

Outlook for the 4th Session of the 12th Supreme People's Assembly: Focusing on Appointments and Policies

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On March 18th, the Korea Central News Agency(KCNA) announced that the 4th Session of North Korea's 12th Supreme People's Assembly(SPA) will be held on April 7th. According to KCNA, the Standing Committee of the SPA decided on March 15th to convene the session and ordered all SPA members to pre-register on April 4th and 5th. Considering the usual practice in previous years, the major agenda items for this session will likely include ① reviewing the budget for 2010 and settling accounts; ② deciding the budget for 2011; ③ sorting organization and personnel issues; ④ discussing the direction of economic policy.

We are primarily concerned with organization and personnel changes and economic policy. First of all, regarding personnel issues, at the 3rd Session of the 12th SPA in June of last year Choi Young Rim was appointed prime minister and Jang Sung Taek became a vice chairman of the National Defense Commission(NDC). Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that there may be some personnel movement among the Party, government, and military organizations at this session as well. Of particular interest is whether or not Kim Jong Eun, the heir apparent and vice chairman of the Party's Central Military Commission, will

receive any change of status. I.e., interest is focused on whether he will become a vice chairman or 1st vice chairman of the NDC. However at present it seems unlikely that Kim Jong Eun will receive such a major post. This is because NDC Chairman Kim Jong Il's health condition has improved. On February 24th at a seminar hosted by the National Research Council for Economics, Humanities and Social Sciences, Dean of the Peking University School of International Studies Wang Jisi remarked, "Chairman Kim Jong Il's health has improved considerably." In fact, after collapsing from a stroke in August 2008, Kim has been gradually recovering since 2009, and from last year to the present he has undertaken frequent on-site inspections. Therefore the power transition to Kim Jong Il is expected to slow down somewhat. Nevertheless North Korea has designated 2012 as the year of achieving the status of a *kangsung daeguk* (strong and prosperous country), and thus if Kim Jong Eun is able to achieve some tangible economic results this year then we can expect him to attain a higher status by 2012.

Another point of interest is who will replace Ju Sang Sung, who was dismissed from his post as minister of People's Security on March 16th. No political reason has been detected for Minister Ju's removal aside from the officially stated "anxiety-related illness." Ju appeared healthy as recently as February 16th, and since he stepped down so suddenly there have been many divergent theories as to the reason. However, considering that Choi Ryong Su was dismissed as People's Security minister in July 2004 after holding the post for just one year, this is really not such an irregularity. At 78 Ju Sang Sung is an elderly man, and he quite possibly may have developed some health problems. Particularly since the work of cementing the Kim Jong Eun succession system has been pushed forward vigorously from the beginning of this year, it is also possible that he may have collapsed from overwork. However, if he is also removed from his position on the NDC at this upcoming SPC session, it will signal that there are more than mere health concerns at play.

Regarding our other area of interest, economic policy, the North may adopt some new laws or move to establish a special economic zone in order to attract foreign capital. In recent years the regime has set improvement of the people's standard of living as the most important national task. However they have been unable to achieve this due to the repeated failures of various reform measures. Meanwhile Kim Jong Eun's succession process has been accelerated, and in order to firmly establish his status the regime needs to rapidly improve the people's economy in a short period of time. This is also closely related to the problem of building a *kangsung daeguk* by 2012. In that regard, the area in which Kim Jong Eun is most

likely to accumulate achievements is external opening, and this in turn is connected to relations with China. Kim Jong Eun is using the development of CNC, a product of the self-propelled revitalization effort, as a tool to establish his own political legitimacy, and in order to justify this he has promoted the orthodoxy of "advanced scientific thinking." However, for this to succeed he will desperately need Chinese help. Therefore it must be anticipated that he may introduce some policies and laws to facilitate the absorption of Chinese capital, and later on he may visit China to cement those plans. Of course, to complete the construction of *kangung daeguk* he will need to devote every effort to improving relations with the South. Thus we cannot exclude the possibility that some groundbreaking new proposal may be put forth regarding inter-Korean relations. This is another reason why this upcoming 4th Session of the 12th SPA is attracting attention. As the figure below shows, historically meaningful decisions have been made not only at 1st SPA sessions but at 4th sessions as well.

SPA	Session	Date	Achievements
7 th	4 th	1985.4.9	Inter-Korean parliamentary talks proposed
9 th	4 th	1992.12.11	Prime minister replaced (Yeon Hyeong Muk → Kang Seong San)
10 th	4 th	2001.4.5	Processing Trade Act, Lock Gate Act and Copyright Act approved
11 th	4 th	2006.4.11	Strategy for scientific and technological development adopted
12 th	4 th	2011.4.7	?