

# AP



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A submarine-launched “Pukguksong” missile is displayed in Kim Il Sung Square in Pyongyang,

## REPUBLIC OF KIM

ASSOCIATED PRESS STAFF



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Missiles believed to be the Pukguksong 2 are displayed in Kim Il Sung Square in Pyongyang, North Korea. The Pukguksong 2 uses solid fuel, which means it can be hidden and ready for rapid launch.

# A new balance of terror: Why North Korea clings to its nukes

By ERIC TALMADGE

Associated Press

PYONGYANG, North Korea (AP) — Early one winter morning, Kim Jong Un stood at a remote observation post overlooking a valley of rice paddies near the Chinese border.

The North Korean leader beamed with delight as he watched four extended range Scud missiles roar off their mobile launchers, comparing the sight to a team of acrobats performing in unison. Minutes later the projectiles splashed into the sea off the Japanese coast, 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) from where

<https://apnews.com/f3cdf8f726084d13b33f09a5bd1845d0/A-new-balance-of-terror:-Why-North-Korea-clings-to-its-nukes>

he was standing.

It was an unprecedented event. North Korea had just run its first simulated nuclear attack on an American military base.

This scene from March 6, described in government propaganda, shows how the North's seemingly crazy, suicidal nuclear program is neither crazy nor suicidal. Rather, this is North Korea's very deliberate strategy to ensure the survival of its ruling regime.

Back in the days of Kim Il Sung, North Korea's "eternal president" and Kim Jong Un's grandfather, the ruling regime decided it needed two things to survive: reliable, long-range missiles and small, but potent, nuclear warheads. For a small and relatively poor country, that was, indeed, a distant and ambitious goal. But it detonated its first nuclear device on Oct. 9, 2006.

Today, North Korea is testing advanced ballistic missiles faster than ever — a record 24 last year and three in just the past month. With each missile and each nuclear device, it becomes a better equipped, better trained and better prepared adversary. Some experts believe it might be able to build a missile advanced enough to reach the United States' mainland with a nuclear warhead in two to three years.

So forget, for the moment, how erratic Kim Jong Un and his generals



Korean Central News Agency/Korea News Service via AP

**In this March 6, 2017, photo distributed by the North Korean government, leader Kim Jong Un, center, watches the launching of Scud missiles in Tongchang-ri in North Pyongan Province, North Korea.**

may seem. North Korea conducted two nuclear tests last year; one was of the strongest nuclear device it has ever detonated and the other, Pyongyang claims, of its first H-bomb. The U.S. for its part is also escalating — in an explicit warning to Pyongyang, it successfully shot a target ICBM launched from a Pacific island out of the sky with a California-based interceptor missile on Tuesday.

## *For Pyongyang, forcing Washington to seriously weigh that calamity is a win.*

The question is this: if war breaks out and North Korea launches a pre-emptive nuclear strike on an American military base in Japan — for real — would the U.S. recoil and retreat? Would it strike back, and risk losing Washington DC in a second wave of nuclear attacks?

For Pyongyang, forcing Washington to seriously weigh that calamity is a win. And it may become a real-world possibility on President Donald Trump's watch.

### **RISING FROM THE RICE PADDIES**

The 7:36 a.m. launch on March 6 was conducted in North Pyongan Province near North Korea's Sohae Satellite Launching Center. It sent the four Scuds into the ocean 300 to 350 kilometers (185 to 220 miles) from the coast of Japan.

Reporting on it the next day, North Korea's Rodong Sinmun, the ruling party's newspaper, stated it was not a test to see if the missiles would work, but rather a "drill" to train the troops who will "strike the bases of the U.S. imperialist aggressor forces in Japan in a contingency."

To back that up, the North released several photos of Kim in a black overcoat holding a plastic pointer to a map laid out on a wooden table that showed the missiles' flight path and other data. Analyst Jeffrey Lewis and his colleagues at the Center for Nonproliferation Studies in Monterey, California, quickly realized the Scuds were on a trajectory that, with a simple southerly tweak, would have sent them raining down on Marine Corps Air Station, Iwakuni.

Iwakuni, located 50 kilometers (30 miles) southwest of Hiroshima on the southern tip of Japan's main island, is home to some 10,000 U.S. and Japanese personnel. It was used as a staging area during the 1950-53 Korean War, when it was called the "Gateway to Korea" by U.S. and U.N. forces, and continues to be one of the largest and most important U.S. military facilities in Japan.



Korean Central News Agency/Korea News Service via AP

**In this March 6, 2017, photo distributed by the North Korean government, four extended range Scud missiles lift off from their mobile launchers in Tongchang-ri in North Pyongan Province, North Korea.**

Such an attack wouldn't need to be nuclear to be effective. The deadly Sarin nerve agent or some other chemical weapon could also cause tremendous casualties. But training a nuclear attack on Iwakuni had a special psychological twist for those who follow the ceaseless military game of cat and mouse in the region. North Korea's media stressed Kim was accompanied at the launch by nuclear weapons specialists.

“Before the Iwakuni simulation strike, U.S. and South Korean forces were conducting joint military drills, which involved F-35s based out of Iwakuni,” said analyst David Schmerler, who works with Lewis. “As the U.S. and South Korea were practicing their military drills in the event of a conflict on the peninsula, the North Koreans, in turn, practiced their strike plans.”

