

North Korea

OVERVIEW

North Korea is the most secretive, closed, repressive, and isolated country in the world. The North Korean people have very limited freedom, because of their strict government. There are tensions between North and South Korea, and there is always the threat of war. The communist country has nuclear weapons, and threatens that they will not hesitate to use them.

The totalitarian regime has often been accused of abusing human rights. There are reports from international organizations on torture, slave labor, and public executions.

Oddly enough, the official name of the country is the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. It is located in the northern part of the Korean Peninsula. Pyongyang is the capital city of North Korea, and is home to around 2.8 million people.

Leadership

The Kim family rules North Korea. They have created a country where the people treat them as superheroes with special powers. Kim Il Sung is the founder of the regime. His son, Kim Jong Il, was designated as the new leader after his father's death. Kim Jong Il died in 2011 after having ruled the country for 17 years. Kim Jong Un was the successor, and is the current leader of North Korea. Only a little is known about Kim Jong Un, but he has continued ruling the country the same way as his father and grandfather.

Economy

North Korea's economy is completely planned by the government. Essentially, this means that the government owns most of the businesses in the country. Apart from North Korea, there is only one other country in the world that has such a centralized planned economy; Cuba. North Korea has a policy that forbids most people and companies to trade with other countries. Only China and Russia are allowed to invest in North Korea, and on a very small scale. The country is one of the poorest and least developed in the world.

Fast Facts

Flag:



Population:	24.76 million
Capital:	Pyongyang
Currency:	North Korean won
Leader:	Kim Jong-un
Government:	Family dictatorship, Totalitarianism



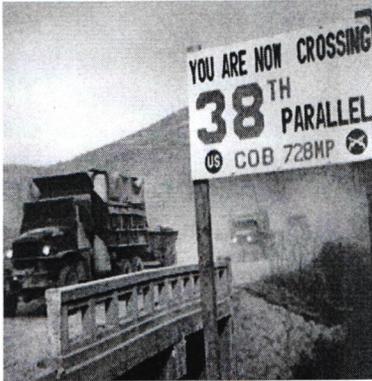
Exercise 2: Are the statements below true, false or not given?

- 1) Kim Jong Il is the current leader of North Korea. ()
- 2) North Korea is a Democracy. ()
- 3) North Korea has weapons of mass destruction. ()
- 4) Tourists are not allowed in North Korea. ()
- 5) Pyongyang is home to nearly 15 million people. ()
- 6) The North Korean leaders have supernatural powers. ()
- 7) The government owns most of the businesses. ()
- 8) Kim Jong Un has made the country more free and open. ()
- 9) Kim Il Sung died in 2011. ()
- 10) North Korea is similar to Cuba in many ways. ()
- 11) North Korea does not trade with other countries. ()
- 12) The regime treats its people very well. ()

The Korean War

NORTH VS SOUTH

For a long time, the Korean Peninsula was occupied by only one Korea. It was not only ruled by different Korean dynasties, but also by China and Japan. Japan had control over Korea from 1910 until 1945, and it was a part of the Japanese empire back then.



During 1945, which was a period that marked the end of the Second World War, the Soviet Union (Russia) declared war on Japan. The northern part of the Korean Peninsula was taken from Japan by the Soviet Union. The southern part was administered by the United States. Korea was now divided into two parts at the 38th Parallel.

Soon afterwards, major conflicts arose between these two split regions of the country. The northern part of the country followed the footsteps of the Soviet Union and became communist; while the south had a capitalist government, which was backed by the United States. The Republic of Korea (South Korea) was officially formed in 1948. A short time later, the USSR (Russia) established the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) with Kim Il Sung as the leader.

Following the split of the country into the north and the south, attempts were made to unify the two parts. However, conflicts arose because both countries had completely different political systems. In 1950, conflicts became more violent, and the Korean War was sparked. North Korea invaded the south and the United Nations sent aid to South Korea. At first, the north was able to conquer a large area from their southern neighbor. However, a few months later, forces from the UN pushed the North Korean military back to the north. Forces from South Korea and the UN were so successful that soon after, the North Korean capital – Pyongyang - was occupied. The North Korean army reinforced itself with the help of Chinese forces, and the fighting moved back to the south again. In the beginning of 1951, the capital city of South Korea – Seoul - was taken by the Communist forces.

