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## Analysis on North Korea's 4<sup>th</sup> Plenary Meeting of the 8<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea

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The 4<sup>th</sup> Plenary Meeting of the 8<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea was held from December 27 to 31, 2021. This meeting discussed six items on the agenda as follows: 1) the performance assessment report of the Party and the state's policies and a plan for the projects, 2) the current implementation status and a proposal of the state's budget, 3) the important tasks currently facing rural areas under socialism, 4) the revision to the Party's bylaws, 5) the current status of Party organization's ideology, and 6) organizational problems.

What garnered the most outside attention was the kinds of policy North Korea would announce on South Korea and the US. North Korea's official reporting on this meeting did not state the details of the meeting agenda. The essence of the meeting agenda reportedly appears to be economic issues, in particular, addressing issues in rural areas. This paper looks into main topics in political, diplomatic, economic, and social sectors and discusses the implications based on North Korea's official reporting.

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Korea (WPK) was held from December 27 to 31, 2021. This meeting discussed six items on the agenda as follows: 1) the performance assessment report of the Party and the state's policies and a plan for the projects, 2) the current implementation status and a proposal of the state's budget, 3) the important tasks currently facing rural areas under socialism, 4) the revision to the Party's bylaws, 5) the current status of Party organization's ideology, and 6) organizational problems.

### Focused on Exploring Measures to Tackle Economic Issues

What garners the most outside attention was the kinds of policy North Korea would present on South Korea and the US. However, an official reporting of North Korea did not address this specifically except for a brief mentioning. The essence of the meeting agenda reportedly appears to be economic issues, in particular, "how to proactively find and implement measures to stabilize the economy amidst harsh environment and how to be self-sufficient." The meeting assessed economic issues in 2021 and presented a plan and direction for the 2022 projects. The specific focus was on issues in rural areas. The meeting set 'addressing issues in rural areas as a separate agenda,' and Kim Jong-un himself presented the policy direction.

In retrospect, North Korea incorporated the results of important meetings in its New Year's Day Speech as witnessed in the 5<sup>th</sup> Plenary Meeting of the 7<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the WPK of late 2019, the 8<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in early 2021, and the 4<sup>th</sup> Plenary Meeting of the 8<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the WPK in 2021. When compared to the three previous New Year's Day Speeches, North Korea appears to have a coherent direction of a 'new path' in its internal and external policy since a failure of the DPRK-US Hanoi summit in February 2019. This new path can be summarized as stabilizing the economy based on the doctrine of self-reliance (*Charkyok Kaengsaeng*) and the principle of strengthening the state's control on the economy in expectation for the prolonged DPRK-US confrontation; boosting the national defense power; enhancing the role of Party organization under the banner of Our "People First" Philosophy; and doubling down on a crackdown of anti- and

non-socialist practices.

This meeting exhibits differences compared to a reporting of two other previous meetings, although the general strategic framework stays the same. First, it is notable that the 4<sup>th</sup> Plenary Meeting of the 8<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the WPK in 2021 specifically focused on addressing internal issues, particularly economic issues. Previously, reportings of the 5<sup>th</sup> Plenary Meeting of the 7<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the WPK of late 2019 and the 8<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in early 2021 mentioned details and set issues of enhancing defense power and promoting aggressive foreign and security policy on the US as main items of the agenda (policy on South Korea in case of the 8<sup>th</sup> Party Congress). Given this, it is worth noting that a reporting of the 4<sup>th</sup> Plenary Meeting of the 8<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the WPK barely mentioned such issues.

Second, although the meeting touched upon the importance of the state's control on the economy and the struggle against anti- and non-socialist practices, the details and the frequency of such mentioning are modest compared to the past. The wording of "Our People First Philosophy" did not surface, which was viewed as the fundamental underpinnings of socialist politics. The meeting did not address the development of state-led commerce and the strengthening of the ideology education. As was seen in the alternative measures in rural areas, the economic policy direction still focuses on the state's control of the economy and tackling the economic issues. However, this meeting was about presenting related policy instead of focusing on a resolution.

