible so that we can move toward peace and unification," she said.

In late February, North Korea test-fired a barrage of short-range ballistic missiles in an apparent protest against annual joint military exercises between the South and the United States that Pyongyang has denounced as a rehearsal for invasion.

Park said the South will beef up capabilities to defend itself against the North's nuclear and missile threats while at the same time strengthening the combined defense system with the United States.

"It is our historic duty and mission to lay the groundwork for free and peaceful unification," Park said. "We can open the door for unification only when our military is true to its original duty of defending the country and the people no matter what happens in inter-Korean relations and the security situation."

Relatedly, Foreign Minister Yun said on Feb. 28 Seoul will exert efforts to muster the international community's cooperation in its push to unify the two divided Koreas.

"(I) will make efforts aggressively and proactively to create an environment favorable to the peaceful unification (of South and North Korea)," Yun said in a local forum.

South Korea will take a dual policy of using both pressure and dialogue in its efforts to make Pyongyang give up its nuclear weapons program, the minister said, reiterating that the Park administration's strategy is aimed at denuclearizing North Korea and handling inter-Korean affairs. (Yonhap)

U.N. PANEL'S PROBE OF N. KOREA'S HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

The U.N. Commission of Inquiry launched an official investigative mission into widely condemned human rights abuses in North Korea.

■ By Lee Kwang-ho

North Korea has long been labeled one of the worst human rights abusers in the world, yet there have been few tangible results in the improvement of the human rights situation there. Of late, a United Nations panel released a lengthy report of North Korea's dismal human rights that recommended perpetrators of "unspeakable atrocities" in North Korea be held accountable for crimes against humanity.

Wrapping up its year-long investigation, the U.N. Commission of Inquiry (COI) said in its final report released in Geneva on Feb. 17 that the North has committed organized, extensive and grave crimes against humanity, citing the country's political prison camps, abductions of foreigners and its forcing of people into starvation, all conducted to keep its regime afloat.

The 400-page report and supplementary documents recommended the U.N. Security Council refer the situation to the International Criminal Court (ICC) so that perpetrators of such atrocities "without any parallel in the contemporary world" can

face justice. One of the recommended perpetrators included North Korean leader Kim Jong-un.

Australian Michael Kirby, the commission's chairman, penned a letter to Kim dated Jan. 21 warning that the report would call for a referral to the ICC "to render accountable all those, including possibly yourself, who may be responsible for the crimes against humanity," as found in the year-long investigation.

COI's Accusations

When asked how many North Korean officials may have committed the crimes against humanity, Kirby told reporters in Geneva the number would be running into the hundreds, without naming specific names. "Any official of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) who commits, orders, solicits or aids and abets crimes against humanity incurs criminal responsibility by international law and must be held accountable under that law," Kirby wrote.

The COI was established in March 2013

Michael Kirby, chairperson of the U.N. Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in North Korea, shows the panel's report on the communist country's human rights violations, during a news conference in Geneva on Feb. 17. (AP-Yonhap)



last under the 47-nation U.N. Human Rights Council resolution as the international community's first attempt to launch an official investigative mission into widely condemned human rights abuses in North Korea. The COI presented a final written report on their findings to the human rights council in later March.

The three-member COI procured testimony from witnesses in Seoul, Tokyo, London and Washington. It found North Korea's crimes to include execution, murder, enslavement, torture, imprisonment, rape and forced abortions. As part of the investigation, the COI team was in Seoul last August to interview former North Korean political prisoners who defected to South Korea in week-long hearings in which the defectors testified about brutal torture, sexual abuses and food shortages in the prison camps.

The authoritative report further recommended that the U.N. Security Council adopt targeted sanctions against individuals who appear to be most responsible for crimes against humanity. It also suggested

that the U.N. General Assembly should establish an "ad hoc tribunal" that's operated by willing countries.

Following the release of the COI report, North Korea rejected the findings, saying such accusations are nothing but the international community's attempts "to topple the regime." The North's foreign ministry claimed the report "misrepresents the true picture of the Korean people enjoying genuine rights and is peppered with sheer lies and fabrications."

N. Korea's Rejection

"The DPRK categorically rejects this report as it does not deserve even a passing note," the North's foreign ministry said. "The report is peppered with sheer lies and fabrications deliberately cooked up by hostile forces and riff-raffs such as some elements with ambiguous identities who defected from the North, criminals escaped from it after committing crimes against the country to earn money."

Pyongyang further insisted, "The U.S.,

the worst human rights abuser, should be brought to an international human rights tribunal as it killed innocent people in various parts of the world through aggression and intervention, causing unspeakable disasters, and systematically committed illegal wire-tapping and surveillance against citizens of other countries, to say nothing of those in its mainland, sparking uproar.”

It further stated that the human rights issues, as listed in the report, do not exist in North Korea. Then it lambasted the commission, calling it a “marionette” of the United States, Japan and the member states of the European Union.

According to the report and supporting documents, a wide array of crimes against humanity, arising from “policies established at the highest level of” North Korea, have been committed and continue to take place in the country.

“These crimes against humanity entail extermination, murder, enslavement, torture, imprisonment, rape, forced abortions and other sexual violence, persecution on political, religious, racial and gender grounds, the forcible transfer of populations, the enforced disappearance of persons and the inhumane act of knowingly causing prolonged starvation,” the report said.

The commission estimated that up to 120,000 political prisoners are currently detained in four large political prison camps, where they face deliberate starvation, among other rights violations.

The South Korean foreign ministry said on Feb. 17 that Seoul “has proactively supported the commission’s fair and independent activities, and through the announcement of the commission’s report plans to

bolster cooperation with the international community for the improvement of the human rights situation in North Korea.”

“The South Korean government expects the COI report, which includes results of an in-depth investigation showing the seriousness of the North Korean human rights situation, will raise the international community’s awareness,” Seoul’s foreign ministry said in a statement.

On Feb. 18, however, South Korea said its support for the U.N. report should not be linked to an inter-Korean agreement to stop slandering each other. “Issues on human rights have nothing to do with slandering the North. The rights situation is seen from the perspective of mankind’s universal values,” said a senior official of Seoul’s unification ministry, which handles inter-Korean affairs.

Seoul’s Stance

After holding two rounds of rare high-level talks, the two Koreas in early February agreed to stop making insulting remarks against each other to improve their relations. “Advocating the (human rights) values cannot constitute slandering Pyongyang, and I believe that Pyongyang also will not link the two separate issues,” he added.

The U.N. panel also condemned China’s policy of forcibly repatriating defectors who may face torture or possibly execution upon their return to North Korea -- the first major naming of China in a U.N. assessment report of North Korea.

It urged China and other states to respect the “principle of non-refoulement,”

a principle of international law that forbids the rendering of a victim of persecution to their persecutor, and abstain from forcibly repatriating any people to North Korea against their will.

Meanwhile, China rejected on Feb. 18 the accusation by U.N. investigators that Beijing is aiding crimes against humanity by forcefully repatriating North Korean defectors, while making it clear that it would oppose any move to refer the North to the ICC. "We totally cannot accept this accusation," China's foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying told reporters.

China, the North's key ally, has considered tens of thousands of North Koreans hiding in the border areas as illegal migrants, not asylum-seekers, and routinely sends them back to North Korea, where they face harsh penalties including execution. Hua reiterated China's long-criticized stance on North Korean defectors in China, saying, "We do not refer to those people as refugees but as illegal border-crossers."

International Reaction

Asked how many North Korean defectors are hiding in China, Hua declined to answer, but said China is dealing with them "in accordance with international and domestic laws and humanitarian principles."

Starting actual criminal proceedings, however, would likely be difficult. "The decision ultimately remains with the Security Council," a senior Korean foreign affairs official said. "If there is one country with veto power opposed to the resolution, it cannot pass." But, he added, the report "sends a strong message in itself."

The United States, which co-sponsored a resolution with Japan, the European Union and South Korea, said the report "provides compelling evidence of widespread, systematic and grave human rights violations." Marie Harf, a spokeswoman for the U.S. State Department, called rights violations in the North among the world's worst.

The White House said on Feb. 18 it has strongly and consistently condemned North Korea's human rights violations, which were highlighted by a new U.N. panel report. "We are extremely vocal and critical about the appalling conduct of the North Korean regime," White House Press Secretary Jay Carney said at a press briefing.

In another accusation of North Korea, the U.S. government said on Feb. 27 that human rights conditions in North Korea continued to be "deplorable" last year, as Secretary of State John Kerry reiterated his criticism of what's happening in the reclusive communist nation.

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry has described North Korea as an "evil" place. "North Korea is one of the most closed and cruel places on earth. There's no question about it. There's evil that is taking place there that all of us ought to be deeply and are deeply concerned about," he said in an interview with MSNBC television that aired on Feb. 26.

"Human rights conditions in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea remained deplorable. The government was responsible for extrajudicial killings, disappearances, arbitrary detention, arrests of political prisoners and torture," the State Department said in its Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013. (Yonhap)

CHINA'S CONCERNS OVER N. K.'S SHELLING NEAR AIRLINER

Unaware of the North's firing of artillery shells, a Chinese civilian airplane flew through the airspace minutes later.

China said on March 7 that it has conveyed its "concerns" to North Korea three days after the North's firing of long-range artillery shells threatened the safety of a Chinese civilian jet that happened to be passing through the affected airspace, an indication of Beijing's discontent over Pyongyang's military drills.

"We have already contacted the DPRK (North Korea) side to express our concerns," China's foreign ministry spokesman Qin Gang told reporters during a regular press briefing, when asked whether China has lodged a formal protest with North Korea over the March 4 incident.

After firing a series of short-range missiles for days in the previous week into the East Sea, North Korea launched a barrage of artillery shells into the general area on March 4 in an apparent show of force against ongoing South Korea-U.S. joint military exercises.

Unaware of the North's military move, a China Southern Airlines Co. airplane, en route from Tokyo to the northeastern Chinese city of Shenyang with 220 people on board, flew through the airspace min-

utes later, according to South Korea's defense ministry.

The Chinese official did not elaborate on what kind of concerns Beijing forwarded to Pyongyang through what channel, but the Chinese measure is interpreted as official expression of its regrets.

South Korean officials said Qin's briefing is an open confirmation that a Chinese civilian airplane was jeopardized (by the North's firing) and an expression of China's discontents over North Korea.

The officials said the Chinese passenger jet was flying at an altitude of 10 kilometers, while the North Korean shell's peak altitude was 20 kilometers. They said the CZ 628 flight passed through the airspace about five minutes after the shell hit the water.

Defense ministry spokesman, Kim Min-seok, criticized the North's firing of artillery shells for creating a "very dangerous situation" for the Chinese jet.

South Korea and the United States have also said the North's launches of Scud-class short-range ballistic missiles are a violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions that ban Pyongyang from conducting such

launches.

Asked whether the Chinese government agrees with the criticism by South Korea and the U.S., Qin replied, “We call on all relevant parties to do more things that are conducive to easing tensions and making joint efforts to safeguard peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula.

“It serves the overall interests of all relevant parties,” Qin said.

North Korea fired seven short-range projectiles from its east coast on March 4 using multiple rocket launchers, according to defense ministry, in a series of provocations by the communist country as the U.S. and South Korea entered the second week of joint military drills.

The North fired off three short-range projectiles using a 240 mm multiple rocket launcher at around 6 a.m. from Wonsan on its southeastern coast, the ministry said. They flew about 55 kilometers in the northeast direction.

Pyongyang launched four more beginning at 4:17 p.m. using a 300 mm KN-09 launcher from the same region, with a range of about 155 km, it said.

On the first day of the Key Resolve drills on Feb. 24, the North briefly violated the tense western sea border three times.

“North Korea openly displayed a show of force against the Key Resolve exercises with weapons of varying ranges,” spokesman Kim Min-seok said. “The South Korean and U.S. forces have mobilized intelligence assets to closely monitor possi-



This Yonhap file photo shows North Korea's artillery firing exercise. North Korea fired 25 short-range missiles into waters off its east coast in a show of force on March 16. (Yonhap)

bilities of additional provocations.”

Experts say the new rocket launcher poses a great risk as it is capable of striking major military facilities in South Korea, including those located as far south as the headquarters of three military branches that are located some 160 km south of Seoul.

“The 300 mm multiple rocket launcher was developed to strike South Korea's strategic facilities and hinder reinforcement of U.S. forces in times of war,” a senior military official said, requesting anonymity. “North Korea may use the weapon during the early stages of war.”

Seoul officials have raised concerns that the latest provocations could hamper the reconciliatory mood between the two Koreas following the reunions of families separated by the 1950-53 Korean War at the North's Mount Kumgang resort in late February.

But North Korea again fired off 25 short-range missiles toward the East Sea on March 16, the latest show of force in response to the ongoing joint South Korea-U.S. military drills. (Yonhap)

SEOUL PUSHES TO REGULARIZE FAMILY REUNIONS

One-off family reunions are insufficient to cater for the number of those waiting to see their loved ones, who are mostly in their 70s and 80s.

