

10/Sept./2008 NHK S. Korea: Kim Jong Il may be ill

South Korea is hastily collecting information on North Korean leader Kim Jong Il after he failed to attend Tuesday's national celebration.

South Korean government sources say that Kim may be ill.

They point out that the North Korean leader, who had attended the 50th and 55th anniversaries, did not make any public appearances during a series of large-scale rehearsals of the celebration and related events. They add that there have been no reports about the leader over the past month.

On Tuesday, a South Korean newspaper, Chosun Ilbo, quoted diplomatic sources as saying that Kim collapsed on August 22nd.

But other South Korean sources say they have not been able to confirm this. There are also unconfirmed reports that Kim is suffering from worsening diabetes and heart disease, and that 5 Chinese medical doctors recently visited North Korea.

The sources stress that they cannot confirm or deny any information about the state of Kim's health because there have been similar cases in the past. ###

10/Sept./2008 NHK US official: Kim Jong Il may be seriously ill

A US government official told NHK in Washington on Tuesday that North Korean leader Kim Jong Il may be seriously ill.

The official said it is possible that the North Korean leader has suffered a stroke and he may have collapsed last month.

The official added that it's too early to comment on the future of the six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear development and US-North Korean relations.

He said he will carefully watch the developments in North Korea. ###

10/Sept./2008 AP N. Korea denies leader Kim is ill

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) \_ North Korea denied Wednesday that leader Kim Jong Il is seriously ill, granting a foreign news outlet rare interviews with top officials who dismissed reports questioning Kim's health following his absence from a key ceremony.

Speculation has intensified that Kim may have taken ill after he missed a parade Tuesday commemorating the communist state's founding 60 years ago.

That followed weeks of absence from public view and rumors that foreign doctors were brought in to the isolated nation to possibly treat him.

On Wednesday, North Korea's No. 2 leader and ceremonial head of state, Kim Yong Nam, said there is "no problem" with the supreme leader, and senior diplomat Song Il Ho also said reports about Kim Jong Il's health are "not true," according to Japan's Kyodo News agency.

"We see such reports as not only worthless, but rather as a conspiracy plot," Song told Kyodo in what the agency said was North Korea's first reaction to the reports. "Western media have reported falsehoods before," he said, according to the report from Pyongyang.

It was not the first time North Korea sent a message to the outside world through Kyodo. Kim Yong Nam also gave the news organization an interview two days after North Korea carried out its first-ever nuclear test blast in 2006.

In another indication that the North's leader is alive, Pyongyang's official Korean Central News Agency said Kim sent a birthday greeting Wednesday to Syria's leader.

Kim wished Syrian President Bashar Assad good health and success in efforts to make the country secure and prosperous, according to the Korean-language message carried by KCNA.

News of Kim's possible illness made front-page headlines in South Korean newspapers.

South Korean government officials could not immediately confirm the reports, but South Korean President Lee Myung-bak convened an emergency meeting Wednesday in Seoul to discuss the situation with senior aides, an official at the presidential Blue House said.

Lee's office said in a statement after the meeting that the government will continue to follow the situation closely. It said Seoul had predicted the North's leader may not attend Tuesday's event, but did not elaborate.

Seoul's Defense Ministry said there has been no unusual movement in North Korea's military and the heavily armed border between the two sides remained calm.

North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency devoted its coverage to stories celebrating the country's founding anniversary and gave no hint of Kim's condition. It is considered an absolute taboo for state media to discuss the North Korean leader's health in the totalitarian nation where he is revered almost as a demigod.

Unification Minister Kim Ha-joong told a parliamentary committee that Seoul had confirmed the North's leader did not attend Tuesday's ceremony marking the country's 1948 foundation. But he noted Seoul had not verified media reports about Kim's health. Yonhap cited an unidentified South Korean government official as saying Kim appeared to have "collapsed," a term that in the Korean language is used when a person becomes suddenly ill. But the official stressed it was certain that Kim has not died, Yonhap said.

Yonhap reported later in the day, also citing an unnamed South Korean government official, that Kim recently underwent surgery for a stroke, but that his condition was not serious enough to be life-threatening. Officials said they could not confirm the report.

Investors shrugged off the speculation about Kim's health.

Seoul's benchmark stock index closed 0.7 percent higher after declining 1.7 percent in early trading.

Speculation over Kim's condition spiked Tuesday after he did not appear at a parade commemorating North Korea's founding 60 years ago, one of the country's most celebrated holidays along with the birthdays of Kim and his late father, Kim Il Sung, the country's founding leader.

The 66-year-old Kim, who has been rumored to be in varying degrees of ill health for years, took over the reclusive state upon the death of his father 14 years ago in a hereditary transfer of power. The younger Kim attended the parade on the 50th and 55<sup>th</sup> anniversaries and was widely expected to do so this year as well.

Since late 2002, North Korea has been locked in a standoff with the United States over its nuclear ambitions.

The country carried out its first nuclear test in 2006, but agreed last year to disable its nuclear facilities in exchange for economic aid and political concessions.

The negotiations, however, hit a snag again recently with the two sides at odds over how to verify North Korea's accounting of its nuclear programs. Washington has delayed its promised removal of Pyongyang from the U.S. terrorism blacklist.

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10/Sept./2008     NHK     S. Korea holds emergency meeting on Kim's health

South Korean President Lee Myung Bak has convened an emergency meeting of his senior secretaries as speculation mounts that North Korean leader Kim Jong Il may be seriously ill.

The meeting was on Wednesday, the day after Kim failed to appear in public for a parade marking the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the communist state.