The U.S.-South Korea drills reportedly included an F-35 stealth fighter “decapitation strike” on Kim Jong Un and his top lieutenants.

Kim, apparently, was practicing how to take them out first.

### **WHY THIS COULD ALL GO NUCLEAR: THREE SCENARIOS**

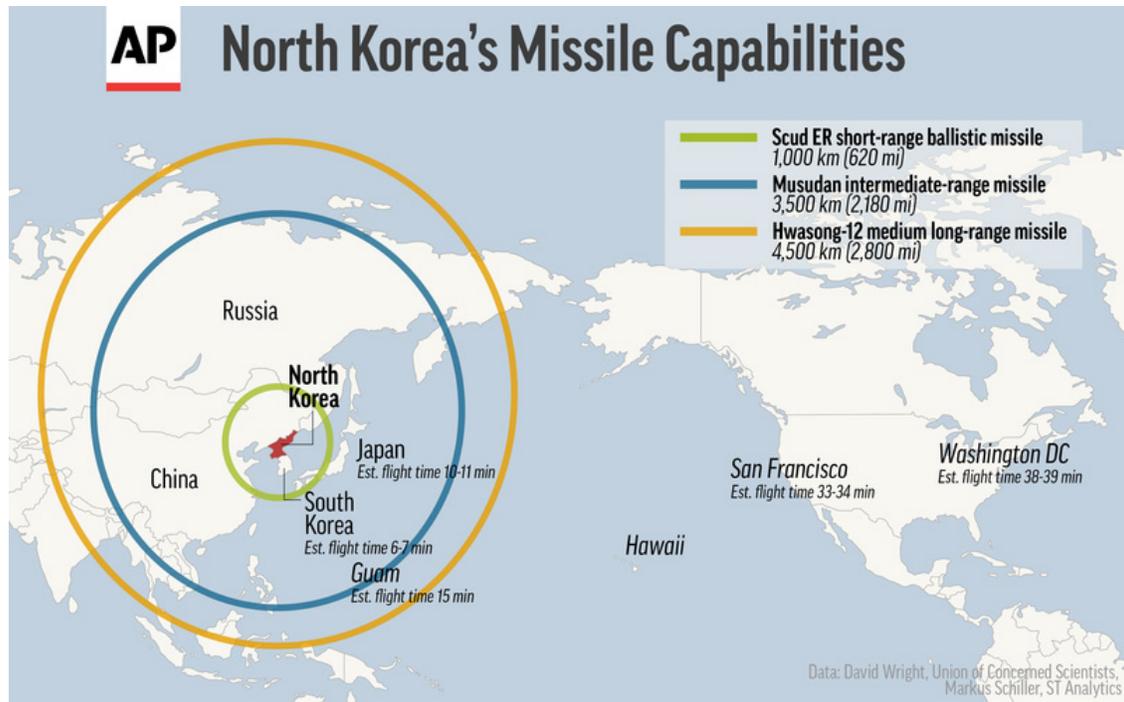
The Cold War concept of “mutually assured destruction” that kept the United States and the Soviet Union from attacking each other requires a “balance of terror” to encourage restraint: Once each side has attained a certain level of destructive power, neither will attack because they are convinced that

neither will survive.

North Korea doesn't have that assurance. If a war were to break out now, it could very well be destroyed. That's the way things have been for decades.

But here's where the urgency comes in for the United States and its allies. If North Korea succeeds in building nuclear-tipped ICBMs that can reach the U.S. mainland, the dynamic in a contingency would be highly volatile.

A nuclear-armed North Korea would have a strong incentive to go nuclear quickly and go nuclear first if it believed, correctly or not, that it was about to



be attacked. But that also would increase Washington's first-strike incentive, since it doesn't want its strategic advantage taken away by a surprise attack on its own cities or military bases.

So both sides have good reason to be trigger happy.

Bruce Bennett, a leading North Korea expert and senior defense analyst with the RAND Corporation, offers these possible scenarios:

— Consider a case in which North Korea has a stockpile of nuclear warheads and the ability to launch them from submarines or remote, hard-to-detect sites on land. Fearing an attack from the U.S., it launches a pre-emptive nuclear strike on the South Korean port of Busan, then tells the United States that if there is any nuclear retaliation, it will fire nuclear weapons at U.S. cities.

Would Donald Trump, or whoever follows him, back away? Would he risk losing Los Angeles, or Chicago, to defend America's allies?

— Or North Korea tries another ballistic missile launch like the one on

March 6. This time, just before the missiles hit the water near Japan, a nuclear weapon on one or more of the missiles detonates, downing a few commercial aircraft or sinking some cargo ships. This would convince the world that Kim Jong Un has a real nuclear arsenal and isn't shy about using it.

Would Trump react with a nuclear attack on North Korea?

— Now, picture war breaking out on the Korean Peninsula. North Korea, to convince the United States not to intervene, launches an ICBM that appears to be coming down short, well west of California. But on the way down it bursts in a nuclear explosion, possibly causing some damage to U.S. territory. Pyongyang then threatens more serious damage to the United States if there is any nuclear retaliation or U.S. intervention in the conflict.

