

## **Rumours on Unconfirmed Sino-North Korean Bilateral Meetings, 1991**

Source: M.D. Reilly in the UK Embassy, Seoul to I. Davies, Far Eastern Division of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), with copies sent to Dr. J E Hoare, UK Embassy in Peking, 5 November 1991, in folder **FCO 21/4803**, Sino-North Korean Relations, United Kingdom National Archives, Kew Gardens, London. Located and transcribed by Adam Cathcart.

Re: 'Visit of Kim Il-Sung to China'

Date: 5 November 1991

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1. On 1 November My Hungarian colleague gave me a read-out of reports he had received about Kim Il-sung's recent visit to China. There had been three reports: One from the Hungarian Ambassador in Peking, one from one of his junior colleagues quoting Chinese MFA sources and one from the Hungarian Embassy in Pyongyang, quoting Chinese and other diplomatic sources. The report from the Hungarian Ambassador in Peking was similar to that even by the Chinese MFA to the EC and reported in TUR.

2 At a lower level, the Hungarian's contact in the MFA said that the Chinese had urged upon Kim Il-sung the need for thoroughgoing economic reform. He had apparently agreed, while ruling out the prospect of political reform. In particular, he had allegedly told the Chinese that control of work places was going to be removed from party cadres and handed over to technocrats. Kim had briefed the Chinese on the line the North Koreans intended to take on nuclear issues [underlined] at the subsequent inter-Korea Prime Ministerial talks, seeking Chinese support for the proposal for a nuclear-free zone on the peninsula and linkage of any inspection of North Korean nuclear facilities to the verified withdrawal of US nuclear weapons. Chinese-ROK links had been discussed and the Chinese had agreed that they would not establish diplomatic relations with the ROK until North Korea was able to establish relations with Japan. Finally,

there had been discussion of a visit to China by Kim Jong-il. Kim Il-sung was apparently eager for an early visit. While the Chinese had apparently agreed in principle, no dates had [p. 2] been agreed and no such visit would take place before the end of the year.

3. In contrast, the Chinese diplomat in Pyongyang had said that he thought China would establish diplomatic relations with the ROK 'soon.' This view, however, was based not on specific information but on the current level of links between China and the ROK, which he thought were indicative of an early establishment of formal relations. The general expectation in Pyongyang before the visit had been that it would be limited to four days only and the fact that it was extended to nine days was ascribed to a Chinese desire to further impress upon Kim Il-sung the need for economic reform by demonstrating to him the success of such reforms in China. Despite the length of the trip, the consensus in Pyongyang was that the visit had not/not gone well. In contrast to most such visits, there had been an absence from the pages of the Rodong Shinmun of the usual friendship toasts and bilateral communiques, and reports on the outcome of the visit had been limited to a single North Korean communique.

4. The Chinese diplomat had confirmed that Kim Il-sung had met Deng Xiaoping [FCO underlining]. The latter had urged Kim to stand aside and hand over nominal power to somebody else, while remaining in position of influence behind the scenes, as he Deng had done. Kim allegedly responded by saying that he would do so on his 80th birthday, i.e. 15 April 1992.

5. I am in no position to judge the reliability or otherwise of such reports. My Hungarian colleague was himself inclined to take some of it with a pinch of salt, notably talk of Kim standing down next April. On the other hand, despite continued poor relations between Hungary and the DPRK, the Hungarian charge in Pyongyang is their former Ambassador to Peking and former Director General of the old socialist Asian countries division in the MFA in Budapest. Presumably he retains high level contacts in both China and the DPRK. Whatever the outcome of the visit, the Hungarians have separately concluded on the basis of

Chinese and Russian assessments that without either substantial amounts of external aid or thoroughgoing economic reform, North Korea cannot survive for more than 2 more years.