



DPRK SHAKES UP ELITE IN ORDER TO MEET 2012 ‘STRONG AND PROSPEROUS’ GOAL

During the third session of the 12th Supreme People’s Assembly, convened on June 7, Kim Jong Il promoted his brother-in-law Jang Sung Thaek to vice-chairman of the National Defense Commission (NDC), named a new premier, and replaced several department heads and ministers. This appears to be an attempt to shore up the regime as it seeks to “open the door to a strong and prosperous nation” by 2012, the 100th anniversary of the birth of Kim Il Sung. Kim Jong Il made a personal appearance at this latest assembly meeting, unlike the SPA meeting held in April. The leader’s presence hints at the importance of the latest gathering.

This promotion of Jang Sung Thaek and shake up of Cabinet positions appears to be part of efforts to realize the quickly approaching goal of establishing a ‘strong and prosperous nation’ by 2012, assigning those most able to positions of responsibility, regardless of age or experience. Most notably, Jang, widely thought to be second-in-command in North Korea, was promoted to vice-chairman of the NDC. He was first appointed to the NDC at the first meeting of the 12th SPA in April 2009, making his climb to vice-chairman in a mere 14 months.

Before the latest promotion, Jang held the position of vice-director of the Workers’ Party of Korea, a newly created position that he was the first to hold. In this position, Jang oversaw national security offices, police, and the courts, putting him in a position of power difficult for anyone else to achieve. Having traveled to both South Korea and China, Jang Sung Thaek was likely promoted to present the image of a strong military and, at the same time, establish stable relations with the international community in order to ensure a smooth transition of power as



well as to resurrect the economy by 2012. When Kim Jong Il led a delegation to China last May, the Chinese government treated Jang very well, ignoring standard protocol for someone in his position.

In addition, Choe Yong Rim was named the North's new premier, and eight new vice-ministers were appointed. Regional Party secretaries were allowed to participate directly, allowing those who are most knowledgeable of local conditions to impact the decisions of the administration. Most of the new appointments were very experienced elites, including Choe Yong Rim (80) as premier, and Kang Neung Su (80), Kim Rak Hui (77), Ri Thae Nam (70), and Jun Ha Chul (82). The regime is promoting a number of veterans who are making their "last stand for the motherland" as part of the effort to ensure stable transformation of power after Kim Jong Il.

With Kim Rak Hui's appointment as vice-premier and new appointments to the Ministry of Foodstuff and Daily Necessities Industry as well as the head of the Light Industry Ministry, North Korea seems to be pursuing the improvement of standards of living promised in the 2010 New Year's joint editorial. Pyongyang Party officials appear to be attempting to reassert a centrally planned economy in the aftermath of botched currency reform efforts; however those witnessing regional economic conditions appear much more able to come up with appropriate economic policies. North Korea has been unable to make any significant progress in resolving its food shortages or its inability to provide daily necessities to the public, leading the regime to scapegoat some high-ranking officials. Now, many in and outside of North Korea are watching closely to see if the regime can launch economic efforts capable of successfully 'opening the door to a Strong and Prosperous Nation' in the next two years.