

N. Korean Dictator Exposes Youth Causing Government Troubles

Tsutomu Nishioka

North Korea's Kim Jong-un regime appears to go astray. While the dictatorship system has been maintained, the dictator's very inferior governance has caused various government troubles over the past year.

Reckless missile launch plan amid fierce cold

Among the troubles is the recent stumbling missile launch plan. On December 1, North Korea warned that what it claimed was a satellite would be launched between December 10 and 22. On December 8, however, the North Korean Committee of Space Technology in a statement announced that scientists were seriously examining the issue of readjusting the launching time for the satellite for some reasons, indicating that the launch could be postponed. This may be because the launch is well expected to fail due to some technical problems.

The plan to launch the satellite amid fierce cold is unreasonable. Only eight months have passed since North Korea failed in launching a missile even under a mild weather in April. The period of eight months is too short for North Korea to identify factors behind the failure and find solutions. Nevertheless, North Korea selected a cold weather season where it has never launched missiles. This may be because Kim Jong-un instructed competent government agencies to successfully launch a missile on the death anniversary for his father Kim Joing-il in December after the failed missile launch plan timed to meet the death anniversary of his grandfather Kim Il-sung. Therefore, the young Kim has publicized the missile launch as an instruction of his father. If the plan is cancelled, it may represent Kim Jong-un's misjudgment.

N. Korea aborts efforts for Japan and the South

On the other hand, Kim Jong-un had proceeded with behind-the-scene negotiations with Japan's Noda administration, planning to hold the year's second government-to-government talks with Japan in Beijing on December 5-6. I have been informed that the Noda administration

had been willing to take advantage of progress in negotiations over the North's past abduction of Japanese citizens to recover its popularity ratings toward the December 16 general election and asking the North Koreans to pledge a new search on abductees at the Beijing talks to be held during the election campaigns. In return, the Noda administration could have made major concessions binding the next Japanese government.

Meanwhile in South Korea's presidential election campaigns, pro-Pyongyang leftist candidate Moon Jae-in had been fairly competing with Park Geun-hye, a candidate from the ruling Saenuri Party.

The missile launch warning has led the Japan-North Korea talks to be postponed and stimulated conservatism in South Korea to help Park. The warning has worked to abort efforts of the North Korean Workers' Party Unified Front Department to improve relations with Japan and South Korea. If the missile launch is postponed, the trouble may deepen.

Just after Kim Jong-il died last December, Free North Korea Radio founder Kim Song-min, a leader of defectors from North Korea, said: "North Korea will make the transition to the Kim Jong-un dictatorial regime as the personal dictatorship system created by Kim Jong-il is firm and unlikely to break down soon. But Kim Jong-un is too young and inexperienced to become a dictator for the system where he must make decisions by himself on all matters. Contradictory decisions will emerge, confusing the government. Our challenge is how to take advantage of such mistakes."

Developments in the past year precisely met predictions by Kim Song-min. After North Korea reached agreement with the United States on food aid in February, its missile launch warning before the arrival of food aid led the agreement to be nullified. In addition to failing to receive food, North Korea failed in launching the missile. Later, Pyongyang cursed out South Korean President Lee Myung-bak, media organizations and others, threatening to launch terrorist attacks. But it failed to do anything. In North Korea, rice and corn production plunged on a drought this year, leading black market food prices to double from the previous year. A massive starvation is said to be possible next spring.

The Kim Jong-un regime may continue to make mistakes and

weaken. The situation has grown more fluid. Japan's next government will have to develop a strategy against North Korea with a sense of tension.

Tsutomu Nishioka is Planning Committee Member, Japan Institute for National Fundamentals, and Professor at Tokyo Christian University.