

NUMBER OF DPRK MOBILE PHONE SUBSCRIBERS JUMPS

After normal citizens of North Korea were granted permission to use the country's new mobile phone network, the number of subscribers has already climbed to more than 6,500.

On March 3, Shanghai's 'Dongfang Satellite TV' aired a report titled, "North Korean government permitted average citizens to use mobile phones, too." Only a few years ago, owning a mobile phone in North Korea signified one's status as a member of the elite class, as its use was banned to normal citizens, but now, North Korean residents have reported that the government allows them to purchase and use mobile phones, with some stating that the service was likely to considerably change their everyday lives.

According to the report, many people have flocked to a new store in the country's capital specializing in mobile phone sales. It was said that on March 2, as many as 100 residents were lined up in front of a store in downtown Pyongyang in order to purchase a new phone, with some new owners unable to control their excitement as they immediately placed calls and investigated all of the phone's functions.

The Egyptian firm Orascom Telecom has been providing 3G mobile phone service, initially only to the North's elite, since last December, but this is not the first time North Korea has had a mobile service provider. In November, 2002, a European-based GSM service network was established. However, after the 2004 explosion at the Yongchon train station, which Kim Jong Il' train had recently passed through as he returned from a visit to China, mobile phone service was heavily restricted among rumors that a mobile phone-triggered bomb may have been behind

the deadly incident.