

**After Kim Jong Il's death, N. Korea tells country to rally behind the 'Great Successor'**  
*Chico Harlan*



TOKYO — With North Korea deeply mourning its “Dear Leader,” Kim Jong Il, the government in Pyongyang tried to reassure its people Monday with a message about Kim’s son, the “Great Successor.”

“Under the leadership of Kim Jong Eun,” North Korea’s state-run media said, “we should turn our sorrow into strength.”

North Korea has had just two leaders in the past 63 years — Kim, and his father, Kim Il Sung. Now, the reclusive government says, the Dear Leader’s son — believed to be in his late 20s — will continue the dynasty and grapple with the challenge of holding the deeply impoverished, nuclear-armed country together.

Kim Jong Eun will be one of the world’s most unknown — and significant — power-holders, potentially capable of reforming the country, maintaining it, or letting it slip into chaos.

The youngest of Kim Jong Il’s three sons, he has neither the resume nor the experience to control the country in the rigid manner of his father and grandfather, experts say.

For security experts in Seoul and Washington, the younger Kim’s rise turns North Korea from a truculent state into a volatile one, far likelier to threaten its neighbors or show signs of civil unrest.

Until late last year, most North Koreans had never seen Kim Jong Eun’s adult photograph. Pyongyang’s propaganda office had begun taking cautious steps to build the successor’s personality cult — but the process was designed to last years, not months.

Analysts who have studied North Korea’s second attempted power transfer fear several scenarios, including a revolt by the military or a fight for power among older party members, who view Kim Jong Eun as vulnerable target, too young to have his own allies and loyalists.

“This is really the worst possible nightmare for the North Korean state — this sudden death, and for the son to be taking over,” said Victor Cha, the White House’s former director of Asian affairs. “This could collapse before our eyes.”

Before Kim Jong Il’s death, experts and government officials in Seoul and Washington agreed on at least one major point about the North Korean father-to-son power transfer: The longer Kim Jong Il lived, the better its chances.

When Kim Jong Il formally took power from his father in 1994, he’d already worked behind the scenes for almost two decades. He had visited foreign countries and orchestrated military attacks: He’d studied his father’s methods.

But the current power transfer began only 15 months ago, when North Korea held a massive political gathering in Pyongyang, naming Kim Jong Eun to several top military and Workers’ Party positions.

A plump young man now in his late 20s, Kim Jong Eun studied for a time in Switzerland at a German-speaking high school in Liebfeld, a suburb of the Swiss capital Bern. Former

classmates remember a shy but determined boy obsessed with American basketball and expensive sports shoes. They say he spoke passable German and made some local friends, but was monitored closely by staff from the North Korean embassy in Bern.

Kim vanished in the middle of the school year in 2000, apparently to return to Pyongyang, and had not been seen in public since until he emerged as his father's heir-apparent last year. His mother, Kim Jong Il's third wife, was a former dancer who died in 2004.

North Korea has given only halting signals of Kim Jong Eun's rise. A common children's song that supposedly celebrated him didn't mention his name. His birthday passed without official acknowledgment.

When Kim Jong Il made official trips to China and Russia, Kim Jong Eun stayed at home. When the father traveled domestically, visiting factories and grocery stores, meeting with military units and watching figure-skating events, the son frequently joined him. But most times, for official photos, the younger Kim stayed in the background.

Kim Jong Eun's profile expanded in September, when he met with the president of Laos, sitting side-by-side with his dad. He also attended a massive military parade, sharing a VIP booth with his father.

In public, the chubby Kim Jong Eun wore dark Mao-style suits, similar to those worn by his grandfather. His hair — a long, black wave on top; sides buzzed almost to the scalp — was described by the official state newspaper as "sobering and stylish."

Although a campaign of hagiographic propaganda hailed him as the "dear young general" it is unclear how much support he has within the armed forces or the ruling party, both of which are dominated by far older men.

On Monday, as Pyongyang's official news agency urged loyalty to Kim Jong Eun, the online news announcement used a special, enlarged font for the names of Kim Jong Il and Kim Il Sung. It used the regular font for Kim Jong Eun.

For more than six decades, the Kim family has used North Korea as its own family-run business, gathering nuclear weapons, collecting luxury cars, funneling money to the military, paying little worry to chronic food shortages in the countryside and using isolation to hold it all together.

North Korea seemed fine, so long as its people didn't have phones to hear stories from China, didn't have movies that showed pictures of Seoul.

But Kim Jong Il's death comes at a time when North Koreans have increased access to outside information, adding an obstacle that the Dear Leader never faced in his own succession.

In an effort to bring in hard currency, the country has opened up to outside investors. Defector groups in Seoul smuggle in CDs and USB flash drives, loaded with pro-democracy information. With its central food distribution system all but broken, North Korean officials have also allowed for the emergence of private marketplaces — gathering points where people can potentially share, in whispers, ideas they once kept to themselves.

Before his death, Kim Jong Il tried his best to surround his youngest son with allies who would protect him against potential threats, purging several officials he viewed as power-hungry.

He also gave new power to his sister, Kim Kyong Hui, and his brother-in-law, Jang Song Taek. Some North Korea experts worry that Jang or other senior leaders, appointed as caretakers for the succession, will instead turn into rivals.

"With the power center, Kim Jong Il, now gone, there are fewer common interests" to hold the top officials together, said Ryoo Kihl-jae, from the Seoul-based University of North Korean Studies.

As North Koreans heard the news Monday of Kim's death, they flooded into public squares, according to video released by Pyongyang's news agency. North Koreans formed orderly lines in front of Kim-related monuments, and many fell to their knees, sobbing, even howling. One man slapped the pavement with grief.

An article written by the state news agency described a nation seized with "indescribably bitter grief."

The article quoted a politician and a military officer, both of whom mentioned Kim Jong Eun. The politician, Ho Song Chol, said that North Korea will triumph under the young general. The military officer, Jong Il Guk, 43, described a country willing to "work harder" for the "great and fresh victory" of its next revolution, led by Kim Jong Eun.

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