■ By Kim Tae-shik

South Korea has long urged North Korea to allow families separated by the 1950-53 Korean War to meet on a regular basis to comprehensively address the humanitarian issue.

President Park Geun-hye raised the matter on March 1 in an address marking the Independence Movement of 1919, ordering the government to launch related talks with the North.

The prospects for regular reunions, however, are uncertain for the time being as North Korea rejected the South's call for talks without a clear explanation.

In a follow-up to Park's instructions, South Korea on March 5 proposed to hold working-level Red Cross talks between the two sides on March 12 at the truce town of Panmunjom.

"South Korea expects North Korea's speedy response to our proposal, given the pain and agony of the separated families," Park Soo-jin, a unification ministry spokeswoman, said in a briefing on March 5.

The North's Red Cross rejected the overture in a message to its South Korean counterpart the next day saying that "an

appropriate atmosphere has not been created" for the proposed talks, according to Seoul's Unification Ministry, which handles inter-Korean affairs.

North Korea's Rejection

The North did not elaborate on what it meant by atmosphere, though it may have been referring to its displeasure with the ongoing joint military drills between South Korea and the United States.

North Korea has traditionally denounced South Korea-U.S. joint military drills as rehearsals for war against it and refused to hold any dialogue with the South while they take place.

The Unification Ministry expressed regret over the North's snub and again urged North Korea to come forward to discuss the humanitarian issue.

South Korea's Red Cross made the request in a message to its North Korean counterpart. Seoul communicated its wishes through the inter-Korean liaison telephone channel at the border village that day.

In a Cabinet meeting on March 4, President Park ordered the government to begin talks with the communist country to allow families separated across the border since the fratricidal war to exchange letters and hold video reunions, extending her earlier offer to Pyongyang to regularize the meetings.

The president believes one-off family reunions are insufficient to cater for the number of those waiting to see their loved ones, who are mostly in their 70s and 80s.

There is no direct means of contact between ordinary civilians of the two countries, which remain divided by a heavily fortified border.

Park said that at least 6,000 people need to meet with their relatives on the other side of the border every year if all elderly members of separated families are to see their loved ones at least once before they die.

“The reason I proposed regularizing reunions of separated families ... is that many families do not have time to wait any longer. Many members of the separated families have died with unresolved grievances,” Park said. “The unification ministry and the Red Cross should hold discussions with the North to realize letter exchanges and video reunions.”

In February, hundreds of people from the two Koreas were briefly reunited with



South Korean Namgung Bong-Ja (R) and her North Korean father Namgung Ryul cry as they bid farewell to each other after their three-day family reunion at a Mount Kumgang resort on North Korea's east coast on Feb. 25. (Yonhap)

their relatives for the first time in the first round of family reunions in more than three years amid apparently warmer ties.

Since then, North Korea has fired short-range missiles and rockets into the sea in an apparent show of force and to express its anger over the South Korea-U.S. joint

military drills, which Pyongyang denounces as a rehearsal for an invasion of the communist country.

The Key Resolve command post exercise ended on March 6, but the Foal Eagle combat field training will run until April 18. A large-scale joint landing drill, Ssangyong exercise, will be staged from March 27 to April 7.

Issue for Urgent Settlement

In the latest sign of lingering tensions, the North's powerful National Defense Commission took issue with the latest leaflets flown from the South into the reclusive country in a message sent to South Korea's presidential office on March 5. The leaflets criticized the North's leader Kim Jong-un.

The North's complaint came three weeks after South and North Korea agreed to halt slander against each other during their first high-level talks in seven years.

For years, some North Korean defectors in the South and conservative activists have flown leaflets critical of the communist regime over the heavily fortified border.

The North has bristled at any outside criticism of its leader and has made military threats against the South over the leaflets in recent years. The North has also repeatedly pressed the South Korean government to stop its activists from sending the leaflets.

But South Korea has said there are no legal grounds to prevent activists from floating the leaflets, citing freedom of expression in a democratic country.

The South's presidential office sent a response to the North later on March 6, saying its people "are guaranteed by the Constitution the right to freedom of speech and assembly and that we cannot restrict this right without clear legal grounds."

The message also said the South is "not engaged in any slander or defamation against the North as agreed in the high-level contact" and that it is positively assessing the fact that the two sides worked together to smoothly hold February's reunions of separated families.

Experts say North Korea is unlikely to immediately accept the offer to regularize reunions because it has used such events as a bargaining chip to extract economic aid and other concessions from the South.

North Korea has demanded that the South provide economic assistance like rice and fertilizer when agreeing to family reunions in the past.

As the North said it made big concessions to agree on the family reunions in February, it is very likely to make further demands of the South.

Taking back its demand that the joint military drills be put off until after the reunions, North Korea agreed in the high-level talks on Feb. 14 to stage the reunions as previously agreed by the sides, from Feb. 20-25.

It is likely the North will link its demands for the resumption of tours to Mount Kumgang, provision of rice and fertilizer and lifting of economic sanctions in place since May 2010 to the family reunions issue, experts say.

Tours to Mount Kumgang were halted after a North Korean guard shot and killed

a female South Korean tourist in July 2008. South Korea suspended all personnel and material exchanges with North Korea in May 2010 following the North's sinking of a South Korean warship in the West Sea with the deaths of 46 sailors.

Even if Pyongyang agrees to regularize the reunions, it may backtrack from the agreement or scrap it at any time, they said.

Regularizing Reunions

Yang Moo-jin, a professor at the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul, said it is possible that North Korea's demands for the resumption of the tours or provision of rice and fertilizer may be on the negotiating table once the two Koreas sit down to discuss the regularization of reunions.

Other experts think that President Park's offer for regularizing the reunions may indicate the government's flexibility on the North's demands.

Kim Yong-hyon, a professor of North Korean studies at Dongguk University in Seoul, said, "It seems the fact that the president put forth an offer to hold family reunions on a regular basis may imply that Seoul can take a positive stance toward Pyongyang.

"Although the offer did not expressly note (flexibility), it can be interpreted as the government may be inclined to exercise flexibility if Pyongyang accepts our offer," he said.

Kim also said North Korea may not be willing to accept the South's call for dialogue at present as U.S. forces are

deployed for joint drills.

There are also observers of the opinion that North Korea prefers high-level talks to Red Cross talks to get concessions from the South.

In its message to the South Korean Red Cross on March 5, North Korea said such grave humanitarian issues as the regularization of family reunions are not problems that can be resolved via Red Cross talks, hinting that they should be discussed in high-level talks.

"North Korea is likely to continue to express its discontent over South Korea and the U.S. until the Foal Eagle is over and may seek a chance to hold high-level talks," Kim said.

Millions of Koreans remain separated across the border as a legacy of the war which ended in a truce, leaving the peninsula still technically in a state of war.

The Koreas have held 19 rounds of reunions since their landmark summit in 2000, with about 25,000 family members having temporarily met.

More than 129,200 South Koreans have applied for temporary reunions with their family members in North Korea since 1988, according to government data.

Among them, more than 57,700 people, or 44.7 percent of the applicants, have since passed away, according to the data.

The two Koreas agreed in their high-level talks in February to hold negotiations to discuss humanitarian issues like the family reunions and hold another round of high-level talks to discuss a wide range of issues pending between the two sides. (Yonhap)

N. KOREA'S ATTEMPTS FOR AGRICULTURAL REFORM

With the implementation of a small team-based farming system, North Korea now appears to allow individual ownership in the family-oriented farming system.

When former North Korean leader Kim Jong-il died in 2011, he left behind an isolated country in dire economic straits with a malnourished population. Since current leader Kim Jong-un took control of the socialist country, he has claimed to have placed priority on the improvement of people's living standards by increasing food production and improving farming methods.

As the impoverished country is still grappling with food shortages, the young North Korean leader has repeatedly voiced his determination that the North Korean people "will never have to tighten their belts again." The North has long been criticized by the international community for pursuing nuclear weapons programs while its people starve. Nevertheless, North Korea has vowed to pursue both nuclear and economic development simultaneously.

Aware of the stark reality, Kim has repeatedly said the country should concentrate its energy toward agricultural reform to help establish an economically strong, socialist nation. He stressed the importance of agriculture in his New Year's Day speech delivered to the nation on Jan. 1.

Greeting the New Year, Kim said, "We should clearly prove the validity and vitality of the theses on the socialist rural question by waging the ideological, technological and cultural revolutions dynamically in the rural areas and bringing about a decisive turn in agricultural production."

Socialist Rural Theses

On Feb. 25, the North renewed its campaign for rural development on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the publication of the "socialist rural theses" initiated by the late North Korean founder Kim Il-sung. He published the theses at the eighth Plenary Meeting of the fourth Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) held on Feb. 25, 1964.

Marking the anniversary, The North's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said the late North Korean leader expounded upon the principles, tasks and ways to develop the rural economy through the instructions titled "Theses on the Socialist Rural Question in Our Country."

"President Kim Il-sung considered it as important tasks to solve the peasant and agricultural questions from the days after

the liberation of Korea from the colonial rule of the Japanese imperialists,” the KCNA said.

Rodong Sinmun, the daily of the ruling Workers’ Party, said recently the whole country is striving to carry out the rural theses under the leadership of Kim Jong-un to provide the people with an affluent and happy life as early as possible.

Kim Jong-un clearly indicated the path of rural development in his letter sent to the participants of the National Conference of Subworkteam Leaders in the Agricultural Sector held in Pyongyang on Feb. 7.

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

In the letter, Kim also indicated his intention to accelerate the overhaul of the farming sector, a core element of the “June 28 economic reform measures,” which the North introduced in 2012 to shore up its moribund economy. The measures were announced under the heading “About the Establishment of a New Economic Management System of Our Own Style.”

The 2012 reform package reportedly seeks to give greater autonomy to state corporations in terms of their production items, prices and stock, while allowing farmers to take in a greater portion of their harvest. In the farming sector, the new system calls for the distribution of 70 percent of farm products to the state and the remaining 30 percent to farmers, regardless



Seen here is a special stamp that North Korea issued on Feb. 24 to mark the 50th anniversary of the late North Korean founder Kim Il-sung’s work, “Theses on the Socialist Rural Question in Our Country.” (KCNA-Yonhap)

of the state production plan.

The package, which analysts argue moves further away from an inefficient socialist system, is aimed at improving economic conditions to maintain the loyalty of a public that is growing disgruntled over an ever-worsening food crisis.

In the letter to agricultural leaders this year, Kim said, “Egalitarianism in the realm of distribution has no connection to socialist principles and has a detrimental impact that reduces farmers’ productivity. So as to increase farmers’ enthusiasm for agricultural productivity, we have implemented small-scale farms. By properly applying this, we should make sure that we yield productive outcomes.”

In the letter, Kim said, “While decisively increasing grain production, it must bring about fresh innovations in the vegetable, livestock, fruit and all other branches of the rural economy.” In order to radically increase agricultural production, Kim said the sector must do farm work in a scientific and technological manner in line with

the demands of the party's agricultural policies and self-reliant farming methods.

Worth special attention in Kim's letter is the call for the implementation of a farming management system that involves handing out a plot of land, called "Pojon," to small teams, usually comprising a family unit.

The system was briefly introduced in the North in 2002, but was not widely implemented. Similar measures were reintroduced in 2012 at the Samjigang Cooperative Farm in Jaeryong County, South Hwanghae Province, for a trial run and saw favorable results.

Farming Management System

The system comprises three to five people as a group working for larger cooperative farms, where individuals are allowed to sell surplus agricultural output and grains at the market after taking out their portion allotted for the state. This kind of system is now spreading to cooperative farms across the country.

With the implementation of the policy, the North now appears to allow individual ownership in the family-oriented farming system. A pro-North Korean newspaper published in Japan reported recently that the sub-work team system resulted in a significant increase in production.

Under the July 1 economic measures of 2002, North Korea began a pilot of the family-oriented system in 2004. But the exhibition program was abolished one year later after it turned out to be a failure. Through the 2002 economic measures, the North tried to relax the rigid command economy by dissolving the rationing

scheme, allowing street markets, raising wages and prices and adopting incentives and graded compensation.

The small team-based agricultural system is largely family oriented. Each North Korean farming household usually consists of three to five members -- parents and one to three offspring. A family unit of three to five makes up one of 10-15 members assigned to a larger unit of land.

According to various sources, individual farmers in the family are given their portions of the farming crop by the state after surrendering the lion's share. Then the farmers are free to either consume or sell the crops as they see fit.

Under the new system, the farmers are now able to sell their surplus agricultural produce at open markets or the state-owned grain stores. In this way, North Korea is offering incentives to farmers who are productive, while cutting food rations for those who underperform, a United Nations agency said recently.

According to the 2013 North Korea food production report by the World Food Program (WFP), many cooperative farms across the country are giving incentives to members in the form of extra rations. It said the move seems to be aimed at getting people to produce more and inject a spirit of competitiveness into the farming sector.