Is the U.S. president going to risk millions of people dead and major cities destroyed?

“With the weight of history on his shoulders, how would a U.S. president respond?” Bennett asks. “How should he respond?”

### **GOOSE-STEPPING TO THE 'FINAL VICTORY'**

It's mid-morning on April 15, the “Day of the Sun,” the 105th anniversary of Kim Il Sung's birth.

Some 100,000 North Koreans are amassed in Kim Il Sung square waving



Wong Maye-E • AP

**Soldiers goose-step across Kim Il Sung Square in Pyongyang, North Korea, during a parade to celebrate the 105th birth anniversary of Kim Il Sung, the country's late founder and grandfather of current ruler Kim Jong Un.**

plastic bouquets and holding up lettered cards to create designs like the ruling party's hammer, sickle and brush logo when seen from the balcony of the Grand People's Study House. That's where Kim Jong Un is standing.

Kim watches as military units from each branch of his million-man armed forces goose-step by in what North Koreans like to call "single-minded unity." He then smiles and applauds at the most varied array of missiles and their transport vehicles the North has ever displayed.

The message of the parade, held before reporters from all over the world, is clear. North Korea is, or is near to being, able to launch a pre-emptive strike against a regional target. It is preparing to withstand a retaliatory follow-up attack if it does, and it is building the arsenal it needs to then launch a second wave of strikes, this time at the U.S. mainland.

*This vision of a new "balance of terror" built to its crescendo as six submarine-launched 'Pukguksong' missiles ... rumbled through the square.*

Unlike the Soviet Union, North Korea can't annihilate the United States. But if it can clear those three steps, it could conceivably destroy a major U.S. military base in the region or a city on the U.S. mainland.

This vision of a new "balance of terror" built to its crescendo as six submarine-launched "Pukguksong" missiles and their land-based cousin, the "Pukguksong 2," rumbled through the square.

Submarines are the ultimate stealth weapon, mobile and notoriously hard to find. North Korea is believed to have one experimental ballistic missile submarine, and this missile would go in its silos. The Pukguksong 2, meanwhile, represents advances on the ground. It uses solid fuel, which means it can be stored and hidden, is ready for rapid launch and fits on a transport vehicle that can be deployed off-road in rough terrain. Kim Jong Un has ordered it be mass produced.

The big reveal came next.

No one really knew what it was until, in its first flight test a month later on May 14, it was sent an astounding 2,111 kilometers (about 1,240 miles) in altitude — higher than satellites in low Earth orbit. It remained airborne for 30 minutes before plunging to the Pacific. With great fanfare, the North's media declared it the "perfect weapon system" capable of carrying a "large-size heavy nuclear warhead."

Many analysts believe the missile — which the North calls “Hwasong 12” — could be a stepping stone to the ICBM North Korea needs to attack the U.S. mainland. Kim Jong Un was on hand for its early morning launch, too. He hugged his elated rocket scientists and, according to his official media, claimed he can now hit the United States with an “all-powerful means for retaliatory strike.”

That is bravado. For now. The missile’s estimated striking range is 4,500 kilometers (2,800 miles), give or take.

But, put another way, it’s halfway to Chicago.

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*Talmadge has been the AP’s Pyongyang bureau chief since 2013. Follow him on Twitter at @EricTalmadge and on Instagram at erictalmadge.*

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Ng Han Guan • AP

Portraits of late North Korean leaders Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il hang on a wall as a woman stands in a room of a dormitory for workers with the seafood processing factory Hunchun Pagoda, in the city of Hunchun in northeastern China's Jilin province.

## NKorean workers prep seafood going to US stores, restaurants

By TIM SULLIVAN and HYUNG-JIN KIM and MARTHA MENDOZA

AP Writers

HUNCHUN, China (AP) — The workers wake up each morning on metal bunk beds in fluorescent-lit Chinese dormitories, North Koreans outsourced by their government to process seafood that ends up in American stores and homes.

Privacy is forbidden. They cannot leave their compounds without permission. They must take the few steps to the factories in pairs or groups, with North Korean minders ensuring no one strays. They have no access to telephones or email. And they are paid a fraction of their salaries, while the rest — as much as

<https://apnews.com/8b493b7df6e147e98d19f3abb5ca090a/NKorean-workers-prep-seafood-going-to-US-stores-restaurants>



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**A worker stacks crates at the Yanbian Shenghai Industry & Trade Co. Ltd., which hires some North Korean workers to process seafood in the city of Hunchun in northeastern China's Jilin province.**

70 percent — is taken by North Korea's government.

This means Americans buying salmon for dinner at Walmart or ALDI may inadvertently have subsidized the North Korean government as it builds its nuclear weapons program, an AP investigation has found. Their purchases may also have supported what the United States calls “modern day slavery” — even if the jobs are highly coveted by North Koreans.

At a time when North Korea faces sanctions on many exports, the government is sending tens of thousands of workers worldwide, bringing in revenue estimated at anywhere from \$200 million to \$500 million a year. That could account for a sizable portion of North Korea's nuclear weapons and missile programs, which South Korea says have cost more than \$1 billion.