### **Party-led Politics and the Strengthening of the Ideology of 'Austerity and Devotion'**

The results of the reporting of this Plenary Meeting as well as North Korea's move in 2021 suggest that the direction of politics for 2022 in North Korea points to the principle of being 'self-sufficient' and 'strengthening the national defense power amidst the border blockade under the Party's management and control.' This principle

is rooted in the direction laid out at the 8<sup>th</sup> Party Congress (the doctrine of self-reliance [*Charkyok Kaengsaeng*] + the development of state-of-the-art strategic weapons). The primary focus of politics in 2022 seems to be in sync with the 2021 direction and seeks to enhance the internal durability, building on last year's achievement and the limitations. This section projects major characteristics of the related areas in politics as follows.

First, in terms of the direction of the governance, North Korea started to replace the supreme leader's New Year's Day Speech with the reporting of the Plenary Meeting since last year. This indicates that 'the Party-led politics' will remain in place, which has been sought by the Kim Jong-un regime. In 2021, North Korea institutionalized the Party-led governance system, established the new position of the first secretary, and revised the Party's bylaws to ease the burden of Kim Jong-un's governing. The Party's bylaws were once again revised at this Plenary Meeting. The meeting, moreover, laid out the 2022's core tasks as "relentlessly improving Party's projects, making the entire Party as a venue for learning, being united around the Party's ideology, intention, and acts, and uplifting the Party workers' level and capabilities." In particular, economic policy and the self-sufficiency-boosting projects in the region are projected to be the focus for 2022.

Second, in terms of ideology, North Korea is expected to maintain "Kim Il-sung nationality," "Kim Jong-il Chosun," "the principle of putting our state first," "the principle of putting our people first" and continue strengthening the legitimacy of the Kim Jong-un regime based on '*Charkyok Kaengsaeng*, austerity, and devotion.' The Plenary Meeting suggests that North Korea presented a slogan of "Let's wage a fierce battle to make our country prosperous and promote the well-being of our people" as the direction for the 2022 struggle. The general secretary of the Party Kim Jong-un remarked, "the year 2022's struggle is an all-out, immediate, bold battle that must be fought and won over to fully develop the socialism and enhance the livelihoods of our great people and our dearest descendants." He went on to say to North Korea's Party officials and residents that "Our people are united with an unwavering will, faith, and strength to weather through whatever challenges that

come in our way. We already muddled through harsh environments such as last year and made achievements independently. Based on our proud experiences, our people and our Party will make another proud victory." Kim presented a project of strengthening the collective ideology. On the midnight of January 1, 2022, North Korea held a flag-hoisting ceremony at the Kim Il-sung Square with the presence of citizens of Pyongyang and stressed "people's loyalty and patriotic fervor to safeguard our homeland."

### **Exploring the Post-COVID 19 and Maintaining the Crackdown**

Third, COVID-19 emergency preventive projects remain the top priority in North Korea for 2022. This Plenary Meeting suggests that North Korea "once again placed the emergency preventive projects as the state's top priority and as an immediate goal to be met with a strong will without any mishaps." This remark indicates that North Korea will continue a blockade on its borders amidst the global spread of the COVID-19. Nevertheless, it is notable that North Korea vowed to "implement projects that will place the foundation for medical prevention firmly on the scientific basis, establish material and technical foundation for the preventive care, and supplement and complete ability and means to advance preventive care nation-wide." Given these remarks, North Korea is likely to seek technical cooperation with the international community on COVID-19 medicine and vaccines through various channels, including with its allies, China and Russia.

Fourth, Party-led crackdown projects are expected to remain in place this year. This Plenary Meeting also mentioned "tasks to enhance the role of judicial and law enforcement agencies to more actively wage the struggle against anti- and non-socialist practices across the Party, the nation and the society and promote the social order and the well-being of the people." The meeting also addressed "tasks to uphold the revolutionary, law-abiding spirit, and toughen the socialist law and institutions." The meeting indicates that North Korea "vowed to engage in nation-wide ideological battles to tackle the formalism across the entire Party in

Party-led projects, firmly establish revolutionary rules within the Party, and uplift the spirits of the Party officials as purely and loyal."

