

International

North Koreans pay tribute to Kim's father in freezing cold

'The great leaders are regarded as our own parents'

PYONGYANG: The Day of the Shining Star dawned bitterly cold in Pyongyang. But thousands of North Koreans lined up in temperatures of minus 8 degrees Celsius yesterday to pay their respects to late leader Kim Jong Il on his birthday. Kim, the son of the isolated North's founder Kim Il Sung and the father and predecessor of current leader Kim Jong Un, was born on February 16.

According to Pyongyang's orthodoxy, he came into the world in 1942, in a snow-covered hut at a secret camp on the slopes of Mount Paektu, the spiritual birthplace of the Korean people, where his father was fighting occupying Japanese forces. Outside historians point instead to official Soviet records, which say he was born a year earlier in a Siberian village where Kim Il Sung was in exile. Either way, it is a key anniversary in a nuclear-armed nation whose people are taught from birth to revere the "Paektu bloodline", as the Kim family which has ruled it for three generations is known.

Referred to as the Day of the Shining Star, the occasion is celebrated with flower shows, mass dances in the capital and elsewhere, and laudatory tributes in state media, all reinforcing the underlying narrative. Driver Kim Chol Jun, 42, took his two boys to Mansu Hill, where giant statues of the two older Kims look out over the capital, to pay his respects to them and the current leader. "No sons and daughters feel tired when they visit their parents," he said. "The great leaders are regarded as our own parents,

so I visit here to bow before our parents with my sons." Ordinary North Koreans consistently express unequivocal support for the leadership and its policies when speaking to foreign media.

Silver screen

Snow dusted the two monumental panels — one to the fight against Japanese occupiers, the other to the building of socialism — that flank the statues, their faces bathed in the light of the rising sun as small children swept the steps clean. In pride of place before the bronze effigies stood a large floral tribute emblazoned with the name of Kim Jong Un, who is due to hold his second summit with US President Donald Trump at the end of the month.

Pyongyang is under multiple international sanctions over its pursuit of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, which Washington is pressing it to give up. North Korea has rejected demands for what it calls its "unilateral" disarmament. At the statues, groups ranging from couples and families to hundreds-strong detachments of workers or soldiers assembled turn by turn in front of the images.

After placing individual blooms or flower baskets before the figures, they lined up as an announcer intoned: "Let us pay tribute", and bowed deeply, the military personnel saluting. Kim Jong Il died in 2011 and his remains are preserved in a palatial mausoleum on the outskirts of Pyongyang, but officially he remains Eternal General Secretary of the ruling Workers' Party of Korea. — AFP



PYONGYANG: People gather as they wait to pay their respects before the statues of late North Korean leaders Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il as part of celebrations marking the birthday of late North Korean leader Kim Jong Il, known as the 'Day of the Shining Star', on Mansu hill. — AFP

Drug 'godfathers' surrender to Bangladesh police

TEKNAF: Some 102 Bangladeshi meth dealers have surrendered to authorities at a pre-scheduled ceremony in a coastal town, officials said yesterday, as a Philippines-style anti-narcotics crackdown sows fear among kingpins. Bangladesh last year launched a "war" on drugs following a proliferation of illegal substances in the South Asian nation of 165 million people, mostly of cheap methamphetamine pills known as "yaba".

Police said 24 yaba "godfathers", as well as lieutenants and peddlers, surrendered to the country's home minister in Teknaf — the key gateway for smuggling yaba into the country from Myanmar, where the pills are manufactured by the millions. The dealers also surrendered 350,000 vanilla-scented, small red yaba pills — whose name comes from a Thai word meaning "crazy medicine" — and 30 illegal firearms.

The country's police chief Mohammad Javed Patwary said authorities would advocate for lesser prison sentences for those who had surrendered, and would "assist" them in returning to normal life. But he promised "harsh upcoming days" for those who had stayed away. "Those who are in hiding, don't get carried away. You'll not be spared," he told the mass gathering of several thousand locals who came to witness the event.