In the months that followed, heavy fighting followed between the two regions of the country. However, the main conflict was at the 38th parallel (a circle of latitude that is 38 degrees north of the equator). Negotiations for peace started in July of 1951, but the heavy fighting did not stop until 1952. On July 27th 1953, an agreement was reached between the two parties, and a demilitarized zone at the 38th Parallel was formed. The peace treaty was signed by North Korea, China, and the United Nations; and was led by the United States. However, South Korea never officially signed this treaty.



Exercise 3: Answer the questions about the Korean War.

1) Which nation had control over the Korean Peninsula during the 2nd World War?

2) What happened to the Korean Peninsula at the end of the 2nd World War?

3) Why were there conflicts between North and South Korea after they were formed?

4) Which side started the Korean War, and by whom were they supported?

5) What is the 38th Parallel?

6) What is the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ)?

7) Is the Korean War officially over? Explain.

Interesting Facts

ABOUT NORTH KOREA

Kim Jong Il

During the reign of Kim Jong Il, the North Korean government released the "official biography" of the life of Kim Jong Il. According to this biography, Kim Jong Il was born on a sacred mountain under a double rainbow as a new star appeared in the sky. When he was only 3 years old, he learned to walk and was already correcting his school teacher during history lessons. Kim Jong Il shot a 38 under par on the country's golf course. He scored 11 hole in one's on the 18 hole course. After that, he retired from the sport, as he could not get any better at it. He did not use toilets because he did not defecate. He invented hamburgers and had the ability to control the weather with his moods.



Kim Jong Il

Life expectancy

The average life expectancy of North Korean people is 69 years, which is 11 years less than South Koreans. The most serious health risk is hunger. During the reign of Kim Jong Il, a famine killed around 2.5 million people, which was roughly 10% of the entire population.



Tourism

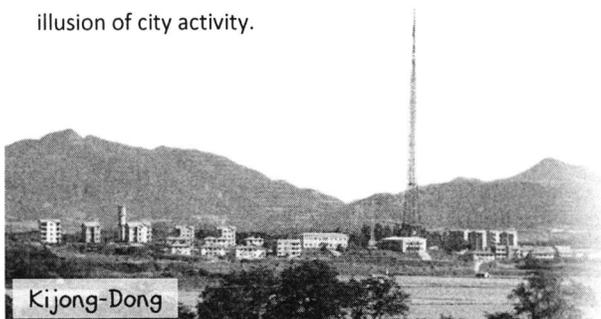
It is possible for foreigners to visit North Korea, although it is not easy to do so. Visa applicants are thoroughly checked by the authorities and only a few people are actually allowed to visit the country. However, no South Koreans are ever allowed to come to North Korea. It is also extremely difficult for the American and Japanese people to obtain a visa, as these countries are seen as enemies of North Korea. Once tourists have entered the country, they are not allowed to speak with the local people. It is also against the law for North Koreans to speak with foreigners without permission.

The US Navy ship

The Navy of the United States is the most powerful in the world. No single country in the world has ever claimed to have captured a US ship or submarine. However, North Korea is actually the only country in the world that has captured a US Navy ship. The ship was taken in 1968 around 15 miles off the coast of North Korea.

Kijong-Dong

Kijong-Dong is a propaganda city that was built in the 1950s near the border with South Korea. The city has no actual residents. The main purpose behind building this city was to display the superiority of the North over the South. The buildings of the city have lights on set timers and actors are hired to create the illusion of city activity.



Kijong-Dong

QUICK FACTS

An American soldier ran across the North Korean border in 1962 and has been living there ever since.

North Korean "researchers" have concluded that the North Korean people are the 2nd happiest people in the world behind China.

