

International

North Koreans process salmon, snow crab eaten in US, Europe

N Korea workers worldwide bring in \$200-\$500 million a year

HUNCHUN: Americans buying seafood for dinner may inadvertently have subsidized the North Korean government as it builds its nuclear weapons program, an Associated Press investigation has found. Their purchases may also have supported forced labor. At a time when North Korea is banned from selling almost anything, the country is sending tens of thousands of workers worldwide to bring in an estimated \$200 million to \$500 million a year.

That could account for a sizable portion of North Korea's nuclear weapons and missile programs, which South Korea says have cost more than \$1 billion.

While North Korean workers have been documented overseas, the AP investigation reveals that some products they make go to the United States. AP also tracked products made by North Korean workers to Canada, Germany and elsewhere in the European Union.

In response to the investigation, Senate leaders said Wednesday that the US needs to keep products made by North Koreans out and get China to refuse to hire North Korean workers. "The (Trump) administration needs to ramp up the pressure on China to crack down on trade with North Korea across the board," said top Senate Democrat Chuck Schumer. At Chinese factories, North Korean workers aren't allowed to leave their compounds without permission, and must step from housing to factories in pairs or groups,

with North Korean minders.

They receive a fraction of their salaries, while the rest - as much as 70 percent - is taken by the North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's government. John Connelly, president of the National Fisheries Institute, urged its 300 members, including the largest seafood importers in the US, to "ensure that wages go to the workers, and are not siphoned off to support a dangerous dictator." Besides seafood, AP found North Korean laborers making wood flooring and sewing garments in Chinese factories. Those industries also export to the US, but

AP did not track specific shipments except for seafood.

American companies aren't allowed to import products made by North Korean workers anywhere in the world, and companies doing business with them could face criminal charges for using North Korean workers or materially benefiting from their work. (The AP employs a small number of support staff in its Pyongyang bureau under a waiver granted by the US government to allow the flow of news and information.) US Customs and Border Protection, responsible for enforcing the law, did not respond to requests for comment.

A repressive regime

"This is a state-sponsored scheme to export folks who are in bonded labor," said Luis CdeBaca, former US ambassador for

“**State-sponsored scheme to export folks**”



HUNCHUN: Workers at a seafood processing plant where North Korean workers are distinguished from the Chinese workers by blue overalls wash up after work in the city of Hunchun, in northeastern China's Jilin province. — AP

human trafficking issues. "It's supporting a repressive regime." Western companies involved that responded to AP said forced labor and potential support for North Korea was unacceptable in their supply chains. They said they'd investigate, and some said they'd already cut off ties with suppliers. Meanwhile, as many as 100,000 North Koreans continue to work in construction in the Gulf states, shipbuilding in Poland, logging in Russia and on fishing boats in Uruguay. New UN sanctions bar countries from expanding their North Korean workforce.

Despite the pay and restrictions, the jobs abroad are highly coveted among North Koreans. Roughly 3,000 North Koreans are believed to work in Hunchun, a Chinese industrial hub near the North Korean and Russian borders. At some factories, laborers work hunched over tables as North Korean political slogans blasted from loudspeakers. When a reporter approached a group of North Koreans - women in tight, bright polyester clothes preparing a meal at a garment factory - one confirmed that she and some others were from Pyongyang, the North Korean capital. — AP

Row over Pakistani paramilitary unit fuels political confusion

ISLAMABAD: An unexplained dispute between Pakistan's interior minister and an elite paramilitary unit under his command is adding to political confusion in Islamabad, prompting questions about a rift in ties between civilian leaders and the powerful military. The spat comes at a moment of heightened concern over the feverish political climate in nuclear-armed Pakistan, which the United States seeks to include in its new strategy for South Asia.

Interior Minister Ashan Iqbal was taken by surprise when the elite Rangers unit, which provides security around parliament, withdrew its guards without explanation on Wednesday. "I was told the Rangers have unilaterally withdrawn from the important installations where they were on duty, which, for us, was shocking," Iqbal told domestic television channel Dawn News. "This was a gross violation."

Outside parliament on Thursday, the country's Frontier Constabulary was on guard instead. A police official on duty confirmed the Rangers were no longer stationed there. "The order for them to leave did not come from the interior ministry, it must have come from somewhere else," said the official, who asked not to be identified because of the sensitivity of the topic. Rangers' officials could not immediately be reached for comment. Iqbal did not immediately respond to Reuters' telephone calls to seek comment.

The Rangers had this week denied Iqbal entry to a court



NUSHKI, Pakistan: Pakistani devotees gather around the bodies of blast victims after a suicide bombing near a sufi shrine in the Gandawa area of Jhal Magsi district yesterday. — AFP

building where matters relating to an anti-graft case against Sharif were being heard, prompting him to threaten to resign, saying he refused to be "a puppet interior minister". The moves follow July's Supreme Court disqualification of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, which he blamed on a conspiracy against him, feeding speculation about a rupture in civilian-military ties. Senior leaders from Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) party pointed fingers at the country's military after his disqualification for not declaring a source of income. The army denies playing a role. But the Rangers' departure from the area around parliament points to a persistent disagreement between civilian and military leaders, one analyst said. "They can't just leave their posts," said Zeeshan Salahuddin, communications and strategy director of the Islamabad-based Centre for Research and Security Studies. — Reuters

Serial attacker targets women; 11 stabbed

KARACHI: Pakistan police announced a reward of nearly \$5,000 yesterday for information that could help them nab a serial attacker who has stabbed 11 women so far in the port megacity of Karachi. The attacks began late last month when a man on a motorcycle began sporadically wounding women walking on streets in the eastern part of the sprawling city.

They escalated late Wednesday when the attacker targeted five women in different parts of the neighborhood, bringing the total number of women assaulted to 11 and alarming authorities. CCTV footage of one attack shows the man stabbing a burqa-clad woman from behind and then fleeing, police said. "It is the pattern that he attacks on the women from rear with some sharp pointed object... We have arrested at least eight individuals having similarities with the appearance of the attacker," Samiullah Soomro, a senior police officer said.

Police also announced a reward of 500,000 rupees (\$4,700) for information leading to the attacker's arrest. "Our full focus is on this case and we hope to find the culprit soon," Soomro said. The attacks echo a similar spree in the garrison city of Rawalpindi last year, when a man stabbed 17 women over a series of months, killing one, because he wanted "revenge" for a cruel stepmother. "I hate women," 22-year-old Mohammad Ali told police when he was finally arrested in August. — Reuters