

MONTHLY RECAP: NOVEMBER

KIM JONG IL'S HEALTH

November opened with the state-run North Korean media displaying newly released pictures of Kim Jong Il attending a soccer game between two army teams on November 2. More photos were released on November 5 as the media announced inspection of two military sites. A third outing in less than a week was reported on November 6, when Kim was said to have attended a classical music concert. Several other reports throughout the month of November, sometimes accompanied by pictures, claimed that Kim had visited military and cultural festivals, as well as several factory visits. Neither the authenticity nor date of the photographs has been determined. Kim has not been seen by any outsiders attending a public event since August 14. His absence from ceremonies marking several major anniversaries in the North, as well as the latest absence from the funeral of the last first-generation revolutionary Pak Sung-chol the last week of October, have led many observers to speculate that he has suffered a stroke and has not fully recovered. Over 30 pictures were released of Kim Jong Il on November 25, and in none of them was his left hand not in his jacket pocket, something some point to as evidence of a stroke.

On November 5, it was reported that French brain surgeon Francois-Xavier Roux admitted he had visited Pyongyang in October, recanting his previous denial of rumors he had not traveled to North Korea. He stated that he had traveled to the North to “check hospital data” and did not treat anyone, according to Fuji Television Network Inc.

DPRK LEADERSHIP

It was reported on November 8 that South Korean intelligence sources believe that 62-year old director of the North's secret police Chang Sung Taek, husband of Kim Jong Il's younger sister Kim Kyong Hui, is in charge of daily operations of the North Korean government while Kim Jong Il recovers from a stroke. Choi Jin Wook, spokesperson for the Korea Institute for National Unification, believes North Korea appears to be functioning normally under Chang.

U.S.-DPRK RELATIONS

A forum organized by the (U.S.) National Committee on American Foreign Policy November 6-7 was attended by Sung Kim, U.S. special envoy to the six-party talks, Ri Gun, DPRK director for North American affairs, former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, Frank Jannuzi, President-elect Obama's foreign policy adviser, and other officials. During the talks, North Korean participants stated that they wished to maintain "the momentum" over the next three months of transition to an Obama administration. Some in the U.S. are pushing for Kissinger to be sent to the North as a special envoy soon after the new government takes office.

DPRK-PRC RELATIONS

It was reported on November 13 that China continues to increase the number of soldiers guarding the PRC-DPRK border, and are putting up addition fencing and border patrol installations "to prepare for any possible influx of refugees due to instability or regime change in North Korea," as rumors surrounding the health of Kim Jong Il continue.

Chinese travel agents report that since the end of October, the PRC-DPRK border has been closed to tourists, with those wishing to visit the North required to fly from Shenyang. Train traffic is still running, with four trains weekly entering North Korea, but one Chinese travel agent stated that they generally do not carry any passengers, and are strictly for freight.

DPRK-PRC TRADE

It was reported on November 3 that Chinese companies that purchase ores and minerals from the North are no longer willing to pay previous prices, forcing some DPRK mines to temporarily shut down, and causing a drop-off in smuggling.

On the other hand, it was reported on November 12 that overall trade between North Korea and China's Yenben was up 83 percent from last year, totaling 334,320,000 USD from January to September this year.

On November 26, it was reported that North Korea was in the process of accelerating development projects in Sinuiju in an effort to turn it into an economic zone attractive to Chinese investors

INTER-KOREAN COOPERATION

A delegation from the DPRK National Defense Commission inspected the Kaesong Industrial Complex on November 6, and repeatedly asked South Korean factory managers how long it would take for them to cease operations and evacuate the complex. Lieutenant General Kim Yong-Chol would give no reason for the inspection or questions, stating, "I have no authority over this issue. The decision has already been made."

The DPRK announced on November 12 plans to "restrict and cut off all overland passages" and cut telephone lines between the two Koreas, including the nine military hotlines, beginning in December. The DPRK Red Cross also announced it would shut down its liaison office within the DMZ and cut off all phone connections with Panmunjom.

Seoul responded by sending a message to the North on November 14, stating that it was trying to put a halt to the sending of leaflets by private organizations, and that it wants to promote joint business projects. Seoul also proposed talks to ease tensions between the two, but North Korea rejected the proposal as "nothing more than wordplay", and said the South must halt military exercises.

An opposition-party Democratic Labor Party delegation traveled to Pyongyang on November 15. Upon their return, delegation members reported that the atmosphere in the North was more serious than expected, and said that President Lee Myung-bak should shift his DPRK policy in order to repair relations with Pyongyang.

On November 18, the South Korean government announced plans to provide over 10 billion won to five inter-Korean projects, including industrial, farming, and medical ventures.

A joint study on the ecosystem, forests, and cultural properties within the Demilitarized Zone between the two Koreas was launched on November 10. The first study, completed on November 15, found 180 species, 13 of which were either national treasures or rare varieties in the western regions of the DMZ. The study will examine all parts of the DMZ through 2010.

ANTI-DPRK LEAFLETS

The South Korean group Fighters for Free DPRK stated they would continue to send leaflets to the North, including 100,000 on November 5, “no matter how Kim Jong Il rants, no matter how the [South Korean] government is cowed with fear.” Another 100,000 leaflets were sent to the North in 10 helium balloons, some accompanied with U.S. and Chinese currency.