While the country had been suffering from chronic food shortages, with local food output unable to meet demand without foreign assistance, it said that productive farmers have reportedly taken home as much as 65 kilograms worth of extra rations for a three-month period from the cooperative he or she works for, depend-

ing on the output.

Meanwhile, North Korea is known to have started to rent out state-owned farmland to city laborers as part of efforts to solve chronic food shortages. "Since mid-May, the North has started lending state-owned cooperative farmland to city workers as part of its various efforts to solve serious food shortage problems for urban workers," North Korea Intellectuals Solidarity in Seoul said. City laborers are bearing the brunt of the food shortage problems in the North while farming workers have easier access to farm produce, the group said.

Boost for Agricultural Output

Kim's call for efforts to boost agricultural output came in the context of food problems facing the population of 24 million people. North Korea's food production is estimated to have been at about 5.03 million metric tons in 2013, up 5 percent from the previous year, the WFP said in a recent report. Nonetheless, the food security situation remains serious, with 84 percent of all households having borderline or poor food consumption, the report said.

In response to neighboring countries' mention of substantial reforms and opening-up oriented toward a capitalist market economy, the North has said that there will be no change in its policies as desired by "our enemies," indicating that the recent reform measures are aimed at making a conservative, limited change based on North Korea's current economic reality and structure.

In his New Year's address this year, Kim

Jong-un stressed a robust economy buttressed by agriculture, construction and science as key to a "new leap to a strong, prosperous socialist nation." Notably, he placed emphasis on even the development of "green energy."

Kim specifically mentioned livestock farming facilities, a fruit farm, a waterway and tideland reclamation. The development of the Sepho Plateau located in eastern North Korea is connected to husbandry, a new economic policy that Kim has highlighted as a means to solve the food problem. The newly created area is to serve as grazing land for cattle.

In another campaign, the North's media marked the 68th anniversary of the promulgation of the agrarian reform law initiated by the late leader Kim Il-sung on March 5. "The Agrarian Reform was a historic event as it brought about a dramatic change in the position and fate of the peasants in Korea and opened a new chapter in settling the issue of land in the country," said Rodong Sinmun.

The newspaper said that rice precisely means national power and socialism. "If the country attains self-sufficiency in food by successfully doing farming, Korean-style socialism will stand undeterred and the country will dynamically advance revolution and construction as it is determined to do, no matter how desperately the enemies may work."

In another article, Rodong Sinmun called for a rapid boost in agricultural production, saying "Neither the victorious advance of socialist development nor happy lives for the people will be thinkable without the development of agriculture." (Yonhap)

KOREAN UNIFICATION WILL LEAD TO ECONOMIC BONANZA

Unification will end not only the division of the Koreas, but clear away the last vestige of the Cold War in the history of the world.

■ Lee Tai-hwan. *Director, Center for China Studies, Sejong Institute in Seongnam, South Korea*

In her New Year's press conference in early January, President Park Geun-hye asserted that the unification of the Korean Peninsula would bring "daebak," or a bonanza.

In a discussion with Klaus Schwab, the executive chairman of the World Economic Forum (WEF), at the 44th WEF Annual Meeting in Davos, Switzerland, later that month, Park also said that inter-Korean unification would bring a bonanza not only to Korea but also to all Northeast Asian nations, as it could provide a new growth engine in the region.

She said that there should be preparations for unification so that the peninsula can obtain genuine peace and make a quantum leap. To that end, Park recently unveiled a plan to launch and chair a preparatory committee for unification.

Why is Park initiating the unification drive at this juncture? Can inter-Korean unification become a reality? When is it likely to happen? Can it really bring an economic bonanza? What are the challenges in achieving it?

"Nobody knows when unification will actually take place, but we'll have to do our best to advance it," said Park.

But many Korea experts around the world forecast that unification can be a reality within a decade or so.

In January 2010, Niall Ferguson, a Harvard University professor, predicted inter-Korean unification is likely to be one of the most historic events in the coming decade. He reasserted the prediction in May 2013.

The Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO)

in Russia forecast in a special report that North Korea will be absorbed by South Korea between 2021 and 2030. It also pointed out that unification under South Korea's lead would result in boosting Russia's national interests, as it would ensure a stable economic partner.

Economic Bonanza

Many people are concerned about the astronomical financial burden and social chaos that is almost sure to occur in the course of unification. They may not agree on the idea of a "bonanza."

Park claimed, however, that unification would bring great economic benefits to Korea and its neighboring countries, especially to northeastern China and the far eastern region of Russia, an area where there is a huge demand for infrastructure investments. So will unification really turn out to be a bonanza?

Firstly, the costs incurred by reunification will be outweighed by the benefits.

Uniting the two Koreas will cost about US\$591 billion over a decade if it occurs in 2020, according to an estimate by the Finance Ministry.

According to a report by the local daily the Chosun Ilbo, an annual trade volume between Korea, China and Japan would jump by US\$122.5 billion after the unification.

Above all, benefits will far exceeds costs, considering that costs are temporary while benefits will hold out as long as one Korea remains.

The Seoul-based Hyundai Research Institute recently forecast that a unified

Korea with a population of 75 million would become the world's ninth largest economy around 2050. International organizations and experts also made similar predictions.

Secondly, a unified Korea that would bring peace and stability to Northeast Asia would become an attractive international investment destination, and particularly help three northeastern provinces of China as well as the provinces of Russia's Siberia see more investment opportunities.

Thirdly, unification would free North Korean citizens from severe economic hardships and dire human rights conditions.

Despite the rosy prospects, formidable challenges are ahead on the road to unification.

It is notable that a general consensus on unification has yet to be formed even among South Koreans.

The percentage of South Koreans that deem unification necessary fell to 54.8 percent of the surveyed in 2012 from 57 percent in 2011, according to a study released in November by Seoul National University's Institute for Peace and Unification Studies.

The ratio slumped to 40.4 percent among those between 19 and 29, indicating that younger people are not more enthusiastic about unification than their elders.

In a survey conducted by the youth policy research center of the Yeouido Institute under the ruling Saenuri Party, 47.3 percent of the polled college students said "unification is unnecessary," with 52.4 percent responding that it is necessary.

Given the atmosphere, efforts toward unification awareness need to be made to

make the South Korean community into a “unification-friendly” society.

In addition, it is not yet clear how to realize unification in a smooth fashion and obtain support or acceptance of North Korean people for a South Korean-led unification.

Challenges Ahead

On this issue, Aidan Foster-Carter, a Korea expert at Leeds University in Britain, is highly skeptical. “If Korean reunification ever happens, it will be a grim, arduous march to integrate two societies now as divergent as the proverbial chalk and cheese,” he said.

Some 26,000 North Korean defectors living in South Korea could be an example. If the defectors do not support a unified Korea based on South Korean terms, how can the South garner the support of the North Korean people? Given this, special policies for the defectors should be taken in making preparations for unification. A vision for a post-unification future should also be mapped out for the North Korean people.

Another tangible thing to do is to prepare for a possible contingency in North Korea.

Following the execution of Jang Song-thaek -- the once powerful uncle of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un -- on treason charges in December, it is widely believed that only three to five years or less remain for the Kim Jong-un regime.

Suppose an emergency in which the North Korean regime suddenly collapses. What is its likely result?

As Dr. Bruce Bennet at RAND Corp. illustrated in his recent report, there are worrisome possibilities, including the northern territory’s fall into insurgency and organized crime, as well as weapons of mass destruction and nuclear scientists falling into the hands of terrorists. Without preparations against such dangerous situations, unification seems to be a long way off.

Last but not the least, it is very important to proactively secure international support for the peaceful unification of the peninsula.

It is noteworthy that an international consensus on a peaceful unification was formed through summit diplomacy last year among South Korea’s neighboring powers, including the United States and China.

The international community’s interest in investing in a unified Korea is also growing.

Jim Rogers, a prominent commodities expert and investor, said that once the integration of the two Koreas begins, he would invest his entire wealth in Korea.

It is still unclear, however, whether all the major powers will actively support a South Korea-led unification, even though they agree on a peaceful unification.

Therefore, creating a strategic dialogue and partnership between key players in the region, particularly between the U.S. and China, whose national interests are very different, is a core task in pushing for unification.

Inter-Korean unification is something that goes beyond costs and benefits. Unification will end not only the division of the Koreas, but clear away the last vestige of the Cold War in the history of the world. (Yonhap)

SPA: N. KOREA'S RUBBER-STAMP LEGISLATURE

The Supreme People's Assembly, or SPA, is the unicameral legislature of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), the official title of North Korea. It consists of one deputy from each of 687 constituencies across the country. Elections are held in five-year intervals, with the 13th and the latest one taking place on March 9, 2014.

Nominally the SPA is the socialist country's top decision-making body. But as its nickname "rubber-stamp parliament" suggests it functions to simply endorse or declare policies and legislations drawn up by the government and the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK). The ruling WPK, led by North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, governs the country in a monolithic coalition, called the "Democratic Front for the Reunification of the Fatherland," with the Korean Social Democratic Party and the Chondoist Chongu Party. The SPA ordinarily delegates authority to the smaller but more powerful Presidium, chosen from among its members.

The SPA is currently headed by Chairman Choe Thae-bok, secretary of the Central Committee of the WPK, and there are two vice chairmen. Kim Yong-nam, officially the No. 2 man in North Korea, has been president of the Assembly Presidium and titular head of state of North Korea since 1998.

The SPA always passes all proposals by the government into law during its sessions with almost no debate or modification.

Major functions of the SPA include

adopting, amending or supplementing enactments to the Constitution; determining state policy and budgets; elections of the chairman, vice chairman and members of the National Defense Commission; election of the president and other members of the Presidium; elections of legal officials; appointing president, vice president and other members of the Cabinet. The Constitution is amended when approved by more than two-thirds of the number of deputies.

The Assembly is convened once or twice a year in regular sessions of several days each. At all other times, the Presidium serves as the country's legislature. Extraordinary sessions of the Assembly can also meet when called by the Presidium or by a third of the Assembly deputies.

On April 14, 2012, during the fifth session of the 12th SPA, Kim Jong-un was elected as the country's supreme leader.

His status as leader was reaffirmed when he was elected as a delegate of SPA in a unanimous support of the voters on March 9. In SPA elections, voters can vote yes or no for a single candidate.

Under the Constitution of North Korea, all citizens aged 17 and older, regardless of party affiliation, political views or religion, are eligible to be elected to the legislature and vote in elections. However, all candidates are selected by the Democratic Front for the Reunification of the Fatherland, which means the ruling forces decide who will be chosen as deputies of the SPA. (Yonhap)

Internal Affairs**North Korea turns to online promotion of Mt. Kumgang tours**

North Korea has turned to active online advertising to attract more foreign tourists to its scenic mountain resort, which observers say is apparently linked to its efforts to earn much-needed hard currency.

The Korea International Travel Company, the North's state-run tourist operator, said on its website on March 16 that the number of tourists from European and Asian countries to Mount Kumgang is on the rise.

“(Foreign tourists) have constantly expressed admiration and praised Mt. Kumgang,” one of the postings on the site said.

The website also included several postings by Chinese and Taiwanese tourists who uploaded their travel epilogues and praises of the mountain resort.

The move is the latest effort by the heavily sanctioned country to diversify ways to entice more tourists and secure foreign currency amid a dispute between the two Koreas over their stalled joint tour program at Mount Kumgang. (Yonhap)

N. Korean, Hong Kong firms to develop border city of Sinuiju

North Korea has joined hands with a Hong Kong-based company to develop the country's northwestern border city of Sinuiju into a special economic zone, a North Korean official said.

Sinuiju, which borders China's Dandong city, has drawn much attention from foreign investors for its geographical advantage as North Korea's western gateway to China, Ri Chol-sok, the vice chairman of North Korea's economic development committee, said in an interview in the March issue of Kumsugangsan magazine, a North Korean government mouthpiece.

“Now a joint development company has been established for the development of (Sinuiju) and is striving to win back lost opportunities,” said the North Korean official.

Hong Kong-based conglomerate Great China International Investment Groups Ltd. reportedly signed the deal with North Korea.

North Korea is also making efforts to lure foreign investment to other special economic zones, including one in the Rason area in the northern tip of the country, according to Ri.

The foreign company already has deep ties with the North, having joined the country's project launched in January to renovate the eastern part of the capital Pyongyang.

The North had first designated Sinuiju as a special administrative city to experiment with introducing a market economy, only to see the plan go nowhere. Sinuiju is one of the 13 areas the North plans to develop into special economic zones, according to an announcement last November.

“The joint venture established with the Hong Kong company indicates North Korea’s aggressiveness in developing Sinuiju,” Cho Bong-hyun, an analyst at the IBK Economic Research Institute, said. (Yonhap)

N. Korea officially confirms foot and mouth outbreak

North Korea confirmed on Feb. 21 an outbreak of food-and-mouth disease (FMD), which led to the culling of thousands of pigs, for the first time this year.