While the presence of North Korean workers overseas has been documented, the AP investigation reveals for the first time that some products they make go to the United States, which is now a federal crime. AP also tracked the products made by North Korean workers to Canada, Germany and elsewhere in the European Union.

Besides seafood, AP found North Korean laborers making wood flooring and sewing garments in factories in Hunchun. Those industries also export to the U.S. from Hunchun, but AP did not track specific shipments except for seafood.

American companies are not allowed to import products made by North

Korean workers anywhere in the world, under a law signed by President Donald Trump in early August. Importers or company officials could face criminal charges for using North Korean workers or materially benefiting from their work, according to the law.

Every Western company involved that responded to AP's requests for comment said forced labor and potential support for North Korea's weapons program were unacceptable in their supply chains. Many said they were going to investigate, and some said they had already cut off ties with suppliers.

John Connelly, president of the National Fisheries Institute, the largest seafood trade association in the U.S., said his group was urging all of its companies to immediately re-examine their supply chains "to ensure that wages go to the workers, and are not siphoned off to support a dangerous dictator."

## *Roughly 3,000 North Koreans are believed to work in Hunchun, a far north- east Chinese industrial hub.*

"While we understand that hiring North Korean workers may be legal in China," said Connelly, "we are deeply concerned that any seafood companies could be inadvertently propping up the despotic regime."

### **EXPORTING LABOR**

North Koreans overseas work in construction in the Gulf states, shipbuilding in Poland, logging in Russia. In Uruguay, authorities told AP, about 90 North Koreans crewed fishing boats last year. U.N. sanctions now bar countries from authorizing new work permits for North Korean workers but do not target those already abroad.

Roughly 3,000 North Koreans are believed to work in Hunchun, a far northeast Chinese industrial hub just a few miles from the borders of both North Korea and Russia. Signs in this mercantile city are in Chinese, Korean and Russian. Korean restaurants advertise cold noodles, a Northern favorite, and Russian truckers stop into nightclubs with black bread on the menu.

In an effort to boost the local economy, China and North Korea agreed several years ago to allow factories to contract for groups of North Korean workers, establishing an industrial zone with bargain-priced labor. Since then dozens of fish processing companies have opened in Hunchun, along with other manufacturers. Using North Korean workers is legal in China, and not

considered forced labor.

It's unknown what conditions are like in all factories in the region, but AP reporters saw North Koreans living and working in several of the Hunchun facilities under the watchful eye of their overseers. The workers are not allowed to speak to reporters. However, the AP identified them as North Korean in numerous ways: the portraits of North Korea's late leaders they have in their rooms, their distinctive accents, interviews with multiple Hunchun businesspeople. The AP also reviewed North Korean laborer documents, including copies of a North Korean passport, a Chinese work permit and a contract with a Hunchun company.

When a reporter approached a group of North Koreans — women in tight, bright polyester clothes preparing their food at a Hunchun garment factory — one confirmed that she and some others were from Pyongyang, the North Korean capital. Then a minder arrived, ordering the workers to be silent: “Don't talk to him!”

Their contracts are typically for two or three years, and they are not allowed to go home early. The restrictions they work under make them very valuable employees. North Korean laborers are “more stable” than Chinese workers, said Li Shasha, a sales manager at Yanbian Shenghai Industry and Trade Co., a major Hunchun seafood processor.



Ng Han Guan • AP

**Workers at a seafood processing plant where North Korean workers are distinguished from the Chinese workers by blue overalls wash up after work in the city of Hunchun.**

Chinese workers have job protections that give them the right to take time off, while North Korean workers complete their contracts with few complaints, rare sick days and almost no turnover.

“They won’t take a leave for some personal reason,” said Li, whose company shipped containers of squid and snow crab to the U.S and Canada in July and August.

They are also often considered cheaper. Li said that at the Yanbian Shenghai factory, the North Koreans’ salary is the same as for the Chinese, roughly \$300 to \$385 per month. But others say North Koreans are routinely paid about \$300 a month compared to up to \$540 for Chinese.

### *The North Korean government of Kim Jong Un keeps anywhere from half to 70 percent of their pay.*

Either way, the North Korean government of Kim Jong Un keeps anywhere from half to 70 percent of their pay, according to scholars who have surveyed former laborers. It passes on to the workers as little as \$90 per month — or roughly 46 cents per hour.

The work can be exhausting, with shifts lasting up to 12 hours and most workers getting just one day off each week. At some factories, laborers work hunched over tables as North Korean political slogans are blasted from waist-high loudspeakers.

Through dozens of interviews, observation, trade records and other public and confidential documents, AP identified three seafood processors that employ North Koreans and export to the U.S.: Joint venture Hunchun Dongyang Seafood Industry & Trade Co. Ltd. & Hunchun Pagoda Industry Co. Ltd. distributed globally by Ocean One Enterprise; Yantai Dachen Hunchun Seafood Products, and Yanbian Shenghai Industry & Trade Co. Ltd.

They’re getting their seafood from China, Russia and, in some cases like snow crab, Alaska. Although AP saw North Korean workers at Hunchun Dongyang, manager Zhu Qizhen said they don’t hire North Korean workers any more and refused to give details. The other Chinese companies didn’t respond to repeated requests for comment.