### **Defense and the Reshuffling in Sync with the Performance**

Fourth, at the closing remarks of the Plenary Meeting, the general secretary Kim Jong-un presented the core tasks for 2022 under the recognition that "Chosun peninsula's military environment, which has increasingly destabilized over time, and the international trends require North Korea to more actively strengthen the national defense power without hesitation." In the military sector, the Plenary Meeting stressed the need to "instill the spirit of the Party's revolutionary ideology in the entire military force, continuously implement projects designed to advance the military into a revolutionary force that shows absolute loyalty and obedience to the Party's guidance, place a top priority in training forces, mobilize talents well-versed in using weapons and combat skills, and firmly establish military discipline." The meeting also highlighted the need to "solidify North Korea's military as the military of the WPK, uplift the spirit of loyalty to Kim Jong-un (Party), enhance the combative preparedness." In the munitions industry, the meeting emphasized the need to "thoroughly implement the decisions made at the 8<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, expand the achievements made so far, push ahead with the development and production of the combative technology designed for contemporary wars, seek qualitative changes in the national defense power, implement goals for independence, modernization, scientification of the national defense industry as planned." The meeting presented the tasks of developing state-of-the-art strategic weapons to horn the negotiation skills. In society, the meeting laid out a task to boost people's combative preparedness to advance the military reserve force, stressing the need to "put in place a decisive measure to strengthen the civil defense force to prepare for the contemporary combat, initiate a training revolution to enhance the military qualifications and command ability of Worker-Peasant Red Guards and operational ability of the military force."

Lastly, the reshuffling of the elites was announced at this Plenary Meeting, including a member of the Political Bureau of the Party Central Committee Park Jong-gun (vice premier and Chair, the State Planning Committee), and an alternate member of the Political Bureau Ri Tae-seop (minister of social security). Given their career and positions, North Korea is likely to focus on managing the economy and society in 2022 as illustrated by its governing direction. Whether Kim Yo-jong rejoined the Political Bureau was not confirmed, though, which garner outside attention. Kim Yo-jong is expected to continue maintaining the projects on South Korea and the US in the Propaganda and Agitation Department serving a 'speaker role' for Kim Jong-un for the time being. Twenty-one people were appointed as a member of the Party Central Committee and twenty-two people were appointed as an alternate member, all of whom are presumed to have made achievements in the following projects given North Korea's end-of-the-year governing practice of 2021 and the political direction of this year: the youth-oriented ideology-related projects regarding the three great revolutions; projects on regional self-sufficiency and agriculture, and the military technology projects.

### **Possibility of Maintaining the Direction of 2021 Strategy on South Korea and Foreign Affairs**

In terms of South Korea and foreign affairs strategies, North Korea reportedly "presented a series of tactical directions and fundamental issues that need to be upheld in dealing with the inter-Korean relations and external projects." However, the details were yet to be revealed. North Korea did not specifically mention major issues, such as the resumption of the DPRK-US and the DPRK-ROK negotiations, the end-of-the war declaration, the US-China competition, and the Beijing Winter Olympics, which hint the challenges facing North Korea to seek "tangible and fruitful changes" by "accurately understanding and accessing the internal and external circumstances" amidst the "volatile, fluctuated international environment and conditions surrounding the Korean Peninsula."



North Korea stressed the need to "stabilize the economy amidst extremely harsh environment and be self-sufficient in the economic sector." In the military and defense industry, North Korea stressed the need to "strengthen the national defense power," "develop and produce the combative technology and weapons deployable for contemporary battles," and "drive qualitative changes in the national defense power," which indicate the similar lines of "principles (fundamental issues) that need to be upheld" to advance nuclear capabilities while responding to sanctions with the doctrine of self-reliance (*Charkyok Kaengsaeng*) as announced at the 8<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2021. It deserves the attention that dramatic messages were not sent toward South Korea and the US. The direction on an external strategy in 2021 is projected to remain for the time being, which is to 'wait and see while being vigilant.'

### **Economic Achievements Falling Short of the Expectation in 2021**

The performance assessment report of projects implemented by general secretary Kim Jong-un illustrates that North Korea has not made significant economic achievements in 2021. Except for the completion of house-building construction in Samjiyon city and the completion of the residential building (*Salimjijip*) in the Komdok District of South Hamgyong Province, the meeting mentioned neither notable progress nor whether the goals of the five-year economic development plan were met. North Korea appeared to set a realistic, modest production target in 2021, which was still an unattainable goal for North Korea to this day.

North Korea seems to have made achievements in food production from last year, which is deemed to be the most important. It was evidenced by North Korea's recent remarks that it has "made distinct advancements in the agricultural sector that are quantifiable and give North Korea a sense of pride in 2021." The Rural Development Administration estimates the food production volume to be at 4.69 million tons, a 290,000-ton increase(7%) from 2020, given the sound weather conditions and no typhoon-induced damage. Therefore, the food conditions in 2022 are expected to improve slightly in North Korea compared to last year. However, despite such an



improvement, a food shortage will prolong in the North.