The animal disease broke out at a pig farm in a suburb of Pyongyang on Jan. 8 and spread to 17 areas of Pyongyang and Junghwa County of North Hwanghae Province near Pyongyang, the (North) Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said in a report.

The outbreak is the first since April 2011.

Of about 3,200 pigs infected by FMD Type O viruses, some 360 died from the disease with about 2,900 culled, causing huge financial losses, the KCNA said.

The quarantine authorities have issued emergency quarantine measures across the country and blocked traffic in the affected areas as well as conducted disinfection procedures there, it said.

However, the KCNA expressed concerns over the wide spread of the animal disease, citing a lack of preventive medicine and diagnostic kits and difficulty in securing disinfectant.

On Feb. 20, the agriculture ministry of South Korea said it had been notified of the outbreak in the North by the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE).

According to the OIE, the North reported the outbreak more than a month after it broke out, without explaining why.

FMD is an infectious and sometimes fatal disease that affects cloven-hoofed animals, such as pigs, cattle, deer and sheep. (Yonhap)

N. Korean leader inspects army’s food factory

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un has instructed officials to normalize production of food and provide larger quantities of various foodstuffs to soldiers, the North’s state-run news agency reported on Feb. 20.

Kim said he would fully take charge of providing the November 2 Factory, a food manufacturer for the military, with apt conditions for production, the Korean Central News Agency said.

He made the comments during his latest inspection tour of a factory affiliated with the military, a key backbone of the power he inherited upon the death of his father, the late leader Kim Jong-il, in 2011.

The trip came three months after he instructed officials to modernize production processes of food that includes candy, biscuit, sugar-coated bean and fried glutinous bean cake. (Yonhap)

External Affairs**China's nuke envoy visits N. Korea**

China's top negotiator on North Korea's nuclear program is visiting Pyongyang, the country's state media reported on March 17.

The Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) did not give specifics on Wu Dawei's visit or the exact date of his arrival, but only said he had arrived in the North's capital.

Wu's trip is the latest in a series of visits from Chinese officials to the neighboring country since the high-profile purge of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un's uncle in December.

In February, the Chinese delegation, led by Deputy Director-General of Asian Affairs Xing Haiming, visited North Korea in order to discuss the resumption of the stalled six-party talks aimed at ending the North's nuclear weapons program.

The dramatic downfall of Jang Song-thaek, the once-powerful uncle of the North's young leader Kim, marked the biggest political upheaval since the North's young leader Kim took power after his father's death in late 2011.

China, North Korea's key ally and economic lifeline, has been in a delicate position because Jang was considered a supporter of China-style reforms to revive the North's moribund economy and played an important role in dealing with economic projects with Beijing.

Since its third nuclear test in February 2013, North Korea has repeatedly expressed its willingness to reopen the six-party talks "without preconditions," but Seoul and Washington have demand Pyongyang demonstrate its sincerity first by taking steps toward denuclearization.

China has been more accommodating toward North Korea, urging South Korea and the U.S. to lower the bar for sitting down at the negotiating table. (Yonhap)

N. Korea slams U.S. for 'mocking poll results'

North Korea lashed out at the United States on March 13 for calling its recent parliamentary election undemocratic.

On March 9, North Korea held an election for the deputies of its 13th Supreme People's Assembly. It later claimed its leader Kim Jong-un was elected with not a single vote cast against him.

During a regular press briefing the following day, U.S. State Department spokesperson Jen Psaki said, "I will simply say that is not a model for democracy around the world."

Asked about Kim's supposed capture of 100 percent of the vote, she said it "would be a historic outcome," adding, "I don't know that I have much more analysis, as fun as this is."

"The spokesman for the U.S. State Department was so impudent to say that there is no democracy as regards the election," an unidentified North Korean foreign ministry spokesman told the Korean Central News Agency on March 13. (Yonhap)

N. Korea denies any link to Libya oil tanker

North Korea denied any responsibility on March 13 for a North Korean-flagged oil tanker that left Libya after being illegally loaded with oil at a port controlled by anti-government rebels.

On March 8, the North Korean-flagged tanker, named Morning Glory, entered Es Sidra port in the Middle Eastern country. After allegedly loading 234,000 barrels of oil illegally, the vessel escaped to sea.

“It is a ship run by Golden East Logistics Company in Alexandria, Egypt, and is allowed to temporarily use the DPRK flag for six months in accordance with a contract at the end of February,” the North’s Maritime Administration spokesperson told North’s Korean Central News Agency (KCNA).

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

After being informed of the illegal docking, the North Korean authorities demanded the company “let the ship leave the port at once without loading oil,” the spokesman said.

“We also formally notified the Libyan government and the International Maritime Organization that we canceled and deleted the ship’s DPRK registry and invalidated all the certificates,” he added.

Claiming that the ship violated its domestic law and the contract that prohibit it “from transporting contraband cargo and entering warring areas,” the communist country stressed that the ship “has nothing to do with the DPRK at present and it has no responsibility whatsoever as regards to the ship.”

Expressing displeasure with foreign media reports that linked the case to it, the North warned of a “sinister political purpose to tarnish our image.”

Es Sidra is one of three ports under the control of rebels, with the Morning Glory being the first vessel to have loaded oil from there since separatist revolts against the central government in Tripoli erupted in July.

In the aftermath of the government’s failure to stop the ship, the Libyan parliament dismissed its prime minister.

The Libyan government is still struggling to assert its authority over the armed groups and tribesmen who helped topple Muammar Gaddafi in 2011. (Yonhap)

N. Korea slams Kerry’s remarks on MSNBC

North Korea on March 8 lashed out at U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry for his remarks on MSNBC in late February according to its state media.

“North Korea is one of the most closed and cruel places on earth,” Kerry said on Feb. 26 in an interview with the U.S. television broadcaster, adding that “there’s evil that is taking place there.”

The Rodong Sinmun, the mouthpiece of the Workers’ Party of Korea, said that “his

remarks are too lowbrow to be considered as those of a person fancying himself as the top diplomat of a big country.”

Comparing Kerry’s remarks to those by former U.S. President George W. Bush, who labeled the North as belonging to the “Axis of Evil” along with Iran and Iraq, the North Korean newspaper argued the U.S. state secretary effectively reiterated Bush’s claims that the U.S. should rule over other nations opposed to it using force.

It also denounced that the stronghold of evil is the U.S., which is invading and terrorizing other countries. (Yonhap)

Russian envoy on stalled nuclear talks in N. Korea: report

Russia’s envoy on stalled nuclear talks is in Pyongyang, North Korean media said on March 7.

According to the Korean Central News Agency, Grigory Logvinov, Moscow’s roving ambassador, arrived in the communist country.

The news wire service, however, did not elaborate on why he is in the country.

North Korean watchers in Seoul pointed out that Logvinov’s visit comes just 10 days after senior official from Washington and Russia held talks on Pyongyang’s nuclear programs, and speculated it may be an attempt get the stalled six-party negotiations rolling again.

The six-party forum, which began in August 2003 and aims to get North Korea to give up its nuclear program, has been suspended since the last session in late 2008. Besides the Two Koreas, the United States, China, Japan and Russia make up the group. (Yonhap)

N. Korea, Japan Red Cross hold 'productive' talks in China

Red Cross and government officials from North Korea and Japan ended their talks on March 3 during which they agreed to continue negotiations on the possible repatriation of the remains of Japanese nationals buried in the North, Pyongyang’s chief delegate said.

Ri Ho-rim, secretary general of the North’s Red Cross Society who heads the Pyongyang delegation, described the talks in Shenyang, a major city in northeastern China, as “productive.” He added that the talks were underway “in a serious mood.”

The talks, the first of their kind since August 2012, are expected to last until March 5, Ri told reporters when he arrived in Shenyang on March 1. Diplomats from the two nations also attended the talks.

“Both North Korean and Japanese sides reached common ground that we need to continue to meet in the future to resolve the issue of the remains of Japanese,” Ri told reporters after ending six hours of talks.

The talks focused on the possible return of the remains of Japanese who died in the communist country during World War II.

“This round of talks becomes more important as government officials from the two

nations attended,” Ri said. “The talks were underway in a serious mood and were productive.”

Japan ruled the Korean Peninsula as a colony from 1910-45. It normalized relations with South Korea in 1965 but has no formal diplomatic relations with the North.

The four-member North Korean delegation includes two North Korean diplomats handling Japanese affairs in the foreign ministry, which spawned speculation that some additional issues may be discussed at the meeting. (Yonhap)

Inter-Korean Relations

S. Korea remains cautious on fertilizer aid to N. Korea

South Korea is cautious on fertilizer aid to North Korea by private relief agencies, an official said on March 17, amid fresh signs of tensions on the Korean Peninsula.

Unification ministry spokesman Kim Eui-do said private organizations should consult with the government on the issue of fertilizer aid to the North.

The comments are widely seen as disapproval of the plan to ship fertilizer to the North by a coalition of about 200 South Korean civic groups.

South Korea has banned fertilizer aid to the North by its private relief agencies since May 2010, when Seoul slapped sanctions on Pyongyang in retaliation for the deadly sinking of a warship blamed on North Korea.

The North has refused to take responsibility for the sinking that killed 46 South Korean sailors.

Kim also reaffirmed that the government is not considering providing fertilizer to the North.

His comments came a day after North Korea fired 25 short-range rockets into waters off its east coast in what may have been a routine military exercise.

The South Korean government gave 2.45 million tons of rice to North Korea between 1995 and 2010, and 2.55 million tons of fertilizer between 1999 and 2007, according to the unification ministry, which handles inter-Korean affairs. (Yonhap)

N. Korea demands wage hike for Kaesong workers

North Korea is demanding a 10-percent pay increase for its workers at an inter-Korean joint factory park for this year, an official said on March 16.

The base pay of North Korean workers at the Kaesong Industrial Complex, named after the North's border city where it is located, was set at a minimum of \$67 per month based on an inter-Korean agreement. South Korean companies give a 5 percent raise annually, and each company pays for overtime.

In addition to a 5 percent annual hike missed last year due to a sudden halt of the park's operations, the North is demanding an additional 5 percent, said the Unification Ministry official.

The Kaesong Industrial Complex was shut down in early April 2013 after the North unilaterally pulled out all of its workers. It reopened in September after Pyongyang agreed not to repeat such a suspension.

"North Korean authorities in charges of the Kaesong complex have recently demanded a 10 percent raise in the base pay of Kaesong workers," the official said.

The Seoul government, however, has decided not to respond to Pyongyang's demands in line with the agreement set by the two sides, the official added.

"(The Seoul government) cannot accept the North's unilateral demands when South Korean firms are having difficulty due to last year's shutdown," the official said.

The output at the Kaesong park totaled US\$352.9 million in December, slightly lower than the \$364.2 million posted a year earlier, according to ministry data, showing that the operations have almost recovered their normal level.

The Kaesong Industrial Complex, an offshoot from an agreement from the first-ever inter-Korean summit in 2000, began operations in 2004. The complex now hosts 123 South Korean companies, employing 53,000 North Korean workers to mainly produce labor-intensive goods. (Yonhap)

Koreas discuss arbitration procedures for Kaesong

An inter-Korean panel on the arbitration of legal disputes discussed details of arbitration procedures and rules at its meeting held on March 13, the unification ministry said.

The meeting at the jointly run factory park in the North's western border city of Kaesong is the first of its kind since 2000 when the rival Koreas adopted a deal on solving legal disputes through arbitration.

The two sides had substantial discussions on the arbitration rules to be applied once the panel starts its business, the ministry said.

The South has sent the arbitrator list to the North, but the North has yet to follow suit.

The ministry, however, did not say whether they made tangible decisions during the meeting. The two Koreas agreed to hold the 2nd round of the talks in the near future in order to continue their discussion on the arbitration system.

The panel was made up in accordance with the two countries' agreement in September 2013, which is expected to play a role equivalent to that of a court in the industrial park.

The panel is composed of five officials each from the rival Koreas. The sides also have 30 arbitrators each for the panel, which will handle possible legal disputes in the sprawling factory park.

The factory park, the last remaining symbol of inter-Korean cooperation, is home to 120 small South Korean plants producing garments, shoes, watches and other labor-intensive goods. More than 44,000 North Koreans work in the complex. (Yonhap)

Inter-Korean factory park recovers to pre-halt level

Operations at the inter-Korean industrial complex in the North Korean border city of Kaesong have almost recovered to their level before the park came to a sudden halt early last year, data showed on March 9.

The Kaesong Industrial Complex was shut down in early April 2013 after the North pulled out all of its workers at 123 South Korean firms. It reopened in September after Pyongyang agreed not to repeat such a suspension.

According to the data compiled by Seoul's Ministry of Unification, the output of the firms in the park totaled US\$352.9 million in December, slightly lower than the \$364.2 million posted a year earlier.