Details of the meeting have not been disclosed, but President Lee is said to have instructed his aides to analyze intelligence concerning the North Korean leader and draft effective measures to deal with any situation.

A senior official in the President's Office told reporters that it seems something extraordinary is going on in the North, given the circumstances of the country's important 60th anniversary event on Tuesday.

On the other hand, South Korean Unification Minister Kim Ha Joong has told a parliamentary committee that the only fact confirmed so far is that Kim was absent from the parade. He said the government will keep a close watch on what's happening in the North. ###

10/Sept./2008     Reuters     North Korea's Kim is fine, his deputy says

SEOUL, Sept 10 (Reuters) - North Korean leader Kim Jong-il is not ill, a top official in the secretive state was quoted as saying on Wednesday, dismissing speculation of a possible power shift in the world's first communist dynasty.

Kim Jong-il, long-suspected of suffering chronic illnesses, was conspicuously absent from a parade on Tuesday to mark the 60th anniversary of the communist state. A U.S. intelligence official said the reclusive leader may have suffered a stroke.

"(There is) no problem," North Korea's nominal number two leader, Kim Yong-nam, told Japan's Kyodo news agency in Pyongyang.

Senior North Korean diplomat Song Il-ho told Kyodo earlier:

"We see such reports as not only worthless, but rather as a conspiracy plot."

If Kim does take a turn for the worse, it would open the possibility of the first serious power vacuum in a state that has repeatedly threatened to reduce its wealthy southern neighbor to ashes, test-fired missiles toward Japan and worked on building a nuclear arsenal to hold off the U.S. army.

South Korean President Lee Myung-bak called a hurried meeting with senior aides to discuss the North. His unification minister told a parliament committee there was no confirmation of any of the reports on Kim's health.

Analysts cautioned against reading too much into the public appearances of Kim, who can drop out of sight for months and then show up for inspection tours of a military base or a duck farm.

South Korean markets, used to speculation about the secretive state, gave a muted response to the reports of Kim's illness, with the main stock index mostly unchanged in early trading. But investors said the news reminded them of the country's risks.

"If Kim is indeed gravely ill or even worse, dead, this cannot be good for the market in the short-term, as political instability and uncertainties on the North will heighten South Korea's geopolitical risks," said Lee Kyoung-su of Taurus Investment & Securities. Studies have indicated it could cost South Korea hundreds of billions of dollars to absorb the destitute North due to its threadbare infrastructure, sparking worries a sudden collapse could wreck Asia's fourth-largest economy.

#### NUCLEAR DEALINGS

Kim's absence from the anniversary parade came just as the impoverished communist state appeared to be backing away from a deal with major powers on scrapping its nuclear programme in exchange for aid and an end to its international ostracism.

"In North Korea or China national anniversaries, especially the 10-year anniversaries, are big events, and for him not to appear suggests something is wrong," said Cai Jian, an expert on Korea at Fudan University in Shanghai.

Analysts speculated that if Kim were incapacitated, it would be nearly impossible for the stalled talks to move forward.

Kim's health and the person in line to succeed him are two of the most closely guarded secrets in the paranoid state. South Korea said in a 2006 intelligence report that if Kim died, it expected the North Korean government to lapse into a brief coma and then hunker down with top military officials later battling for power, perhaps in partnership with one of Kim's three known sons.

Kim has not been seen as directly grooming any of his sons to take control.

Kim himself was anointed successor by his father and state founder, Kim Il-sung, well before he took over after his father's death in 1994. ###

10/Sept./2008 Reuters Possible successors to North Korea's Kim  
North Korean leader Kim Jong-il has collapsed and is ill, a South Korean official said on Wednesday, and a U.S. official said he may have suffered a stroke.

Following are profiles of some possible successors to the reclusive leader, who at 66 is known to suffer from diabetes and heart problems and has been the subject of persistent rumours about his health.

#### THE THREE SONS

Jong-chol is the second oldest of Kim's three known sons and believed to be 26. Educated in Switzerland, he is thought to be suffering from a hormonal disorder but is considered to be the favourite to succeed his father. Despite the lack of any formal grooming for the top job, one North Korea expert said

Jong-chol has been accompanying his father on official trips around the country.

Jong-nam, 37, is the oldest but many believe he has fallen from grace for trying to enter Japan with a forged passport.

The youngest, Jong-un, born in 1983, is often cited as the most promising but is seen as unlikely to be picked in a society where the tradition of seniority is so strong.

#### BROTHER-IN-LAW

Jang Song-taek, 62, is the husband of Kim's sister and a ruling Workers' Party official who appeared to lose favour some years ago in a power struggle with reformers. But more recently, he returned to the inner leadership circle and is often seen as the second-most powerful man after Kim in the ruling party structure, though he officially holds only a relatively low rank.

#### HEAD OF STATE

Kim Yong-nam, 80, is the head of the North Korean parliament's leadership council and is the country's nominal head of state. While a long-time loyal party member and a former foreign minister, he is not thought to have the legitimacy rooted in the North's revolutionary history, seen as necessary to become leader. If he did succeed Kim, it would likely be as a figurehead.

#### THE GENERALS

Jo Myong-rok is the head of the powerful Political Department of the North's army and Kim's number two in the National Defence Commission. But he, too, is believed to be in poor health.

Another general, O Kuk-ryol, was named in a 2006 report by the South's intelligence agency as a younger and more likely successor to Kim's military post. The report said he appeared to be a reliable figure who is familiar with South Korea. ###

REUTERS