North Korea did not mention specifics in the policy tasks for each industrial sector in 2022, except for the general guidelines, which hints that making a breakthrough in boosting industrial production is not feasible under the international and unilateral sanctions imposed on North Korea. It also warrants the attention that North Korea toned down the need for the state's control and management across the entire economic sector. However, there will still not be significant changes in the policy direction. The year 2022 is expected to witness similar lines of focus of 2021, *Charkyok Kaengsaeng* with the strengthening of the state's control and the management.

### **Announcement of New 'Rural These' Under the Kim Jong-un Era**

As illustrated above, this Plenary Meeting highlighted the need to find measures to improve the production and resolve issues of rural areas. "An immediate task of properly addressing issues in rural areas under socialism" was selected as an item on the agenda at the Plenary Meeting, which facilitates the discussions on improving the food production and developing the rural areas as well as seeking detailed policy measures. This appears to be related to the recognition that economic difficulties under the sanctions and border blockades make it difficult to find a solution to the current economic problems and thus necessitate finding a resolution to "put food on the table," the very basic needs of North Korean people. It is also rooted in the understanding that deepening inequality between urban and rural areas needs to be resolved. Developing rural areas becomes an urgent task that needs to be addressed immediately to 'promote a prosperous country' and 'enhance the well-being of the people, which is manifested in the slogan of this Plenary Meeting's conclusions. Therefore, 'building a new socialist agricultural society' adopted at this Plenary Meeting is a new 'rural these' under the Kim Jong-un regime, which inherited Kim Il-sung's 'Rural Theses' (1964) rooted in the motto of balanced-regional development.

New rural construction goals are summarized as developing affluent rural community, making significant agricultural production, and fundamentally improving the rural living environment. A mid-to-long-term rural development strategies were presented in line with a yearly plan to meet the set target. Core tasks of rural development strategies include promoting political ideology education for farmers, rooting out the food shortages, and significantly improving the living conditions for rural residents.

In terms of food production, Rodong Sinmun reported that "rooting out the food shortages by boosting agricultural production" is defined as a primary task for rural development strategy. It went on to report that the production targets over the next decade in grain, livestock products, fruits, vegetables, industrial crops, and sericulture were laid out, although details were yet to be released. Among them, grain production target will be primarily implemented.

How to meet those goals, however, remains to be unknown. Although North Korea emphasized the need for powerful national support for improving food production, operating a robust state-led guidance system, improving the role of the city and country, and promoting science-oriented farming, details have not been provided. Moreover, what is needed the most in boosting the agricultural promotion is to increase production incentives for people, but the related measures have not been emphasized enough. Therefore, incentives in the form of the current 'Farmland Responsibility System under the group management system' are likely to be put in place.

What deserves attention in agricultural production is a continued emphasis on wheat production. General secretary Kim once stressed the importance of wheat production at the policy speech on September 2021. At this Plenary Meeting, he once again reiterated the need to "change the grain production structure and push ahead with the rice and wheat planting" to "change people's diet into white rice and wheat-based meal." As was known, the main diets for North Korean people are rice and corn. As the living standard has improved compared to the past, corn demand has dwindled and the demand for wheat has risen. North Korea appears to emphasize

the need for wheat farming as it heavily relies on the import of wheat despite this high demand. Policy to expand wheat farming is expected to be actively implemented in the coming days.

Meanwhile, it is also worthy of the attention that North Korea emphasized a project of restructuring the rural villages as "an essential policy task." Last year, North Korea defined rural villages within the Samjiyon city as an 'ideal village' vowing to restructure the rural areas in the next 15 years as part of the long-term rural development plan. In September 2021, North Korea adopted the 'City and County Development Act' to establish legal funding for rural development. This Plenary Meeting once again iterated that the Party's rural construction policy aims to "make all the rural villages reach the level of the Samjiyon city soon."