Around 52,000 North Korean employees worked there as of the end of 2013, compared to some 53,000 people in March 2013, the ministry said, adding that all South Korean companies, except one, had normal operations as of the previous week.

Trade volume between the two Koreas in January also reached some 94 percent of that recorded in the same month a year earlier at \$168.87 million, the data showed.

As the last remaining symbol of inter-Korean economic cooperation, the Kaesong complex has served as a major revenue source for the cash-strapped communist country. (Yonhap)

Inter-Korean tour earnings not subject to U.N. sanctions: gov't

Cash earnings from an inter-Korean tour project would not be subject to United Nations sanctions on North Korea, Seoul's unification ministry said on March 7, amid growing expectations for its resumption.

The U.N. Security Council last year adopted two resolutions against Pyongyang following its nuclear rocket tests, banning bulk cash couriers to the country, a frequently used method to move illicit funds into the nation slapped with several economic sanctions.

The sanctions are aimed at blocking the illicit money from being funneled into the country for use in the development and proliferation of its nuclear weapons program.

Questions have risen whether North Korea's earnings from a joint inter-Korean tourism project in the North's eastern mountain region would violate the resolution banning the transfer of bundles of cash to the wayward country.

"In the ministry's understanding, (bulk cash banning) is aimed at curbing attempts to transfer illicit funds through hand-carrying with the purpose of circumventing bank trading," the ministry said in a written response to independent lawmaker Park Joo-sun's questionnaire regarding the Kungang tour program and the U.N. sanctions.

Also asked whether the bulk cash restriction applies to commercial transactions over the banking system, the ministry said, "Given the purpose of bulk cash banning in the UNSC resolutions, normal dealings through the banking system are not relevant in our understanding."

The U.N. has not detected any violations of bulk cash banning so far, while the Kumgang tour program has not been discussed as a possible violation, according to the ministry's response to the lawmaker. (Yonhap)

N. Korean port of Rason to be open to S. Korea as early as 2015: minister

South Korea may be able to use the North Korean port city of Rason for logistical purposes as early as early 2015, the unification ministry said on March 5.

"The flow of goods through the Rason region may become possible around next spring if things go smoothly," Unification Minister Ryoo Kihl-jae said in a lecture to a group of former lawmakers.

"In early February, South Korean companies paid an on-site visit to the Rason area and if this (cooperation project) goes smoothly, major progress would take place around September this year," the minister said of Seoul's push to join the Rajin-Khasan development project between Pyongyang and Moscow.

The project is designed to develop Rajin, the northeastern North Korean port city now reintegrated into Rason, into a logistics center linked to Russia's Trans-Siberian Railway.

In a summit meeting in November 2103, South Korean President Park Geun-hye signed an agreement with Russian President Vladimir Putin to help South Korean companies join the joint North Korea-Russia logistics project.

In a follow-up step to the summit agreement, officials of three South Korean firms -- Korea Railroad Corp. (KORAIL), top steelmaker POSCO and No. 2 shipping company Hyundai Merchant Marine Co. -- visited the North Korean port city for a feasibility study.

The government is planning to link the North Korean port to two major South Korean southern ports of Pohang and Busan.

The minister also hailed the recent progress in inter-Korean relations, including the late-February reunions of South and North Korean families separated by the 1950-53 Korean War. (Yonhap)

N. Korea to compete in all events at Incheon Asian Games: officials

North Korean athletes will compete in all events at the Asian Games in South Korea later this year, North Korean officials said on Feb. 24.

Preparations are under way to compete in all events, a group of North Korean officials and reporters said during a rare lunch with South Korean pool reporters.

The South Korean reporters are at a North Korean mountain resort to cover the reunions of hundreds of families separated by the 1950-53 Korean War, which ended in a cease-fire, not a peace treaty.

North Korea will compete in "all events" and processes are under way to select athletes who can win medals, said a reporter of Minju Joson, the North's Cabinet newspaper.

In North Korea, reporters are members of the ruling Workers' Party and the state propaganda machine does not stray from the official party line.

The comments came a month after North Korea announced through its state news agency that it will send its male and female football teams to the Asian Games to be held in Incheon, a port city west of Seoul, from Sept. 19 to Oct. 4.

In 2013, South Korea invited North Korea to participate in the 2014 Incheon Asian Games via the Olympic Council of Asia, a sporting body that organizes all sports in Asia. It has 45 member states, including North Korea.

In 2002, North Korea sent 184 athletes and a squad of more than 100 female cheerleaders to Busan, South Korea's second-largest city, for the Busan Games. (Yonhap)

Inter-Korean trade hits 8-year low in 2013

Trade between South and North Korea fell to its lowest level in eight years in 2013 due to their strained relations, data showed on Feb. 23.

Inter-Korean trade reached US\$1.15 billion last year, down a whopping 41.9 percent from the previous year's \$1.98 billion, according to the data from the Korea International Trade Association (KITA).

South Korean exports to the North nose-dived 41.1 percent on-year to \$531.8 million, with imports from the communist country sinking 42.5 percent to \$617.2 million.

The 2013 inter-Korean trade volume was the lowest since 2005, when the figure came to \$1.06 billion.

The KITA attributed the tumble in inter-Korean trade mainly to the suspension of a jointly run industrial complex in North Korea.

The industrial zone in the North Korean border city of Kaesong screeched to a halt in April last year as Pyongyang withdrew all its workers, citing heightened tensions on the Korean Peninsula. Its operations resumed more than five months later.

The Kaesong Industrial Complex, viewed as the crowning achievement of the historic 2000 summit meeting between the leaders of the two Koreas, remains the only viable economic link between Seoul and Pyongyang, hosting some 120 South Korean companies that employ more than 44,600 North Korean workers.

In contrast to the plunge in trade with South Korea, the North's trade with China, its chief ally and largest benefactor, jumped 10.4 percent on-year to a record high of \$6.54 billion in 2013, according to the data.

Between 2009 and 2014, North Korea's trade volume with China, the world's second-largest economy, had been growing an annual average of more than 40 percent, the data showed. (Yonhap)

The Agricultural Policy in North Korea under Kim Jong-un's Leadership: Challenges and Prospects

I. Introduction

Since its official inauguration in April 2012, the Kim Jong-un regime in North Korea has conducted three nuclear tests and test-fired numerous long- and short-range rockets, only to invite criticism and sanctions from the international community and even to adversely affect its amicable relationship with China, its decades-old ally. Under a two-pronged policy aimed at simultaneously building up its nuclear arsenal and invigorating its moribund economy, the new North Korean leadership is providing measures to improve living conditions for North Korean citizens.

In his first public speech delivered during a military parade held to mark the founding anniversary of the (North) Korean People's Army in North's capital city Pyongyang on April 25, 2012, the new, young North Korean leader -- the third and youngest son of late former leader Kim Jong-il -- said: "It is the firm resolution of the Workers' Party of Korea to enable our people ... to live, without tightening their belts any longer, and fully enjoy wealth and prosperity under socialism."

In North Korea today, the industrial share of the agricultural sector is higher than ever. Drawing the attention of North Korea watchers in Seoul and elsewhere is the quantity of crop harvest in the socialist North at a time when the rice harvesting in 2013, which started in mid-September, finished in the latter half of October. But they can hardly get information on the agricultural production because the North does not make statistics public on

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its annual production of cereals, including rice, maize and potatoes.

Fortunately, however, two specialized agencies of the United Nations, namely the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Food Program (WFP), have sent their joint “crop and food security mission” to the North, occasionally before 2003 and regularly thereafter, and provided the international community with statistics on food production and other information on the agricultural sector in North Korea.

Their mission also visited the North in 2013 for two weeks starting Sept. 27 “to assess the 2013 main crop harvest, forecast the 2014 production of winter and spring crops, estimate cereal import requirements for the 2013/2014 marketing year (November/October) and assess the household food security and nutrition situation.”

The FAO/WFP mission has estimated overall food production in the North in the food year 2012-2013 at 4.92 million tons on a milled cereal basis. The 2013-2014 year was estimated at 5.03 million tons, up about 5 percent from a year earlier.

The FAO/WFP report attributed the increase in agricultural production to favorable weather conditions and incentives provided to farmers in cooperative farms. The increase in the North’s food production was also attributable to its increased investment in the farming sector.

In a move to investigate any change in the North Korean agricultural policy since the inauguration of the Kim Jong-un regime, this essay will review the so-called June 28 measures and other developments signaling a policy change, to be followed by an analysis of challenges facing the North Korean farming policy.

II. Developments Signaling a Change in North’s Economic Policy

1. ‘June 28 Measures’ for a New Economic Management System

North Korea notified related government offices and state businesses reportedly on June 28, 2012 of the “June 28 measures,” which aim to establish a new economic management system.

The measures also affect the agricultural sector. The reform measures reportedly call for a reduction in the number of farms in a work squad in cooperative farms from about 20 persons to four to six persons -- a move probably aimed at replacing collective farming with family farming.

The measures also call for the state to provide farmers with seeds, fertilizers and farming machines in advance, allot a certain portion of cultivated land to each work squad, as well as distribute farm products to the state and farmers at the ratio of 7 to 3.

According to a media report in South Korea, the North Korean authorities concerned began to inform North Korean citizens of the June 28 measures in July 2012 through the cable broadcasting system, for the implementation was slated to begin on Oct. 1 that year.

They designated the counties of Kimjongsuk, Taehongdan and Kimhyongjik in the far northern province of Ryanggang bordering China, for their enforcement on a pilot basis.¹⁾ Moreover, in late July 2012 the National Intelligence Service in Seoul briefed the Intelligence Committee in the

National Assembly, South Korea's parliament, of the June 28 measures.

Under the measures, according to the NIS briefing, North Korea has formed a task force for the introduction of a new economic management system, downsized work squads at farms, given a freer hand to business concerns for their management, transferred the authority of dealing with economic projects from the Party and the Army to the Cabinet, and increased wages for laborers.

Under the traditional formula for agricultural management, the Rural Management Committee in each province draws a production plan for approval by the Cabinet, and under the approved plan it assigns production goals to production units under their control. The committee first deducts from farm products the costs for farming materials provided to farmers, fees for land use and subsidies to the Army, and then distributes the remaining portion of the products to production units.

Typically, farmers have been given an unsatisfactory portion of their products because the state set costs for farming materials and fees for land use at an unreasonably high level. The situation has been similar even if some cooperative farms have provided their farmers with farming materials for themselves because the state has rarely increased the purchase price from farmers.

For this reason, the June 28 measures are undoubtedly aimed at recovering a normal production cycle, giving an end to a vicious circle where the short supply of funds and materials leads to a production decrease, a reduction in farmers' income, their weakening desire to work, and then

to a further decrease in production.

The new economic management system for cooperative farms can bring about significant developments in the North Korean agricultural sector, along with a remarkable increase in the production of farm products. Noteworthy is the point that an annual average crop harvest in a farm for the last five years will serve as a standard crop harvest subject to distribution between the state and farmers there at the ratio of 7-to-3, regardless of the production goal set for the farm by the state.²⁾

The reform measures are meaningful for the North Korean economy because of the following points. Firstly, the downsizing of the work squads is meant for the replacement of collective farming with family farming. If an area of cultivated land is allotted to a family with three or four members for farming, it will be possible for them to cultivate the land in their own way under the agreement. And it will trigger a remarkable change in collective farming in cooperative farms, providing a chance for the North to allow private farming.

Secondly, noteworthy is the farm product distribution between the state and farmers at the ratio of 7-to-3. This ratio undoubtedly reflects the fact that the share of farmers in total population ranges from 36 percent to 37 percent. The 7-to-3 ratio is reasonable because the state takes farm products for the non-farming citizens who account for nearly 70 percent of the total population.³⁾

Thirdly, the state provides every work squad in cooperative farms with funds necessary for their farming in advance and sets prices of farm products at the level prevalent on the market. These measures

are meant for an increase in state investment in the agricultural sector, which are among the principles clarified by Kim Jong-un in talks with a group of responsible officials from the Central Committee of the Workers' Party on April 6, 2012.

The talks were called the "April 6 Remarks" under the heading, "Let Us Complete Splendidly the Juche-oriented Revolutionary Cause, Honoring Great Leader, Comrade Kim Jong-il as Eternal General Secretary of Our Party." The young Kim made the remarks just five days before he inaugurated his Party leadership in his capacity as "first secretary" of the Central Committee in the fourth conference of Party representatives held in Pyongyang on April 11, 2012.

Troublesome, however, is that the North Korean government can hardly secure financial resources for funds it will supply to all cooperative farms and key plants, plus industrial complexes in advance to help them finance their production costs.

The government needs much more money should it purchase farm products from farmers at market prices. If it sells the products to citizens in urban areas at market prices, this will touch off inflation. And if the government sells farm products to them at prices lower than their purchase prices, this will increase fiscal deficit.

Undoubtedly for this reason, the North Korean government has been reluctant to actively apply the June 28 measures.