Shipping records seen by the AP show more than 100 cargo containers of seafood, more than 2,000 tons, were sent to the U.S. and Canada this year from the factories where North Koreans were working in China.



Ng Han Guan • AP

**Frozen squid products are stored at the Yanbian Shenghai Industry and Trade Co., which hires some North Korean workers in the city of Hunchun, in northeastern China's Jilin province.**

Packages of snow crab, salmon fillets, squid rings and more were imported by American distributors, including Sea-Trek Enterprises in Rhode Island, and The Fishin' Company in Pennsylvania. Sea-Trek exports seafood to Europe, Australia, Asia, Central America and the Caribbean. The Fishin' Company supplies retailers and food service companies, as well as supermarkets.

The Fishin' Company said it cut its ties with Hunchun processors and got its last shipment this summer, but seafood can remain in the supply chain for more than a year. Owners of both companies said they were very concerned about the North Korean laborers, and planned to investigate.

Often the seafood arrives in generic packaging, but some was already branded in China with familiar names like Walmart or Sea Queen, a seafood brand sold exclusively at ALDI supermarkets, which has 1,600 stores across 35 states. There's no way to say where a particular package ends up, nor what percentage of the factories' products wind up in the U.S.

Walmart spokeswoman Marilee McInnis said company officials learned in an audit a year ago that there were potential labor problems at a Hunchun factory, and that they had banned their suppliers, including The Fishin' Company, from getting seafood processed there. She said The Fishin' Company had "responded constructively" but did not specify how.

Some U.S. brands and companies had indirect ties to the North Korean

laborers in Hunchun, including Chicken of the Sea, owned by Thai Union. Trade records show shipments came from a sister company of the Hunchun factory in another part of China, where Thai Union spokeswoman Whitney Small says labor standards are being met and the employees are all Chinese. Small said the sister companies should not be penalized.

Shipments also went to two Canadian importers, Morgan Foods and Alliance Seafood, which did not respond to requests for comment.

*The vast majority of the workers in Hunchun are women in their 20s. Most are thought to be hired back home by labor brokers.*

Boxes at the factories had markings from several major German supermarket chains and brands — All-Fish distributors, REWE and Penny grocers and Icewind brand. REWE Group, which also owns the Penny chain, said that they used to do business with Hunchun Dongyang but the contract has expired. All the companies that responded said their suppliers were forbidden to use forced labor.

## **HIDDEN LIVES**

North Korean workers in China are under much more intense surveillance than those in Russia and the Middle East, experts say. That's likely because Pyongyang fears they could follow in the footsteps of tens of thousands of their countrymen who escaped to China, or they could interact with South Koreans living in China.

“If a North Korean wants to go overseas, China is his or her least favorable option,” said Andrei Lankov, a North Korea expert at Kookmin University in South Korea. “Because in China, (factories) have essentially prison-like conditions.”

The vast majority of the workers in Hunchun are women in their 20s. Most are thought to be hired back home by labor brokers, who often demand bribes for overseas jobs. The laborers arrive in China already divided into work teams, each led by a North Korean overseer, and remain isolated even from their own employers.

“They're not allowed to mingle with the Chinese,” said a senior manager at a Hunchun company that employs many North Koreans. He spoke on condition he not be identified, fearing repercussions on his business. “We can only communicate with their team leaders.”

In a sense, the North Korean workers in China remain in North Korea, under constant surveillance.

“They only talk about what they need to,” said a medical worker who confirmed their nationality and had cared for some, and also spoke on condition of anonymity out of concern for angering Chinese authorities. “They don’t talk about what they might be thinking.”

They live crowded into rooms often above or next door to the factories, in a world awash in North Korean rituals.

“Let’s Follow the Ideas!” of North Korea’s leaders, urges a poster at the workers’ dormitory at Hunchun Pagoda. Portraits of the country’s first two rulers, worshipped as god-like in the deeply isolated nation, gaze down from otherwise-bare walls. Laundry is often hanging up to dry and potted plants — mostly what appear to be herbs, though one room at Hunchun Pagoda has bright yellow carnations — sit on many windowsills.

It’s a world of concrete. The factory buildings and dormitories at Hunchun Pagoda are grey slabs of unpainted concrete. The yard where the women play volleyball in their free time is concrete. The street outside the front gate is concrete.

At most factories the women prepare their own food and make tubs of their own kimchi, the spicy cabbage dish beloved in both Koreas. Their televisions cannot tune in Chinese programming, and they organize their own sports and



Ng Han Guan • AP

**North Korean workers from the Hong Chao Zhi Yi garment factory gather for a head count after shopping at a street market in the city of Hunchun.**

singing contests on their days off.

Nearly every compound has a workers' garden. There are a half dozen rows of corn at Hunchun Pagoda, and kidney beans and melons at Yantai.

A booming Chinese economy means money has come even to cities like Hunchun, where six-lane roads and factories bump up against cornfields that, a year later, often make way for yet another factory. Mercedes are now regular sights on the road and 30-foot billboards at malls show bone-thin models in fur coats.