### **Stressing the Three Great Revolutions in Rural Areas and Special Treatment for Collective Farms**

Implementation measures for the rural development strategy aim to promote the three great revolutionary movements of ideology, technology, and culture in rural areas. In a letter addressed to the participants of the 5<sup>th</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup> Revolution Pioneer Competition held in November 2021, Kim Jong-un said that "Three-Revolution Team Movement" and a "movement to acquire the three great revolutionary red flags" will be ferociously promoted in the future for the rural development. Rural development strategy was devised in close connection with such three great revolutions. In particular, the spirit of 'patriotic farmer' and 'heroic farmers' were emphasized in a project of ideological education for rural workers. The importance of instilling the spirit of the "greatness and gratitude of the Party, the state, and the institutions" into people and of making people familiarize themselves with the "collective ideology" and such a way of living were emphasized. This is indicative of the indirect criticism of the current, prevalent practices that prioritize individual interests of farm workers over the collective interests of the state and the farms in rural areas. Kim Jong-un also remarked that enhancing the knowledge on scientific technology and related

capabilities for scientific talents will lead to speeding up the rural advancement. He went on to say that it is essential to improve the technological functions by 'making all people well-versed in science and technology and send many college graduates to rural areas.'

In the meantime, it is notable that "special treatments were given to collective farms that exempt them from the obligation of servicing all their debt to the state." North Korea's collective farms, by nature, are subject to heavy debts on the state as they are highly reliant upon the state for farming supplies and are likely to excessively procure grain. Making a self-sufficient rural development is not feasible unless the accumulated state debts are absolved. Such measures will kill three birds in one stone in that they will improve the financial situation of farms, boost the morale of farmers, and earn the public trust in the form of absolute loyalty. However, such "revolutionary great measures" may lead to the phenomenon of moral hazard where people try not to service the debt in the expectation of the state's debt exemption. It remains to be seen whether North Korea properly accounts for these possibilities.

### **Stressing the Achievements of the Youth Projects and Providing School Uniforms and Supplies Free of Charge**

The performance assessment report of the Central Committee in 2021 did not mention the social and cultural sectors. The immediate tasks were presented at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Plenary Meeting of the 8<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the WPK held last February, such as meeting the goals of promoting the talents well-versed in science and technology, completing the construction of pharmaceutical factories, medical equipment factories, medical supplies factories, reinvigorating the cultural, and art sectors, and stimulating the public sports. However, no distinct progress has been made on all of those fronts.

Last year, the North Korean authorities mobilized a massive number of young people to reach the goals of the five-year economic development plan. They were mobilized not only for the purpose of economic contributions, but also for the political

purpose of instilling ideology, consolidating the regime, making people disciplined and educated through laboring. After the 8<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, however, North Korea "prided itself on making phenomenal political achievements" that "countless young people made exceptional progress amidst challenging circumstances and were grown into adults equipped with virtues of touching people's hearts and well-manners."

In the meantime, general secretary Kim Jong-un gave the order as part of the Central Committee's grand order to provide school uniforms and supplies to all students. Such measures were viewed as a way to consolidate Kim Jong-un's image as the "Father *Suryong*" by giving school uniforms, bags, and school supplies to students as gifts to celebrate the upcoming entrance ceremony in April while showing the implementation power to boast about the superiority of the socialist institutions. 'Dandelion learning center' and 'school bags under the Pine Tree label' are expected to be produced and distributed, which were frequently promoted by the North Korean media, capitalizing on certain achievements in the localization and modernization of the light industry sectors.

### **Policy Adjustment between 'Choice and Concentration' and Prospects of Slightly Eased Social Control**

In the conclusion of the Plenary Meeting, tasks in social and cultural sectors were presented, which will contribute to the innovation of projects in science, education, health, and cultural sectors and the economic development (See <Table 1>). The conclusion stated that the core tasks of the scientific industry lie in establishing the implementation tasks in science and technology that will enable making a balanced development not only in the economy but also in the entire state's projects. In particular, it is noticeable that a task of developing and completing the technology urgently needed for enhancing economic self-sufficiency and improving the living standards was set as a "basic task." It is also notable that tasks of nurturing and promoting the talents well-versed in science and technology needed for all sectors and units are prioritized over the production and the construction.

<Table 1> Summaries of the Social and Cultural Sectors of 4<sup>th</sup> Plenary Meeting of the 8<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the WPK

- (Science)

Basic tasks include developing and completing the technology urgently needed to achieve economic self-sufficiency and improve the people's livelihoods. The priority is to nurture the talents well-versed in science and technology necessary for the sectors and units.

- (Education)

The state will provide school uniforms and supplies to students free of charge. An order was given to provide high-quality, new school uniforms and school bags to all students. Detailed tasks in educational sector include the strengthening of the education for gifted children, promoting a massive number of talents well-versed in science and technology for the economy and national defense, enhancing the capabilities of educators in rural and agricultural areas, improving the education level in line with the modernization of the environment and an improvement in the educational conditions.