Commenting on South Korean media reports on moves for reforms and an opening-up in the North, meanwhile, the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Fatherland (CPRF) issued a statement on July 29, 2012 only to deny the reports.

While claiming that as far as its attempt at reform is concerned, the North has never left any field unreformed in socialist construction but has always kept its door open.

The CPRF statement said, "To expect 'policy change' and 'reform and opening' from the DPRK is nothing but a foolish and silly dream, just like wanting the sun to rise in the west."⁴⁾ The DPRK stands for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the official name of the North.

Earlier on Dec. 30, 2011, a statement from the National Defense Commission said, "We solemnly declare with confidence that the South Korean puppets and foolish politicians around the world should not expect any change from the DPRK."

2. Evaluation of North's Moves for a Change in Its Economic Policy

The South Korean government showed a response in August 2012 to the moves in the North for a change in its economic policy, expressing its wish that the moves bring about an improvement in the living conditions of North Korean citizens.

"We know that North Korea's new leadership has examined various measures for various changes in the economic sector since its inauguration," said a spokesman for the South Korean Ministry of Unification. The spokesman added that it is desirable for the North to behave in a way that would relieve the worries of the international community regarding the country's nuclear weapons development program and promote welfare programs for its citizens.⁵⁾

But many North Korea watchers in Seoul have viewed the new economic manage-

ment system in the North as one that will hardly lead to sweeping economic reform.

The new North Korean leadership is undoubtedly feeling the need to take economic reform measures, which are essential to gain support of North Korean citizens, but Kim Jong-un will unlikely take active reform measures which can threaten his socialist regime, according to the analysts.

The Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly (SPA), the North's rubber-stamp parliament, issued a decree on Aug. 18, 2013 to promote Minister of Metal Industry Jon Sung-hun to a deputy premier,⁶⁾ bringing the number of deputy premiers to 11.

A graduate of the Kimchaek University of Technology, Jon became the minister of metal and machine-building industries in 1998 and served as deputy premier during September 2003 and April 2009. He was named minister of the metal industry in January 2013.

With Jon's promotion, the four senior officials, including Premier Pak Pong-ju, plus three deputy premiers -- Kwak Pom-gi, Ro Tu-chol and Jon -- were reinstated and again given a pivotal role in taking another set of reform measures in recent years.

The deputy premiers played a leading role when the North took an array of reform measures for a new economic management formula on July 1, 2002. In 2002, they proposed reform measures, such as introducing family farming, giving a freer hand to enterprises for their management, and establishing commercial and trade banks.

North Korea has continued to suffer from shortages of farming materials necessary for proper farming, in particular, fertil-

izers, whose short supply critically hampers its efforts to increase the production of agricultural products.

North Korea applied 745,965 tons of chemical fertilizers in 2011, 726,627 tons in 2012 and 707,199 tons in 2013, according to the FAO/WFP report in November 2013.

Noteworthy is the fact that the North applied less chemical fertilizers in 2013 than the two preceding years, but it harvested more crops in 2013 than in the two preceding years.

This development may indicate that the North's reform measures for the farming sector have begun to work.

III. The Agricultural Policy in North Korea

1. Key Economic Indicators

According to the Bank of Korea (BOK), South Korea's central bank, the North Korean economy suffered a negative growth rate for nine consecutive years since the turn of the 1990s until 1998.

But it enjoyed a growth for seven years in a row thereafter until 2005 when the growth rate of the gross domestic product (GDP), the total market value of all final goods and services produced in a country in a given year, stood at a moderate 3.8 percent. The North's GDP registered a negative growth rate each in 2006 and 2007, followed by a 3.1 percent growth in 2008.

But the North Korean economy repeated an up-and-down movement thereafter until 2011 when the GDP growth rate was estimated at 0.8 percent.

The FAO specializing in the global situa-

tion regarding agriculture is also furnished with basic data on the farming population in North Korea. It is a general global trend that the share of farming and fishery population of a country decreases when it continues to enjoy economic growth.

But the population in the North's farming and fishing villages has increased steadily. It rose about 23 percent during last 26 years from 7.9 million people in 1985 to 9.7 million people in 2011. The farming population, however, decreased around 28 percent from 7.66 million people in 1985 to 5.54 million during the cited period like the general global trend. And the number of people who are economically active in the agricultural sector decreased 10 percent from 3.36 million in 1985 to 3.03 million in 2011.

Despite a decrease in the farming population and its decreasing share in the total population, the population in farming households accounted for 40 percent of total population and the farming population represented 23 percent of the total population, both in a high level under the international standard, indicating the backwardness of the North Korean industrial structure.

2. Area Planted with Cereal Crops

The land area under the cultivation of cereal, potato and soybean crops in 2012 decreased 0.2 percent from the preceding year to 1,265,000 hectares, said the FAO/WFP Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission to North Korea in November 2012. It added that with regard to the winter and spring cereals, which will be harvested in 2013, a significant reduc-

tion in area (16 percent) is expected on account of a shortage of seed following the poor harvest of these crops in the food year 2011/2012. It also said, "In aggregate, and including home- and kitchen-garden and sloping-land production, the 2012/2013 cropped area is estimated at 2.025 million hectares, to be approximately 1 percent less than that of 2011/2012."

Each cooperative farm household is entitled to a private home garden of up to 30 pyeong (one pyeong equals 3.3 square meters). There are about 1.7 million farm households in the country, which translates to about 17,000 hectares of home gardens.

In addition, a significant proportion of the 4.3 million urban households also have access to smaller home garden plots, typically between 5 and 10 pyeong in size. Kitchen gardens belong to a different category. These are gardens that are allocated to institutions or factories for the production of food crops for their staff and workers.

Their size may vary according to the size of the institution or factory. In the absence of more reliable quantitative data, it is assumed that the country's total home-garden and kitchen-garden area may be about 25,000 hectares. And approximately 550,000 hectares of terraced dry fields formed on sloping land with a gradient of more than 15 degrees are estimated to be under cultivation.⁷⁾

North Korea has used sloping land for the cultivation of farm products since its food crisis in the mid-1990s, but it is hard to estimate the size of the area under cultivation. In 2008, the North Korean Ministry of Land and Environment Preservation, using reports from its forest rangers, estimated the area of deforested sloping land

at between 300,000 and 350,000 hectares. A 2012 study carried out by the EU's Joint Research Centre (JRC) concluded that approximately 550,000 hectares of sloping land with a gradient of more than 150 degrees are under cultivation.

The FAO estimated the total cultivated land in the North, as of 2011, at 2.55 million hectares, and the area under cultivation at 2.3 million hectares. It also estimated the area benefited by irrigation facilities at 1.46 million hectares, or 57 percent of the total area under cultivation.

This irrigated area covers more than one third of rice paddies and dry fields. But there is a wide gap between statistics from the FAO and those from Statistics Korea, a South Korean agency responsible for compiling all official statistical data in the country, as far as agricultural figures are concerned. Statistics Korea estimated the North Korean area of land under cultivation in 1985 and 2008 at 2.14 million hectares and 1.9 million hectares, respectively.

The gap is attributable to their different views on the cultivated land in the North. Statistics Korea included only the official area of cultivated land in its statistics on the cultivated area in the North, while the FAO put not only the official area but unofficial small-sized cultivated land formed in forests.⁸⁾

The area of cultivated land in the North has remained unchanged or decreased in recent years, but the farming population and households have increased, resulting in a decrease in the per-household area of cultivated land. According to Statistics Korea, the per-household area for cultivation was reduced from 1.27 hectares in 1985 to 0.96 hectares in 2008. This is the

reason for a decrease in production per farming household, explaining why the North had to continue high-density farming.

There has been no significant change in the ratio between the rice paddy fields and the dry fields in the North since 1975, although the area of rice paddy fields has continued to increase slightly. In 2009, the area for paddy fields was 610,000 hectares, and the area for dry fields was 1.3 million hectares, with their ratio standing at 32 percent to 68 percent.

3. Inputs for Production

Concrete data regarding the operation ratios of North Korean plants producing farming materials and the supply of the materials in the North has been unavailable since the early 21st century. But data on the North's imports of energy in recent years indicates that North Korea is faced with a situation where it can hardly recover from the sluggish activities of its industries for producing agricultural materials.

In other words, the country is still suffering from poor production and the supply of farming materials, such as chemical fertilizers, agricultural chemicals, oil for farming, vinyl products, farming machines and parts, plus tires.

Most troublesome is the shortage of chemical fertilizers, hampering the North's efforts for increasing the production of farm products. North Korea could supply a great deal of chemical fertilizers in the 1980s before it was hit by a food crisis, with per-hectare use at 350 kg on an ingredient basis. Then the production and supply of chemical fertilizers in the North was enough to meet the domestic demand,

with its annual food grain production claimed to have attained the ambitious goal set at 8 million tons.

North Korea began to develop heavy-chemical industries at an initial phase of its economic development programs and could be furnished with 14 fertilizer plants, including the Hungnam Fertilizer Complex, with an annual production capacity of 3.7 million tons in the 1980s. But the adverse situation of the North Korean economy starting in the early 1990s has decreased North's production of chemical fertilizers remarkably. In the first half of the first 10 years of the 21st century, however, the North was able to meet about 45 percent of its domestic demand for chemical fertilizer, thanks to assistance from South Korea and the international community. Its production of chemical fertilizer then ranged from 37,000 tons to 50,000 tons, representing only 16 percent of the fertilizer it used, with the remaining relying on foreign assistance.

But the North's first nuclear test in October 2006 brought about mounting tension on the Korean Peninsula and a remarkable decrease in assistance from the international community. Seoul also suspended its assistance of food and fertilizer to the North in 2008.⁹⁾ The North has since exerted its strenuous efforts for making up for the shortage of chemical fertilizers, with an intensive campaign for producing more organic fertilizers, including composite micro-organic fertilizer, humus fertilizer and human manure.

According to the WFP, North Korea has increased its fertilizer imports from China after South Korea suspended its fertilizer assistance to the North and it has annually supplied about 300,000 tons of chemical

fertilizers to its farms in the last three years. This quantity of fertilizers represents nearly 40 percent of the North's domestic demand. But it has yet to solve the problem regarding chemical fertilizers.

4. Means of Production

A shortage of farm power is a factor hampering an increase in cereal production. The 28-horse-powered Chollima tractor prevalent in North Korean farms is weak in strength and slow in speed.

Moreover, many farms in the North are not furnished with enough tractors for proper farming. Tractors are operated in about 60 percent of farms outside the grain belt and the shortage of farm power hampers an expansion of the area for the cultivation of barley. The number of tractors in the North decreased 4 percent in 2012 from the preceding year and their operation ratio was about 70 percent. Light oil consumed in the farms in 2012 was 5 percent less than the preceding year, at 62,500 tons.

At the turn of the 21st century, North Korea has actively campaigned for rezoning cultivated land and improving irrigation facilities in an effort to build up its farming infrastructure. The land rezoning project began in Kangwon Province in 1998 and was followed by the North Phyongan Province the next year, South Hwanghae Province from 2000 through 2002 and Pyongyang City, Nampho City and South Phyongan Province from 2002 through 2004. Under the land rezoning project, covering 276,000 hectares of land, 2.1 million small fields were turned into 560,000 large standardized fields, each ranging

from 1,000 pyeong to 1,500 pyeong; the combined length of rides was decreased to 20,000 km from 130,000 km; 23,000 km of waterways were constructed; and 7,600 hectares of new cultivated land were formed, according to a North Korean announcement.

Earlier at the turn of the 1990s, the North had carried out a project to open new waterways for irrigating arable land. It was to replace the pumping system that required a great deal of energy with gravity-feed waterways. Among the waterways built by the North are those connecting Kaecheon and Taesong Lake, and Paekma and Cholsan, plus the waterways flowing through Miru Plain.

According to statistical data released by the Korea Rural Economic Institute in Seoul in September 2012, 56 percent of rice paddy fields and 31 percent of dry fields in the North are irrigated completely, and 26 percent of rice paddy fields and 23 percent of dry fields are partly irrigated, with 18 percent of rice paddy fields and 16 percent of dry fields laid aside without any irrigation system.

IV. Challenges Facing North's Agricultural Reforms

To solve the food shortage problem inherent in its agricultural sector, it is necessary for North Korea to improve the inefficient operating formula for its cooperative farms in a way to stimulate farmers' desire to produce more of their products, revise its cereal production policy oriented with single-cropping in a way to develop alternate crops, turn the terraced fields on slop-

ing land back into forest in a move to develop eco-friendly farming methods, and activate its cooperation with South Korea.¹⁰⁾

Drawing the attention of North Korea watchers in Seoul and elsewhere these days is whether or not the North will apply the June 28 measures for a new economic management system to the farming sector.

In case the North applies the reform measures to the farming sector, it will likely provide farmers with more incentives and encourage them to produce more. Under the aforementioned measures, the North will probably downsize the work squads at cooperative farms, provide farmers with money necessary for farming in advance, distribute farm products between the state and farmers at the ratio of 7 to 3, and allow farmers to sell the farm products given to them on the market or use them for other purposes at their will.