In North Korea, it is not the year 2014 but 103. They started marking the years following the birth of Kim Il Sung.

The economy of North Korea was larger than South Korea until the 1970s. However, today, the North Korean economy is about 2.5% the size of its Southern neighbor.

Every 5 years, elections are held in the country. However, there is only one candidate to choose from.

North Korea has the world's largest stadium. It can seat 150,000 people.

North Koreans may only choose from 28 hairstyles that have been approved by the authorities.

Kim Jong Il's oldest son, Kim Jong Nam, has fallen out of favor after being arrested in Tokyo while traveling to Disneyland on a forged passport.

Everyday Life

IN NORTH KOREA

The North Korean people live under a strict communist regime. They have no say in how their country is managed. The central government controls nearly every aspect of life in the country. Most jobs don't have salaries. Food and clothing are mostly provided by the government. People who do have a job with a paycheck earn around \$1,500 per year. The majority of North Korean people are very poor. They don't have things like washing machines, fridges, or even bicycles.



Practicing a religion is not allowed as the state sees it as a threat. Instead, children are raised to worship Kim Il Sung, "the President for life". There are over 34,000 statues of Kim Il Sung in North Korea, and all wedding ceremonies must take place in front of one. Portraits of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il can be found pretty much everywhere. All citizens must hang these portraits, which are provided by the government. Once a month, the police come over and check whether the portraits are still hanging and properly taken care of.



Electricity is very unreliable in the country; most homes only have electricity a few hours per day. When buildings on one side of the street are blacked out, the other side gets electricity. When this situation occurs, there is a mad rush of children who run to their friends' apartments on the other side.

Internet is only available to the elite in North Korea. Even cellphones are extremely rare. Only people who are trusted by the government can buy a cell phone, but they must pay a registration fee of \$825.

There are only 300,000 cars in North Korea. Nevertheless, the regime takes traffic control very seriously. In case there is a power outage, female traffic directors take over. These traffic directors are personally hand-picked by Kim Jong Un; only the most beautiful girls are chosen for this job.



North Korea is the most militarized country in the world. The government spends more than 30% of its tax income on the military, and all men must serve at least 10 years in the army. It is not easy to be a soldier; the conditions are tough, discipline is harsh, and food supplies are poor.

When people want to buy a TV, they must report this to the authorities. The government wants to ensure that the TVs are tuned to the official channels only. All TV and radio channels are run by the state, and foreign channels are against the law. Because of this, most North Korean people have no idea of world events. They only see the things that the government wants them to see. Foreign books, magazines, and newspapers are not allowed.



Company workers have to allow a lot of time to go to their work. Most transportation systems are unreliable, and being late for work is totally unacceptable. It is not that there is so much work to do, but the government says that being late "aids the enemy".

The Kim Dynasty

RULING NORTH KOREA

North Korea is under total control of the Kim family dictatorship. The regime was established by Kim Il Sung in 1948. The government wants people to believe that their country is a 'democratic people's republic', but in fact it is more like a cult. Kim Il Sung passed away 20 years back. However, he is still regarded as the eternal leader of the nation. The government often punishes people who openly criticize the regime.

Kim Il Sung

Kim Il Sung was born near Pyongyang in 1912. He was a guerrilla fighter during the Japanese occupation of Korea. He also fought with the Soviet army during the 2nd World War. After the war had ended, he returned to his home country and became the leader of North Korea. In 1950, Kim Il Sung convinced his allies Joseph Stalin (Soviet Union) and Mao Zedong (China) to invade South Korea, and take it under control. After American and United Nations forces got involved in the conflict, the war officially ended in 1953.

During his rule, Kim Il Sung introduced the 'Juche Philosophy' which was used to 'develop' his country without any external help, or maintenance of any relationships with foreign countries. He created a cult status that enabled him to rule the country with an iron fist for 46 years.