But when the North Koreans are allowed to leave their compounds, they go to the city's working-class street markets, where vendors set their wares on plastic sheets or folding tables, or sell directly from the backs of trucks.

### *Chinese merchants say most North Koreans are very careful about their finances.*

Chinese merchants say most North Koreans are very careful about their finances. For instance, while they splurge on expensive spices imported from South Korea, they also buy Chinese noodles that cost less than half of the South Korean brands.

On a recent morning, a group of about 70 North Korean women walked to a Hunchun street market from the nearby Hong Chao Zhi Yi garment factory. They asked about prices for watermelons and plums, browsed through cheap pantyhose and bought steamed corn-on-the-cob for 1 Chinese yuan (about 16 cents) apiece.

As the late summer chill set in one evening, a dozen or so women from Hunchun Pagoda played volleyball in the quiet road in front of the compound's gate, scrimmaging in the pool of light thrown by the street lamp.

A train horn blew. The women shouted to one another while they played. As a car with a foreigner drove by, one laughingly called out: "Bye-bye!"

#### **PROPPING UP NORTH KOREA**

Estimates vary on how many North Koreans work overseas and how much money they bring in.

South Korea's intelligence agency estimated in 2014 that 50,000 to 60,000 work in about 50 countries, most in China and Russia. That number may now be up to 100,000, according to Lim Eul Chul, a scholar at South Korea's Kyungnam



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**If you buy salmon from Walmart or ALDI, you may inadvertently have subsidized the North Korean government as it builds its nuclear weapons program, an AP investigation has found.**

University who has interviewed numerous former laborers. Estimates that their labor brings in revenue of \$200 million to \$500 million annually to the North Korean government come from scholars, who base their findings on academic research papers, South Korean intelligence reports and sources in the Chinese business community.

That has made the workers a significant and reliable source of revenue for the North Korean regime as it struggles beneath the weight of increasing UN sanctions, which the U.S. estimates could cost Pyongyang upwards of \$1.5 billion each year in lost export revenues. In the last month alone, China has said it's cracking down on North Korean exports, businesses and joint ventures, but it has a long history of not enforcing sanctions in practice.

Despite the pay and restrictions, these are highly sought-after jobs in North Korea, a chance to move up a rickety economic ladder and see a bit of the world beyond the closed-in nation.

Their monthly earnings in China are far more than many would earn in North Korea today, where official salaries often equal \$1 per month. Experts estimate most families live on about \$40-\$60 a month, with much of their earnings coming from trading in the growing network of unofficial markets.

And there are plenty of benefits to working overseas. The laborers can use

their earnings to start businesses in these markets, and can buy the status symbols of the slowly-growing middle class — Chinese rice cookers, watches, TVs, tableware — selling them back home or using them as bribes. Simply going abroad is so rare that returning workers can find themselves highly sought-after when it comes time to marry.

Lim Il, a North Korean refugee, bribed a series of officials — with 20 bottles of liquor, 30 packs of cigarettes and restaurant gift cards — to get a job as a construction worker in Kuwait City in the late 1990s, when North Korea was still suffering through a horrific famine.

“I felt like I had won the lottery,” he said. “People fantasized about getting overseas labor jobs.”

### *‘These North Korean workers (today) still don’t know they are slaves.’*

Lim, a man in his late 40s who fled to South Korea in 1997 and now writes novels about the North, said that even though he was never paid his \$120-a-month salary, he was happy to simply get beef soup and rice every day.

“Unless you were an idiot, you wouldn’t give up such an opportunity,” he said. While he never thought of himself as a slave, looking back he says that is the right description: “These North Korean workers (today) still don’t know they are slaves.”

The new law in the U.S. labels all North Korean workers both overseas and inside the country as engaging in forced labor. (While U.S. law generally forbids Americans from conducting business in North Korea, the AP employs a small number of support staff in its Pyongyang bureau, operating under a waiver granted by the U.S. government to allow the flow of news and information.)

“There are not many countries that, at a government level, export their own citizens as a commodity to be exploited,” said an official at Immigration and Customs Enforcement, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he wasn’t authorized to speak to the media.

For years the State Department has blacklisted North Korea in its human trafficking reports, saying the overseas laborers and their families could face reprisals if the workers complain or try to escape, and criticizing Pyongyang for keeping much of the workers’ earnings. China, Russia and other countries hosting North Korean labor are all members of the United Nations International

Labor Organization, which requires workers to receive their full salaries.

Luis CdeBaca, former U.S. ambassador-at-large for human trafficking issues, said both federal law enforcement agents and importers should be making sure workers are treated fairly. U.S. Customs and Border Protection, responsible for enforcing the law that bans imports that are products of forced labor, did not respond to repeated requests for comment.

“If you think about a company like Walmart, which is spending a lot of money, time and effort to clean up its supply chain, sending auditors and inspectors to factories, working with suppliers, all of that is thrown out the window if they are importing products made with exploited North Korean labor,” said CdeBaca. “It contradicts everything they are doing.”

CdeBaca conceded the North Korean workers might like their jobs.

“The question is not, ‘Are you happy?’ “ he said. “The question is, ‘Are you free to leave?’”

