

The First “Rason International Product Exhibition” to be Held in Rajin-Sonbong Special Economic Zone

Rajin-Sonbong or “Rason Special Economic Zone” is a co-development project developed by North Korea and China. The Rason SEZ International Product Exhibition is scheduled to take place from August 22nd to 25th -- an exhibition targeted to attract foreign investors to the region.

According to the KCNA article released on August 14, “The exhibition will display a wide array of items from various countries including vehicles, pharmaceutical and clothing products.” It was said that the exhibition promises be an important event to encourage cooperation and exchange with various countries in trade, economic and science, and technology sectors.

This event is expected to not only bring Chinese but also European and other foreign companies into the economic zone, pushing investment into the area.

There is also talk of developing Rason into an international tourism zone to attract tourists from China, Russia, and Japan.

After the closing ceremony of the exhibition, visits to Rajin Harbor, Mangyongbong ferry, and the amusement park are scheduled in order to provide sightseeing tours for the participants to the exhibition.

Mangyongbong ferry, well-known in the past for transporting North Koreans living in Japan back to North Korea, is gaining special attention itself as a new tourist attraction. This cargo-passenger ferry is expected to be utilized further for tourism in the near future, including bringing Chinese tourists from Dairen and other harbors in China to Nampo Harbor close to Pyongyang.

In the late 1950s, Mangyongbong ferry began to shuttle North Koreans in Japan from Niigata Harbor to Wonsan Harbor near Pyongyang. From 1984, it was used to transport cargo into Japan, but this was halted in 2006 due to economic sanctions against North Korea which followed in response to North Korea’s missile and nuclear tests.

There are two ferries in North Korea with the name Mangyongbong. The Mangyongbong-92 will be introduced in Rajin Harbor to maximize the demonstration effect. The Mangyongbong, weighing 3,500 tons, is much smaller and older and inadequate to be used as a ferry.

The Mangyongbong-92 was built in 1992 to commemorate the 80th birthday of Kim Il Sung. The ship was built with funds collected from Chongryon (i.e., the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan). It was estimated to cost over 4 billion JPY at the time, weighing about 9,700 ton with a capacity to hold 350 passengers.

On another note, the fourteenth annual Pyongyang Spring International Product Exhibition held this May hosted over 280 companies from 10 countries. 100 Chinese companies participated in the exhibition. Since then, Chinese corporations from Liaoning and Dandong are reported to have placed contract orders worth 800,000 USD.