- (Health)

The basic direction for health care projects is to improve the quality of medical service and expand the material and technological foundation in the health care sector.

- (Prevention)

COVID-19 emergency preventive projects remain the top priority in North Korea for 2022. North Korea vowed to implement projects that will firmly place the foundation for medical prevention on a scientific basis, establish a material and technical foundation for preventive care, and supplement and complete ability and means to advance preventive care nationwide.

- (Culture)

North Korea will focus on fundamentally innovating the literary art sectors and nurturing the artists for the new generation, growing them into a mainstream group standing at the forefront of creative activities. North Korea will advance the publishing, reporting, and sport sectors. The North will make and solidify the collective-oriented virtues and good customs of the people into social ethos and national customs.

- (Social Control)

North Korea will more actively wage a struggle against the anti- and non-socialist practices to promote the social order and the well-being of the people and uphold the revolutionary, law-abiding spirit, and reinforce the socialist law and institutions.

The role of education was mentioned to nurture the talents well versed in science and technology. The meeting stressed the need to grow "revolutionary talents, creative, capable talents, and socialist vanguard groups" as a basic goal for the educational revolution of the new century. Detailed tasks in educational sector include the increased education for gifted children, promoting a massive number of talents well-versed in science and technology required for the economy and national defense, enhancing the capabilities of educators in rural and agricultural areas, improving the education level in line with the modernization of the environment and an improvement in the educational conditions. While a 'vision of seeking to make all people well-versed in science and technology,' which had been highlighted up until last year, was not explicitly mentioned this year, education for gifted children was emphasized this year. North Korea is expected to stick to a strategy of 'choice and concentration' in education, given its limited resources and budgets.

What is also notable is that North Korea vowed to promote and nurture new generation artists in the literature art sectors and grow them into a mainstream group in conducting creative activities. North Korea ordered a creative innovation for the literary artist groups to get out of the stagnated literary art sectors, but showed no discernable progress on that front. North Korea appears to change its policy direction to unearth the potential of the next generations.

Although an order was given to more actively implement a task of rooting out the anti- and non-socialist practices, which had been put into practice across the Party, the nation, and the society last year, the level of focus seems to subside slightly. Moreover, the expanded role of judicial and law enforcement institutions was emphasized to promote social order and safety. Upholding the law-abiding spirit and toughening the related laws were also mentioned, but only broadly along the guideline. As last year's drastic measures, rectification movement and social control, have made society too rigid, North Korea appears to adjust the level of control this year to a certain extent.



## Policy Implications

The most important period in North Korea's politics in 2022 is April where North Korea celebrates the three important anniversaries: Kim Jong-un's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the appointment as the first secretary of the WPK (April 11), Kim Il-sung's 110<sup>th</sup> anniversary (April 15), and the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the Korean People's Army (KPA) (April 25). Celebratory projects deserve our attention. Recently, North Korea promoted the strengthening of the defense power as the first and foremost achievement made during the last decade of the Kim Jong-un regime. Therefore, the North Korean authorities may make political, military moves after observing the ROK's presidential election results scheduled for March 2021, the status of the ROK-US joint military drills, the internal and external political situation in April, and the level of their military technological development. Therefore, South Korea needs to promptly respond to North Korea's possible moves by focusing on their messages sent from January to February to envision 'peace on the Korean Peninsula in April.'

Meanwhile, North Korea is likely to continue the border blockade to stem the coronavirus from infiltrating in 2022. North Korea's medical sector will become more vulnerable as limited health care resources will be given to emergency, preventive care projects. As the international assistance to North Korea's nutrients and health care sector was halted due to a prolonged border blockade, not only ordinary residents but also the vulnerable population, including children, pregnant women, people with disabilities, and the elderly are likely to be subject to unstable nutritional and health status. Amidst the global spread of the coronavirus variant and the continued vaccinations of booster shots, assisting North Korea through vaccinations to create a collective immunity seems to be limited. As providing the medicine appears to be a feasible option, the ROK government needs to actively seek a dialogue with North Korea on inter-Korean health care cooperation in coordination with the international community. As the North Korean authorities might make moves to the outside world, citing the issues of the COVID-19 prevention, the ROK also needs to brace for that possibility. ©KINU 2022



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