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*Associated Press journalists Leonardo Haberkorn in Uruguay, Han Guan Ng and researcher Fu Ting in China, Kelvin K. Chan in Hong Kong, Frank Jordans in Germany and Jon Gambrell in United Arab Emirates contributed to this report. Mendoza reported from California.*



Ng Han Guan • AP

**North Korean workers walk into the Hong Chao Zhi Yi garment factory after visiting a street market in the city of Hunchun in northeastern China's Jilin province.**



Wong Maye-E • AP

This combination of photographs shows portraits of North Koreans taken by Associated Press photographer Wong Maye-E. She often broke the ice by taking photos with an instant camera and giving them one.

June 16, 2017

## N. Korea portraits: Ordinary lives, ever in leader's shadow

PYONGYANG, North Korea (AP) — When asked what's important to them, North Koreans might talk about working hard, or doing well at sports, or having a big family. But leader Kim Jong Un is never far from the conversation.

Pyongyang subway officer Ri Ok Gyong says she wants “to serve people because Marshal Kim Jong Un loves his people and so must I.”

Professional long-distance runner Pak Chol says, “I want to please leader Kim Jong Un through my sporting successes.”

Ri Ok Ran and her husband, Kang Sung Jin, say they want “to have many children so that they can serve in the army and defend and uphold our leader and country, for many years into the future.”

AP photographer Wong Maye-E tries to get her North Korean subjects to open up as much as is possible in an authoritarian country with no tolerance for dissent and great distrust of foreigners. She has taken dozens of portraits of North Koreans over the past three years, often after breaking the ice by taking photos with an instant camera and sharing them.

Her question for everyone she photographs: What is your motto? Their answers reflect both their varied lives and the government that looms incessantly over all of them.

<https://apnews.com/1680bcfcbba543a7a3e15ffff56a6dba/N-Korea-portraits-Ordinary-lives-ever-in-leader's-shadow>



In this May 9, 2016, photo, Kim Jong Sil, 35, a worker at the Kim Jong Suk Silk Mill for the past 17 years, poses for a portrait in Pyongyang, North Korea. When asked what's important to them, North Koreans might talk about working hard, or doing well at sports, or having a big family, but leader Kim Jong Un is never far from the conversation. Kim Jong Sil's motto: "As one of the working class, i'll devote myself to realize the great idea of Marshal Kim Jong Un and I'll work hard to achieve this."



In this April 13, 2017, photo, Jang Sol Hyang, 19, a Kim Il Sung University student majoring in Mathematics, poses for a portrait at the newly opened Ryomyong Street in Pyongyang, North Korea. When asked what's important to them, North Koreans might talk about working hard, or doing well at sports, or having a big family, but leader Kim Jong Un is never far from the conversation. Her motto: "Being a girl doesn't stop me from upholding the leadership of Marshal Kim Jong Un and it drives me to be even better."



In this Oct. 23, 2014, photo, Kim Guan Huan, 60, a concierge, poses for a portrait at the entrance of the Koryo Hotel in Pyongyang, North Korea. Kim has been working at the hotel for the past 30 years. When asked what's important to them, North Koreans might talk about working hard, or doing well at sports, or having a big family, but leader Kim Jong Un is never far from the conversation.



In this May 7, 2016, photo, Pyongyang subway officer Ri Ok Gyong, 23, holds up a signal as she poses for a portrait in Pyongyang, North Korea. Ri has been working at the station for six years. She says that she is proud of her job because the subway station was one of the places where North Korean leader Kim Jong Un visited. When asked what's important to them, North Koreans might talk about working hard, or doing well at sports, or having a big family, but leader Kim Jong Un is never far from the conversation. Ri Ok Gyong's motto: "I want to server people because Marshal Kim Jong Un loves his people and so must I."



In this June 22, 2016, photo, Kang Jong Jin, a 28-year old former soldier who attaches soles onto shoes at a shoe factory in Wonsan, North Korea, poses for a portrait at his work station. Kang, who has been working longer hours during this 200-day “speed campaign” in line with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un’s vows to raise the nation’s standard of living and energize his five-year plan to develop economy, says that he wants to contribute to Kim’s plan by taking courses to improve his scientific and technological skills.



In this May 8, 2015, photo, village elder Song Hong Ik, 77, right, poses for a portrait on Ryongyon-ri hill in Kujang county, North Korea. Song was 13-years old when the Korean War began. When asked what’s important to them, North Koreans might talk about working hard, or doing well at sports, or having a big family, but leader Kim Jong Un is never far from the conversation.



In this April 9, 2017, photo, Pak Chol, 27, a professional long distance runner, poses for a portrait after winning the Pyongyang marathon in Pyongyang, North Korea. Pak has won three marathons in his life. When asked what's important to them, North Koreans might talk about working hard, or doing well at sports, or having a big family, but leader Kim Jong Un is never far from the conversation. His motto: "I want to please leader Kim Jong Un through my sporting successes."



In this May 7, 2016, photo, Kim Una, 23, studying to be an obstetrician at the Pyongyang Maternity hospital, poses for a portrait in Pyongyang, North Korea. When asked what's important to them, North Koreans might talk about working hard, or doing well at sports, or having a big family, but leader Kim Jong Un is never far from the conversation. She enjoys the work because it is about "bringing new life into the world." She hopes to "meet a good man and have five children with him."



