

North Korea hails nuclear, military feats of Kim Jong-il
Reuters
December 29, 2011

SEOUL, Dec 29 — North Korea lauded the military might built up by deceased leader Kim Jong-il today, likely tying his young successor to the same policies that have set Northeast Asia on edge as the impoverished state inches closer to nuclear weapons capability.

A gathering of 100,000, soldiers in uniform and bare-headed civilians, gathered in silence in wintry sunlight in the capital Pyongyang to mourn the passing of the man who had led the country for 17 years until his death on December 17.

Kim Jong-un, a jowly man in his late 20s who will become the third of his line to lead North Korea, took centre stage overlooking the central square named after his grandfather to listen to tributes to the "great revolutionary".

"Great Leader Kim Jong-il ... laid the foundation for our people to live on as autonomous people of a world-class military power and a proud nuclear state," parliament chief Kim Yong-nam said in the eulogy.

The North has conducted two nuclear tests.

Larry Nicksch, who has tracked North Korea for the non-partisan US Congressional Research Service for 43 years, believes it could take as little as one to two years to have a working nuclear missile once it produced enough highly-enriched uranium for the warhead's core fuel.

That could threaten regional security and give the North a powerful bargaining tool in extracting aid for its economy.

North Korea's state television footage showed the young Kim flanked to his right by the country's top military general Ri Yong-ho on the balcony of the Grand People's Study House. Also nearby him were Defence Minister Kim Yong-chun, and his uncle and the key power-broker in the transition, Jang Song-thaek.

Jang, 65, is believed to be the regent heading a select group of caretakers, as the brother-in-law of Kim Jong-il who survived purges to become his closest confidant who oversaw the power succession before his death of a heart attack.

He stood behind the younger Kim in yesterday's mass funeral parade, escorting the hearse carrying the coffin.

Solemn and grimacing, the younger Kim, believed to be born in early 1984, stood motionless throughout the ceremony. He only came to the forefront of the North's dynastic succession last year by taking on key military and ruling party posts.

"Comrade Kim Jong-un is the highest leader of the party and people who takes on Great Leader Kim Jong-il's philosophy and leadership, personality and morals, courage and audacity," Kim Yong-nam said.

Cruel and cunning enough to succeed?

Mourners, their heads bowed as the ceremony concluded, spilled over to both sides of the Taedong River as temperatures stood at about minus 10 degrees Celsius. Boats moored on the river and trains in their yards blew their whistles for three minutes to mourn Kim Jong-il's passing.

The eulogies were short on boasts about economic achievements from a strongman who used his Songun, or "military first," policy to divert resources to build a conventional and weapons of mass destruction programme.

The North's economic output is now smaller than in the 1990s under the rule of his father Kim Il-sung, who founded the state in 1948, and it has been squeezed harder under international sanctions for its missile and nuclear tests.

Gyorgy Tolaraya, a Russian expert who is Director of Korean Programs at the Institute of Economy at the Russian Academy of Sciences, who met Kim Jong-il for the first time in 2000 described him as "fast and witty and having "a remarkable memory" on any subject.

"...one exclusion might be modern economics, in which he, it seemed, was not so very interested, regarding it just as a tool for rich Westerners to extract profits from their fellow compatriots and poor countries," Tolaraya wrote on 38North, a website published by the US-Korea Institute at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies.

Most Korea-watchers do not expect the North to stage a repeat of the attacks it undertook in 2010 when it killed South Korean civilians with an artillery barrage and, according to most observers, sank a South Korean naval vessel. It denied sinking the vessel and says it was provoked into the barrage.

It may take Kim Jong-un some months to assume the full panoply of official titles held by his father.

"The real question is whether the new Kim has the cruelty and cunning, qualities that his father and grandfather Kim Il-sung possessed in plenty, to preserve in the long run the essential engine of the destitute dynasty he inherits," wrote Sung-Yoon Lee of Tufts University, a leading North Korea watcher. — Reuters

The Malaysian Insider

Copyright© 2011 The Malaysian Insider

Source: <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/world/article/north-korea-hails-nuclear-military-feats-of-kim-jong-il/>