Teknaf is situated in Cox's Bazar district — home to around a million Rohingya refugees — bordering Myanmar. Cox's Bazar is flooded with yaba, with many of the Rohingya refugees used as "mules" for carrying the pills. The pills have become an easy source of income for the Rohingya, some 740,000 of whom have poured across the border since Myanmar launched a military crackdown in August 2017 that the UN has described as ethnic cleansing. The mass surrender comes during a concerted crackdown against drug traffickers, which has left nearly 300 people dead, including 40 from Teknaf, and seen about 25,000 arrested since May last year. On Friday Bangladesh security forces seized 570,000 yaba pills in separate drives in the border region next to Myanmar's northern Rakhine state.

According to the Department of Narcotics Control, some five million people in Bangladesh are drug users with yaba the most popular substance. The country seized a record 53 million yaba pills last year. In October, authorities made yaba a class-A banned substance and parliament passed a law allowing the death penalty for dealing the drug. Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte's highly controversial anti-drug crackdown has killed thousands of alleged users and pushers since 2016. — AFP

Amphibious assault craft take beach in US-Thai war drills

SATTAHIP: With weapons drawn camouflaged troops leapt out of amphibious assault craft while explosions sounded and parachutists glided in from above as the annual Cobra Gold war games took over a placid Thai beach yesterday. Now in its 38th year, Cobra Gold is one of the largest military exercises in Asia, bringing thousands of forces from the United States, Thailand and other countries together for 11 days of training on Thai shores.

This year's drill includes some 2,000 US Marines, 1,000 US soldiers and hundreds from the country's Navy and Air Force. Yesterday US, Thai and South Korean forces descended on Namsai beach in Chonburi province in a joint drill intended to simulate securing the territory. Captain Melvin Spiese told AFP the goal was to "bring power from ship to shore" and be ready for "any kind of future crisis we might need to respond to with our Thai counterparts."

Helicopters buzzed overhead and fighter jets roared across the skies. Cobra Gold exercises span air, land and sea and feature a jungle survivalist session where participants take turns drinking blood from a severed cobra and snacking on insects and scorpions. Singapore, Japan, Indonesia and Malaysia also took part in the war games. A 2014 army coup in Thailand tested ties with Washington and the kingdom tilted towards China with high-profile arms buys. But US military sales continued and the two countries have upped their engagement under US President Donald Trump, who has stepped back on human rights issues and invited junta chief Prayut Chan-O-Cha to the White House. — AFP

Delhi policeman holds up mirror to bike law breakers

NEW DELHI: Traffic cop Sandeep Shahi used to gift helmets to those riding motorbikes on some of the world's most dangerous streets with their head unprotected — but on reflection, he found a better approach. By flashing a mirror at violators, Shahi has been able to shame riders into reflecting on the thin line between life and death on New Delhi's notorious roads.

Although the law mandates proper headgear for bikers in the Indian capital, it is common to see youngsters zip past either without a helmet or with one dangling from their arms, undaunted by the threat of a 1,000-rupee (\$14) fine. Women riding pillion also often give the helmet a miss — sometimes just for fear of ruining their hair-

style. "For the last four years I had been trying to persuade riders to wear helmets but to no avail," Shahi said.

"Then one day when I was riding pillion with my friend on a bike, I saw myself in the mirror without a helmet and I felt ashamed. "Then it struck me that if I make others see themselves in the mirror, they might feel ashamed and start wearing a helmet. A mirror never lies." Shahi says his trick has worked so far. Riders have apologized and promised never to go on the roads again without head gear. "I have also prepared slides about road safety rules which I show to commuters. I am very happy that this simple mirror has proved so effective in curbing violations." — AFP



NEW DELHI: This photo taken on February 15, 2019 shows Delhi Traffic Police constable Sandeep Shahi (2L) holds up a mirror as part of a safety awareness campaign. — AFP

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