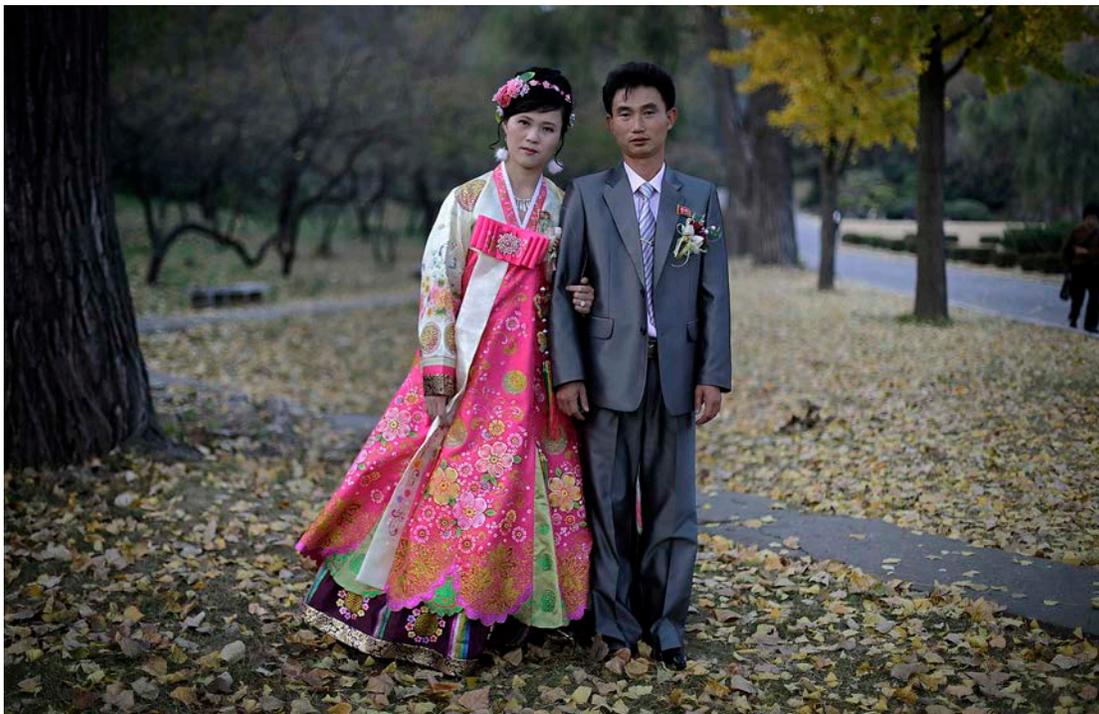
In this Feb. 22, 2016, photo, North Korean People's Army Lt. Col. Nam Dong Ho poses for a portrait at the entrance to the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) on the North Korean side. When asked what's important to them, North Koreans might talk about working hard, or doing well at sports, or having a big family, but leader Kim Jong Un is never far from the conversation.



In this April 17, 2017, photo, Kim Jin Ok, 25, poses for a portrait as she feeds catfish at the Pyongyang Catfish Farm, in Pyongyang, North Korea. When asked what's important to them, North Koreans might talk about working hard, or doing well at sports, or having a big family, but leader Kim Jong Un is never far from the conversation. Her motto: "Working hard at my job pleases our leader Kim Jong Un."



In this May 7, 2016, photo, Pak Su Won, 66, a retired local physician, poses for a portrait along Mirae Scientists Street in Pyongyang, North Korea. When asked what's important to them, North Koreans might talk about working hard, or doing well at sports, or having a big family, but leader Kim Jong Un is never far from the conversation. His motto: "To devote myself to leader Kim Jong Un for the rest of my life. For him, and for the fatherland."



In this Oct. 25, 2014, file photo, North Korean bride Ri Ok Ran, 28, and groom Kang Sung Jin, 32, pose for a portrait at the Moran Hill where they went to take wedding pictures, in Pyongyang, North Korea. The couple were married after dating for about two years. When asked what's important to them, North Koreans might talk about working hard, or doing well at sports, or having a big family, but leader Kim Jong Un is never far from the conversation. Their motto: "To have many children so that they can serve in the army and defend and uphold our leader and country, for many years into the future."

## MEET THE TEAM

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**ERIC TALMADGE**, The Associated Press' Pyongyang bureau chief since 2013, has made more than 40 trips to North Korea. Prior to his assignment in Pyongyang, Talmadge led the AP's coverage of military and security issues in Asia, including several embedded assignments in Iraq and Afghanistan. When not in North Korea, he is based in Tokyo.



**WONG MAYE-E** became a staff photographer with The Associated Press in 2006. Based in Singapore, she has covered the Winter and Summer Olympic Games, World Cup Soccer, Thailand and Hong Kong political protests, the devastation of typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines and the garment factory collapse in Dhaka. She became the AP's lead photographer for North Korea in 2013.



**TIM SULLIVAN** is the The Associated Press' Asia Correspondent, based in New Delhi, India. A former bureau chief for South Asia and West Africa, he has reported from more than 40 countries. He is a native of Boiling Springs, Pennsylvania.