

North Korea to top agenda at Lee-Hu summit in China
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SEOUL, Jan 8 — South Korean President Lee Myung-bak will this week ask China to use its influence to lean on North Korea to show restraint amid a delicate transition to a new leadership in Pyongyang focused on projecting a militaristic image.

Lee will hold a summit with China's president, Hu Jintao, in Beijing and will "discuss ways to develop the strategic partnership between the two nations and cooperative measures for peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula", the South Korean president's office said in a statement.

Lee's three-day state trip to China, his second in four years, starts tomorrow.

The South has said its primary foreign policy goal this year is maintaining stability on the divided peninsula as its unpredictable neighbour embarks on a third generation of dynastic rule following Kim Jong-il's death last month.

Little is known about Kim's chosen successor, his son Kim Jong-un, who in his late 20s and who will be relying on a small circle of trusted members of the military and political elite to act as minders while he cements his grip on power.

Kim Jong-un inspects an armoured vehicle in this undated still image taken from video at an unknown location in North Korea, released by North Korean state TV KRT on January 8, 2012. — Reuters/KRT pic

As part of efforts to consolidate his power, state television in Pyongyang released a documentary today containing footage of the young Kim watching a 2009 long-range rocket launch with his father. He was also shown driving a tank.

The 50-minute documentary, aired on what South Korean media speculated was Kim Jong-un's birthday, offered no new personal details or insights into his thinking.

Analysts say the young Kim may order a "provocation", such as a small-scale military attack or nuclear or missile test, to burnish a hardline image with the powerful military.

In line with his push to project a songun, or military-first, policy, the documentary today quoted Kim Jong-un as saying he was determined to wage war if any enemies intercepted the 2009 rocket launch.

Over the past week, the North, which has twice tested nuclear devices, has also stepped up its use of hostile language against the South.

Both South Korea and the United States have urged China, the North's main ally and benefactor, to help restrain the new leadership from staging any hostile acts.

China voiced its support for the North's new leadership soon after Kim's death was announced.

South Korea's ambassador to China, Lee Kyu-hyung, said last week that the South would continue to raise the issue of China's unwillingness to condemn North Korea when it

provokes the South.

'Problematic'

In 2010, South Korea criticised China for refusing to censure North Korea for torpedoing a South Korean warship, killing 46 sailors. The North denied it sank the vessel.

"It is problematic because China has appeared to take an attitude of protection and support for North Korea, while the North sometimes makes military provocations and implements some incorrect policies," ambassador Lee Kyu-hyung told the South's Yonhap news agency.

South Korea would "continue to raise the issue and make efforts to persuade" China to change that attitude, he said.

China backed North Korea during the 1950-53 Korean War while the United States fought for the South. The United States still has about 28,000 troops in South Korea.

Lee and Hu are also expected to discuss how the two nations will push preliminary talks to launch formal negotiations for a free trade agreement.

Since 2008, South Korea and China have held a series of joint feasibility studies on a possible free trade deal, and reached an agreement to exchange their views on sensitive issues.

The two leaders will also discuss the rising number of Chinese fishing boats caught illegally fishing off South Korea's west coast. Last December, a South Korean coastguard was killed while trying to apprehend a Chinese vessel. — Reuters

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