DMZ BORDER CLOSURE ANNOUNCED

Following earlier warnings of tightened border crossings and veiled threats of KIC closure, the head of a DPRK delegation to the inter-Korean military talks announced on November 24 that up to 50 percent of ROK personnel in the KIC and at the Mt. Kumgang tourist resort area would be expelled, overland passages through the DMZ would be closed, all tours of Kaesong would be suspended, and train service between North and South would be halted, to begin on December 1. He added that production operations in the KIC would be protected, and that South Korean civic groups would need to provide their aid by ship when possible. This year alone, 21 ships have sailed between Busan and Rajin.

DPRK HUMAN RIGHTS RESOLUTION

The annual UN resolution condemning the North’s human rights abuses was co-sponsored this month by South Korea, for the first time ever. The UN General Assembly approved the resolution on November 21 by a vote of 95 to 24, with 62 nations abstaining.

Japan also worked with the European Union to draft a resolution on DPRK human rights to be presented to the 63rd UN General Assembly, in December.

ROK THOUGHTS ON REUNIFICATION

According to survey results published on November 13, out of 1,017 South Koreans over the age of 19 questioned by the Hyundai Research Institute, while 73.1 percent of respondents were ‘interested’ in unification, 61.1 percent thought unification ‘would take more than 10 years’, while another 22.8 percent answered that unification was ‘absolutely impossible’. Most South Koreans were unconcerned about the cost of unifying, as 30.4 percent felt that if unification occurred, it would cause no financial burden, while another 24 percent thought the burden would be less than 15 USD annually, per person. Respondents were evenly divided on the Lee Myung-

bak administration's policies and the outlook for inter-Korean relations, with 50.2 percent responding that the current tensions needed to be relieved, while 49.8 percent said that there was no need to concede to the North if it did not show any signs of change. 52.6 percent were optimistic about inter-Korean relations next year, while 47.7 percent were pessimistic.

DPRK DENUCLEARIZATION EFFORTS

North Korea has slowed disablement projects in Yongbyon, complaining about delays in the delivery of promised energy assistance. The number of fuel rods being extracted daily from its key nuclear reactor is now 15, down from 30 per day last month. More than 60 percent of the rods have been removed. Of the 1 million tons of aid promised through 6-party Talks, more than half has been provided, with the U.S. providing an additional 50,000 tons of oil during November.

Pyongyang indicated on November 12 that it would not allow international nuclear inspectors to remove nuclear samples from inspection sites. A DPRK Foreign Ministry spokesperson said, "The method of verification will be...confined to field visit(s)," as the understanding agreed upon by the U.S. and DPRK does not state that samples can exit the country, but rather, only that "sampling and forensic activities" were allowed. U.S. State Department Robert Wood rejected the North's assertions, stating, "If you remember the understanding, understandings on verification that were issued last month...it was basically agreed that experts could take samples and remove them from the country for testing."

On November 19, Yonhap News reported that North Korea has agreed to allow international inspectors to remove samples from the country, but only after the denuclearization process enters the next phase. On November 24, the North's official media outlet repeated the North's position that sampling would not be allowed, stating, "The U.S.-DPRK agreement includes no paragraph referring to the collection of samples," and accusing the U.S. of completely denying the October agreement between the two.

DPRK PROLIFERATION EFFORTS

It was reported on November 2 that the United States had requested that India deny permission for a DPRK jet to fly over Indian airspace in early August, successfully preventing the plane from delivering its cargo to its destination in Iran. The request was made in relation to the U.S.

Proliferation Security Initiative, which would only be applicable if the airliner was suspected of transporting nuclear materials, long-range missile components, or other threatening materials, according to officials involved in the issue.

DPRK MISSILE BASE CONSTRUCTION

North Korea is reportedly constructing a new missile base near the border shared with China that is larger than existing bases and is thought to be for launching intercontinental ballistic missiles. The South Korean defense minister, Lee Sang-hee, testified to parliament that the base was 80 percent complete.

DPRK DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

As the United States began last month to recruit alternative suppliers for Japan's share of energy aid promised to North Korea during 6-party Talks, North Korean Foreign Ministry researcher Ri Pyong Dok spoke on November 2, stating the North Korean position that "as long as 1 million tons are ensured, it does not matter who gives it to us," reaffirming the North's ambitions of excluding Japan from the talks.

It was reported on November 19 that North Korea has been receiving aid for wind-generated electrical production from the Campus fur Chritus Switzerland. 300W and 2KW trial generators have been in operation in the North Hwanghae province since last year, utilizing the latest in European technology. The report announced that all of the project's goals had been successfully met, and the project would be expanded into other provinces next year.

25,000 tons of food aid from five U.S. NGOs reached the North Korean port of Nampo on November 19.

It was announced on November 20 that the Kuwaiti government has offered 21.7 million USD in aid to the North through its Kuwait Arab Development Fund. The money is to be spent on improving medical facilities in Pyongyang.

DPRK-MYANMAR VISA EXEMPTION

North Korea and Myanmar announced an agreement on November 11 that would allow diplomatic and other government officials visa-free travel between the two countries. The two countries established friendly relations in 1975, but these were frozen after the October 1983 Rangoon bombing by North Korean agents targeting a South Korean presidential delegation, not to be re-established until April of this year.