Kim Il Sung
1912 - 1994



Kim Jong Il
1941 - 2011

Kim Jong Il

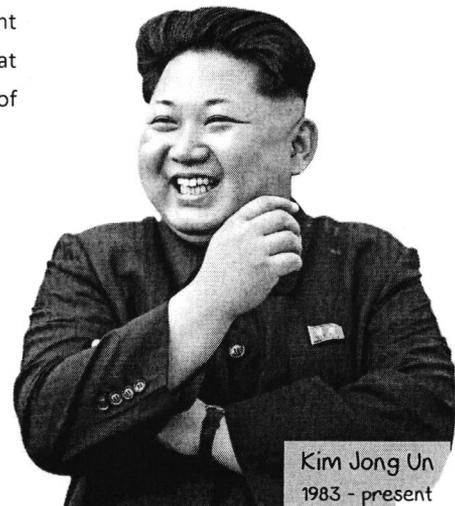
Kim Jong Il succeeded his father in 1994 as the leader of North Korea. He was often called the 'Dear Leader'. According to North Korean propaganda, Kim Jong Il was born on Mount Paekto, a holy mountain in North Korea. However, he was actually born in Russia while his father was fighting for the Soviet Army during the 2nd World War.

During the initial days of Kim Jong Il's reign, North Korea was hit by a famine that lasted for three years, and killed around two million people. His reign was also marked by the launch of a nuclear program that even led to the testing of a nuclear bomb in 2006.

Kim Jong Il died in 2011. The government announced in an official statement that their 'Dear Leader' had died because of physical and mental over-work.

Kim Jong Un

Kim Jong Un is the current leader of North Korea and the youngest head of state in the world. He became the 'Supreme Leader' in 2011 after his father died of a heart attack. He has continued the country's nuclear missile testing which his father started. Kim Jong Un got his education abroad, in Switzerland.



Kim Jong Un
1983 - present

Nuclear Weapons Program

CONFLICTS WITH THE WEST

The North Korean government spends more than 30% of its budget on the military. The army has more than a million soldiers, making it one of the largest armies in the world. However, the soldiers are not equipped with modern weapons. Most of their weapons were acquired from China and the Soviet Union a long time ago.

About 20 years ago, Kim Jong Il started the country's nuclear weapon program. Since then, the country has spent a lot of money and worked very hard toward developing its nuclear arsenal. Initially, government officials claimed that their aim was to produce nuclear energy instead of producing weapons. However, the military has been collecting plutonium, a substance needed to make nuclear weapons.



North Korean ballistic missile

Western countries have become increasingly worried about the nuclear developments of North Korea, urging the regime to cease their nuclear ambitions and threatening the country with increasing economic sanctions. The regime has ignored all such warnings from the west and continued with their nuclear program. In 1994, the then American President Bill Clinton signed a deal with North Korea that would provide the country with food, oil and other aid if they stopped their nuclear program.

However, in 2001, when George Bush became the American President, tensions between the two nations grew. Bush accused North Korea of being a terrorist state and the North Koreans secretly continued producing nuclear weapons.

North Korea successfully tested their first atomic bomb in 2006 and another explosion took place in 2009. The military also tested rockets that can carry nuclear bombs and can reach South Korea and Japan. Some experts worry that North Korea is working on intercontinental rockets that can even reach Europe and the United States.

Exercise 14: Are the statements below true or false?

- 1) North Korea spends more than half of its budget on the military. ()
- 2) The military is equipped with weapons from allied countries. ()
- 3) Reactors were built to produce energy. ()
- 4) North Korea has been trying to produce nuclear weapons since the country was established. ()
- 5) Efforts of western nations to stop North Korea from producing nuclear weapons have been unsuccessful. ()
- 6) The United States has offered financial aid to solve the nuclear problem with North Korea. ()
- 7) President Bush declared war on North Korea. ()
- 8) North Korea made a nuclear attack in 2006 and a second in 2009. ()
- 9) North Korea is able to reach America with its nuclear weapons. ()

Exercise 15: Why do you think that the North Korean government is so eager to produce nuclear weapons?