So far North Korea has attempted to make agricultural reforms by its own means, but the North's efforts in that direction have yet to pay off. It is primarily because the reform measures fell short of farmers' expectations. In comparison with the measures taken by China in an early phase of the Chinese reform campaign, the North's reform measures are at a remarkably low level.

North Korea has managed its economy based on factors oriented with a command economy while utilizing market-oriented factors as auxiliary means. A review of the North's economic policy behavior in recent years shows that the North's accent on these two means, basic and auxiliary, has varied as time has passed. On the occasion of its applying the July 1 reform measures in 2002, it utilized market factors actively

until 2005. But from 2006 to 2009 it imposed intensive restrictions on the market factors, and since 2011 the North has felt the need to utilize market factors again.

The North, however, has yet to clarify the reform measures for a new management system. It is noteworthy that the new economic management system was not on the agenda for the sixth session of the 12th-term SPA, held on Sept. 25, 2012.

V. Conclusion

North Korea has not made public statistical data regarding any sector in the socialist country. For this reason, North Korea watchers in Seoul and elsewhere have relied on their studies in the country, including its agricultural sector; on statistics from international institutions, including the FAO and the WFP; and on countries with a deep interest in the North, such as the U.S. and South Korea.

The FAO and the WFP have forecast that the food situation in the North will get better in the food year 2013-2014, but the North will undoubtedly continue to suffer from a food shortage. For this reason, they advise the North to exert more policy efforts to solve the food problem as follows. Firstly, the North needs to increase the production and supply of high-protein foods, such as soybean and fish. The North can produce 5 tons of fish per hectare at its fish farms annually. But torrential rains have occasionally destroyed many fish ponds. For this reason, they have often needed international assistance to repair the fish breeding facilities in trouble.

Secondly, the North needs to revitalize

the double-cropping program. The production of spring crops, such as maize, barley and potatoes, has decreased in recent years. This stagnation or decline of double-cropping is attributable to erratic weather conditions in early spring and a shortage of such farming materials as plastic sheets, fuel and farming machines' parts in reserve, among other things. In particular, many North Korean farms cannot often function in a normal way in the farming season from April through July because of the poor machine power. Also insufficient are policy measures to stimulate farmers' motives for working hard. The North desperately needs to redraw its strategy for the double-cropping program. It also needs to provide enough quality seeds for winter wheat to be planted in October-November, and spring barley and spring potatoes to be planted in March, along with fertilizers and plastic sheets.

Additionally, the North needs to provide assistance for the private cultivation of home and kitchen gardens by its citizens.

"It is evident that farm households put a great deal of effort into the production of both food crops and small livestock on their own private holdings of approximately 30 pyeong," the two U.N. specialized agencies said. "The produce from these holdings benefits not only the producers themselves but also finds its way to urban-dwelling relatives. Improvements in productivity could therefore benefit a very large section of the population, improving food security in general."

For this reason they recommended that the national policy be developed and its implementation supported. Various elements of immediate support could include

the provision of quality seeds, fertilizer, pesticides, and technical training for those lagging in productivity.

And the North also needs long-term programs for its reforms in the economic sectors as follows. First, it is required to take reform measures aimed at boosting the production of farm products. At stake are the organization and the operation formula for North Korean cooperative farms, highlighted by their overly centralized management of an undemocratic nature, their inelastic organization and management, the monopoly prevalent in the top managing office, and the duality in policy regarding ownership and distribution.

At the turn of this century, the North Korean authorities had to make another attempt at changing its agricultural policy in an effort to increase agricultural production. But it failed to attain its goal because of the inefficient operation system in the collective farms, plus a shortage of production factors. The North failed to remarkably increase the production of food grain despite its ambitious programs for rezoning the cultivated land, improving the irrigation system, developing seeds of better quality and expanding the double-cropping program.

The North is required to improve its relations with foreign countries and the international community and revitalize their cooperation with them. In other words, the North needs to invigorate its economic cooperation with South Korea and its agricultural cooperation with the global community. It needs to awaken to the fact that the delayed settlement of its nuclear program, plus its nuclear tests, have resulted in the deteriorating relations with the South and the international com-

munity. The North is required to abide by earlier agreements reached during the six-way talks involving the two Koreas, the U.S., Japan, Russia and China, and take measures clarified in the agreements should it receive substantial economic assistance from South Korea and the international community and expand the arena of its cooperation with them.

(This is an excerpt from the Korean paper carried in North Korea Studies Review, Vol. 17, No. 2.)

Notes:

- 1) Daily NK, July 20, 2012.
- 2) North Korea Today, Aug. 13, 2012.
- 3) The share of farmers in North Korea's total population in 2008 was 36.8 percent, and the comparable figure for South Korea was 6.5 percent. Statistics Korea, Key Statistical Indicators in North Korea (Daejeon, 2011), p. 55.
- 4) The Korean Central News Agency, July 29, 2012.
- 5) The Yonhap News Agency, Aug. 10, 2012.
- 6) The Korean Central News Agency, Aug. 20, 2012.
- 7) A Special Report by FAO/WFP Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Nov. 12, 2012, pp. 14-15.
- 8) The aforementioned FAO/WFP report included sloping land in North's cultivated land.
- 9) South Korea has supplied 2.55 million tons of chemical fertilizers from 1999 through 2007 in aid to North Korea.
- 10) Lim Sang-cheol and Kang Seok-seung, "A Change in North Korea's Agricultural Sector in the Kim Jong-il Regime, and Prospects," North Korea Studies Review, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 147-164.

N. Korea's per-capita GDP grows 4.8 pct in 2013: report

SEOUL (Yonhap) -- North Korea's per-capita gross domestic product (GDP) rose 4.8 percent on-year in 2013 from an improved grain harvest and expanded investment in the mining, utility and other segments, a report showed on March 16.

The North's per-capita GDP for 2013 is estimated at US\$854, up \$39 from a year earlier, according to the report released by the Hyundai Research Institute (HRI), a South Korean private think tank.

The North's 2013 per-capita GDP amounts to a mere 3.6 percent of South Korea's per-capita GDP of \$23,838 for the same year, it said.

North Korea's grain production improved on the back of favorable weather conditions, while the country also expanded its investment in various industrial sectors, the report said.

The communist state's grain production is estimated to have grown some 5 percent in 2013 from a year earlier. The country saw an 8.5 percent on-year rise and 10 percent gain in its grain production, respectively, in 2011 and 2012.

Also, the reclusive nation increased its budget spending for railroads, metal and power generation sectors, which contributed in boosting its economy, the report showed.

Trade between North Korea and its strongest ally China jumped 10.4 percent on-year to reach \$6.5 billion in 2013, while inter-Korean trade sank 42 percent to \$1.1 billion due to a five-month halt of a jointly run industrial park.

The 2013 inter-Korean trade figure is the lowest since 2005 when the comparable figure was \$1.06 billion.

Assistance from the international community to the North also dropped 47 percent on-year to reach \$63.1 million last year, the report said.

U.N. sends three experts to N. Korea over FMD: report

SEOUL (Yonhap) -- The U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization has dispatched three experts to North Korea to help contain a foot-and-mouth disease outbreak that Pyongyang says is spreading after emerging in the country more than two months ago, according to a U.S. radio report.

The three experts plan to assess the situation with their North Korean counterparts and make recommendations on how to contain the highly contagious animal disease, the Voice of America reported on March 13, citing the U.N. body's Chief Veterinary Officer, Juan Lubroth.

U.N. urges checks on N. Korean ships for illegal arms trade

SEOUL (Yonhap) -- Ships coming to and from North Korea should be subjected to greater scrutiny to prevent illegal weapons trafficking, a U.N. report said on March 11, noting that

the communist country is using shipping to evade U.N. sanctions banning nuclear arms development and trade.

The report follows the interception in July 2013 of a 14,000-ton North Korean ship, Chong Chon Gang, in the Panama Canal while en route home from Cuba. The ship was carrying military hardware hidden under bags of sugar in violation of U.N. resolutions prohibiting the transfer of goods related to nuclear arms development and trade.

Concluding its investigation into the case, the U.N.'s North Korea Sanctions Committee said in its annual report that, "The committee draw the attention of member states' authorities and members of the shipping industry to the concealment techniques that were employed in this case.

No crude import from China to N. Korea in Jan.: report

BEIJING (Yonhap) -- North Korea did not import any crude oil from China in January, marking the first absence of monthly deliveries from China in five months, a Seoul government report showed on March 10.

It was not immediately clear whether the January absence of crude shipments to North Korea from China was linked to Beijing's growing frustration with Pyongyang over its nuclear program, but it followed the execution of the once-powerful uncle of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in December 2013.

China, North Korea's key ally and economic lifeline, has been in a delicate position because the executed uncle, Jang Song-thaek, was considered a supporter of China-style reforms to revive the North's moribund economy and played an important role in dealing with economic projects with Beijing.

In 2013, monthly shipments of crude oil from China to North Korea were absent in the months of February, June and July. However, annual shipments of crude oil to North Korea from China rose 11.2 percent on-year to 578,000 tons in 2013.

China draws 'red line' on N. Korea, says won't allow chaos

BEIJING (Yonhap) -- China's foreign minister on March 8 drew a "red line" on its wayward neighbor North Korea, declaring that Beijing won't allow "war or instability" on the Korean Peninsula.

Foreign Minister Wang Yi also called for the United States and North Korea to make joint efforts to remove a "stumbling block" to reopening multinational talks on ending the North's nuclear weapons program.

"The Korean Peninsula is right on China's doorstep. We have a red line, that is, we will not allow war or instability on the Korean Peninsula," Wang said at a press conference on the sidelines of China's annual legislative session.

China is North Korea's key ally and economic benefactor, although Beijing has become

more frustrated with Pyongyang, which had heightened tensions in the region by conducting nuclear tests and launching missiles.

Pentagon: N. Korea has at least 6 road-mobile ICBM launchers

WASHINGTON (Yonhap) -- The Pentagon said on March 5 that North Korea has at least six Hwasong-13 road-mobile long-range missile launchers, as the U.S. updated the assessment of the secretive nation's military power.

It said the Hwasong-13 intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) have a range of more than 3,400 miles, but its capability has yet to be tested.

The Hwasong-13 has not been flight-tested and "their current reliability as weapon systems would be low," the Pentagon said in its annual report, titled "Military and Security Developments Involving the Democratic People's Republic of Korea 2013."

In the previous version, the U.S. Department of Defense did not mention the Hwasong-13, but said the launchers of the Taepodong-2 long-range missiles have "not yet deployed."

U.N. mulls more sanctions on N. Korea for arms deal ship

NEW YORK (Yonhap) -- The United Nations Security Council is expected to impose additional sanctions on North Korea for the attempted shipment of arms from Cuba to the peninsula last July, a diplomatic source here said on March 5.

The council's sanctions committee has concluded that two entities were involved in the shipment by the North Korean vessel, Chong Chon Gang, caught by Panamanian authorities, the source said.

The committee has begun discussions on the level of punishment as it has reached a consensus that the North violated U.N. Security Council resolutions, the source said.

"The North Korea sanctions committee recently received a formal proposal to add two North Korean shipping firms to the list of sanctions," said the source.

The two include Ocean Maritime Management (OMM), a Pyongyang-based company with links to the North Korean government that is also the registered manager of the Chong Chon Gang. The other is Chinpo Shipping Co., registered in Singapore, allegedly used for the payment of costs for the Chong Chon Gang's operation.

If the U.N. imposes sanctions on the two companies, the number of North Korean entities subject to U.N. sanctions will increase to 25.

N. Korea punishes those involved in S. Korean missionary case: report

SEOUL (Yonhap) -- North Korea has punished dozens of its citizens for helping a South Korean Christian missionary with his alleged spying activities in the communist country, a news report said on March 5.

The missionary, Kim Jong-uk, has been held in the communist state for more than four months since he was arrested on charges of spying for South Korea's state intelligence agency in October.

In February, Kim confessed to committing anti-state crimes and appealed for mercy during a news conference in Pyongyang covered by the North's state media.

After the press conference, dozens of residents in Pyongyang believed to have been involved in Kim's case disappeared, the Washington-based Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported, citing an unnamed source in Sinuiju, a northwestern North Korean city bordering China.

RFA raised the possibility that the people may have been taken to a concentration camp as political prisoners, adding that several North Korean officials in charge of managing check-points where Kim snuck through were also arrested en masse.

N. Korea's fertilizer imports from China soar in Jan.

SEOUL (Yonhap) -- North Korea's fertilizer imports from China skyrocketed in January from a year earlier, data showed on March 4, pointing to Pyongyang's efforts to increase agricultural output.

The North brought in 35,113 tons of Chinese fertilizer in January, a huge increase from 2 tons from a year earlier, according to the data by the Seoul-based Korea Rural Economic Institute (KREI).

Such an amount is unprecedented for January, as the impoverished communist country used to buy a limited amount of fertilizer in winter, according to KREI experts.

The January figure is also two times bigger than the 17,416 tons for December, according to the data.

N. Korea's arms exports reach US\$11 million in 2013

SEOUL (Yonhap) -- North Korea exported defense equipment worth US\$11 million in 2013, a news report said on March 4.

The Voice of America (VOA) also said the North imported defense equipment worth \$63 million in 2013, citing a report by IHS Jane's, a London-based security information firm.

The VOA did not elaborate on what defense equipment North Korea either sold or bought in 2103.

N. Korea has 100 KN-02 missiles with extended range

SEOUL (Yonhap) -- North Korea is estimated to have about 100 KN-02 missiles with an extended range of up to 170 kilometers, as the country has improved engine performance through various test firings, a senior military source said on March 5 .

According to the military assessment on the North's missile program, the KN-02 can fly far-

ther than the previously expected 120 km, adding that 30 transporter erector launchers (TEL) have been deployed to fire the missiles.

“North Korea is estimated to have about 100 KN-02 missiles, considering the number of launchers,” the source said, asking for anonymity. “KN-02 uses a solid fuel system, which saves time on firing and reloading.”

N. Korea listed as ‘high-risk’ country in money laundering

SEOUL (Yonhap) -- North Korea has been designated as a high-risk entity threatening the global financial system for money laundering and terrorism financing, the website of an international body on the issue monitored in Seoul showed on Feb. 25.

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) said, “(It) remains concerned about the DPRK’s failure to address the significant deficiencies in its anti-money laundering and combating the financing of a terrorist regime and the serious threat this poses to the integrity of the international financial system.”

The voice of concern came during the plenary meeting of the FATF, an inter-governmental organization established in 1989 designed to develop policies to combat money laundering and terrorism financing, in Paris earlier in the month.

The FATF first kept tabs on the communist country in 2011, calling on its members to “give special attention to business relationships and transactions” with the North.

N. Korea reinstates key officials on economic projects with China

BEIJING (Yonhap) -- North Korea appears to have recently reinstated two key officials in charge of economic projects with China, a diplomatic source said on Feb. 26, in a sign Pyongyang may try to restore business partnership with Beijing following the purge of leader Kim Jong-un’s uncle.

Kim Ki-sok and Kim Chol-jin, chief and deputy chief of the North’s State Economic Development Commission, had been sacked in connection with the purge and execution of leader’s uncle, Jang Song-thaek, in December 2013, but have been reinstated after undergoing an “ideology re-education,” the source said on the condition of anonymity.

“Kim Ki-sok and Kim Chol-jin were forced to resign from the posts after being involved in the case of Jang Song-thaek, but reinstated as they were considered not so close to Jang,” the source said.

Jang’s dramatic downfall marked the biggest political upheaval in North Korea since late 2011, when the North’s young leader Kim took power following the death of former leader and his father.

PEOPLE

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

- Feb. 16 visits the Kumsusan Palace of the Sun at midnight for the anniversary of the birth of Kim Jong-il (Day of the Shining Star).
- 16 confers military ranks on KPA commanding officers, including Kim Rak-gyom as colonel general.
- 18 watches KPA service personnel compete in sports events.
- 18 watches a performance given by the State Merited Chorus at the People's Theater in celebration of the 72nd anniversary of the birth of Kim Jong-il.
- 20 provides field guidance to the Nov. 2 Factory of the KPA.
- 24 looks round the Songdowon International Children's Camp currently being remodeled.
- 25 makes a speech at the second and closing day of the 8th Conference of Ideological Officials of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK).
- 26 has a photo session with the participants in the 8th Conference of the Ideological Officials of the WPK.
- 27 stresses in a speech at the 8th Conference of Ideological Workers of the WPK that the ideological work of the Party should be conducted in an aggressive manner.
- March 3 gives field guidance to the Pyongyang Weak-current Apparatus Factory.
- 6 sends a congratulatory message to Choummaly Sayasone, general secretary of the Central Committee of the People's Revolutionary Party and president of Laos, on his 78th birthday.
- 9 visits the Kim Il-sung University of Politics and takes part in the election of a deputy to the Supreme People's Assembly at sub-constituency No. 43 of Constituency No. 105.
- 11 watches a performance given by the art squads of KPA Units 567, 324 and 233.
- 12 guides a shooting contest for teaching staff of military universities.
- 12 tours the Central Zoo where projects are under way to build new buildings and remodel existing ones.

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

- Feb. 21 meets with a delegation of Koreans in Japan to celebrate the Day of the Shining Star at the Mansudae Assembly Hall.
- 23 sends a message of greeting to Haji Hassanal Bolkiah, the sultan and head of state of Brunei Darussalam, on the occasion of its national day.
- 26 receives credentials from Op Sisawada, new Cambodian ambassador to the DPRK, at

the Mansudae Assembly Hall.

- March 2 sends a congratulatory message to Abdelaziz Bouteflika, president of Algeria, upon his 77th birthday.
- 3 sends a message of greeting to Rosen Plevneliev, president of Bulgaria, on the occasion of its national day.

Pak Pong-ju : Premier

- Feb. 8 makes a field survey of projects to remodel the sports village in Chongchun Street.
- 24 makes a field survey of the Hungnam Fertilizer Complex, the February 8 Vinalon Complex and the Ryongsong Machine Complex.
- March 3 sends a congratulatory message to Matteo Renzi upon his assumption of office as prime minister of Italy on Feb. 26.
- 4 sends a message of sympathy to Li Keqiang, premier of the State Council of China, over a recent terrorist act that claimed huge casualties in Kunming City of Yunnan Province, China.

CHRONOLOGICAL REVIEW

(Local Events)

- Feb. 16 A banquet is given at the People's Palace of Culture to celebrate the 72nd anniversary of the birth of leader Kim Jong-il.
- 16 Dancing parties take place in various parts of the country to mark the anniversary of the birth of leader Kim Jong-il.
- 16 The February 16 Art Education Publishing House marks its 40th anniversary.
- 16 Kim Yong-nam, Pak Pong-ju and other senior party, military and state officials visit the Kumsusan Palace of the Sun.
- 17 Ski camps for students and pupils begin at the newly dedicated Masikryong Ski Resort.
- 19 The KCNA says Kim Jong-un sent an open letter regarding the election of deputies to the 13th Supreme People's Assembly to all voters throughout the country on Feb. 18.
- 20 Voters of Paektusan Constituency No. 111 vow loyalty to North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in a meeting in Pyongyang.
- 21 The 29th Festival of Science and Technology of Kim Chaek University of Technology finishes after opening on Feb. 19.
- 24 The 8th Conference of the Ideological Officials of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) opens in Pyongyang.
- 24 The State Stamp Bureau issues an individual stamp in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the publication of the socialist rural theses.

- Feb. 25 North Korea marks the 50th anniversary of the publication of President Kim Il-sung's work: "Theses on the Socialist Rural Question in Our Country."
- 26 A short course for the participants in the eighth Conference of Ideological Officials of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) takes place to deal with theoretical and practical matters in the field of ideological work of the WPK.
- 27 Rodong Sinmun, North Korea's main newspaper, calls for invigorating ideological, information and agitation campaigns in an editorial.
- 28 A national symposium on medical science takes place at the Grand People's Study House to mark the 35th anniversary of President Kim Il-sung's work "On Developing Traditional Korean Medicine."
- 28 A national meeting takes place at the People's Palace of Culture to mark the 50th anniversary of President Kim Il-sung's work "Theses on the Socialist Rural Question in Our Country."
- March 1 Meari Shooting Gallery on Chongchun Street of Pyongyang resumes service after completing remodeling work.
- 4 North Korea marks the 68th anniversary of the promulgation of the historic Agrarian Reform Law.
- 4 The Kamapho Fishing Station under the South Phyongan Provincial Fishery Management Bureau in the DPRK begins fishing for this year.
- 5 The construction of Satellite Scientists' Street begins in the DPRK.
- 8 A national meeting takes place at the People's Palace of Culture in Pyongyang to mark the 104th anniversary of International Women's Day.
- 9 The election of the deputies to the 13th Supreme People's Assembly of the DPRK is held according to the Rules on the Elections of Deputies to the People's Assemblies at All Levels.
- 10 A national memorial service takes place at the Central Youth Hall on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the death of Kim Il-sung, who is hailed in the country as a revolutionary martyr.
- 10 The first round of the premier soccer league matches begins as part of the Mangyongdae Prize Sports Games.
- 10 The Central Election Committee reports on Kim Jong-un's election as deputy to the 13th Supreme People's Assembly of the DPRK.
- 11 The Central Election Committee reports the results of the election for the deputies to the 13th Supreme People's Assembly held on March 9.
- 12 The DPRK State Stamp Bureau issues five new stamps depicting modern edifices and folk games.

(Foreign Events)

- Feb. 16 The diplomatic corps and military attaches corps in Pyongyang visit the Kumsusan Palace of the Sun on the occasion of Kim Jong-il's birthday.

- Feb. 17 A delegation of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, led by its Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Liu Zhenmin, arrives in Pyongyang.
- 17 The KCNA says a “Kimjongilia” exhibition took place in Dalian City, Liaoning Province, China on Feb. 9 in celebration of his birthday.
- 18 German Hermin Ferras Alvarez, Cuban ambassador to the DPRK, hosts a reception in his embassy to mark Kim Jong-il’s birthday.
- 19 Palestinian Ambassador to the DPRK Ismail Ahmed Mohamed Hasan gives a reception at the embassy on the occasion of Kim’s birthday. The Iranian Embassy also hosts a reception.
- 19 A delegation of the Chinese Foreign Ministry led by Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Liu Zhenmin visits the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum and the Kumsusan Palace of the Sun.
- 19 DPRK Foreign Minister Pak Ui-chun meets with the Chinese Foreign Ministry delegation at the Mansudae Assembly Hall.
- 20 South and North Korea start reunions of families separated by the 1950-53 Korean War at the Mount Kumgang resort in North Korea.
- 20 A delegation of the DPRK Foreign Ministry led by Vice-Minister Ri Kil-song leaves Pyongyang to visit Iran.
- 21 The Rodong Sinmun urges Japan to account for past crimes.
- 22 The Rodong Sinmun reports that the U.S. will start the Key Resolve and Foal Eagle joint military exercises in South Korea on Feb. 24.
- 23 Staff members of the Russian Embassy in Pyongyang lay a wreath before the Liberation Tower on the occasion of the Day of Defenders of the Motherland.
- 25 The Rodong Sinmun denounces the start of the Key Resolve South Korea-U.S. joint military exercises.
- 27 Liu Hongcai, Chinese ambassador to the DPRK (North Korea), hosts a reception at Pyongyang Koryo Hotel on the occasion of the 55th anniversary of agreements on cultural cooperation and air transportation between China and North Korea.
- 28 The KCNA blasts the report by the U.N. Commission of Inquiry (COI) on the human rights situation in the DPRK as “misrepresenting the true picture of the DPRK people.”
- 28 A North Korean committee in charge of compensating former Korean sex slaves for the imperial Japanese army during World War II brands the suppression of the March 1 Popular Uprising by the Japanese in 1919 as an atrocity aimed at exterminating the Korean nation.
- March 1 Rodong Sinmun calls for inter-Korean declarations to be respected and successfully implemented to prevent war and ensure peace on the Korean Peninsula.
- 1 The DPRK Foreign Ministry rejects U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry’s remarks that termed the DPRK an “evil place” as “malignant mud-slinging” and another vivid expression of the U.S.’ hostile policy toward the DPRK.
- 3 A delegation of politicians from various political parties of Europe headed by Chief Executive Officer of Inter Mediate Jonathan Powell, former Downing Street Chief of Staff to Prime Minister Tony Blair, arrives in Pyongyang.

- March 3 John Short, a 75-year-old Australian missionary who had been detained in North Korea since Feb. 18, arrives in Beijing after being released.
- 5 The spokesman for the KPA Strategic Force blasts the U.S. and its allies for resorting to a smear campaign against North Korea's recent rocket launches.
- 6 Vice Premier Kang Sok-ju meets with a delegation of politicians from Europe at the Mansudae Assembly Hall.
- 6 Rodong Sinmun slams the Key Resolve and Foal Eagle joint military drills of South Korean and U.S. forces.
- 7 Grigorii Logvinov, roving ambassador of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, arrives in Pyongyang.
- 9 Rodong Sinmun denounces Japan for denying and distorting its past crimes.
- 12 A spokesman for the Maritime Administration of the DPRK claims the DPRK-flagged oil tanker Morning Glory, which left a rebel-held Libyan port after loading oil, "has nothing to do" with Pyongyang at present.
- 14 The National Defense Commission of the DPRK says the U.S. should stop at once its groundless "human rights" racket against the DPRK.
- 15 The KCNA claims the situation prevailing on the Korean peninsula is so tense that a nuclear war may break out owing to the reckless war hysteria of U.S. imperialists.

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