**Kim Jong-il Supreme Commander of the Korean People's Army**

**Kim Jong-il** was born February 16, 1941 and has been the leader of Democratic People's Republic of Korea since 1994. Officially he is the Chairman of the National Defense Commission of North Korea, Supreme Commander of the Korean People's Army, and [General Secretary](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General_Secretary) of the Workers' Party of Korea (the ruling party since 1948). He succeeded his father Kim Il-sung, the founder of Democratic People's Republic of Korea, who died in 1994. Due to the secretive nature of the North Korean government, many official claims about Kim's life and activities are inconsistent with outside sources.

Kim Jong-il's official biography states that he was born at Mount Paektu in northern Korea on February 16, 1942. Soviet records show he was born in the Siberian village of Vyatskoye, near Khabarovsk, on February 16, [1941](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1941), where his father, Kim Il-sung, was a captain and battalion commander in the Soviet 88th Special Rifle Brigade, which was made up of Chinese and Korean exiles. It is believed that his official birth year was adjusted so he would be seen to be 50 at the time of his father's eightieth birthday.

Kim Jong-il's official biography also holds that his birth at Mount Paektu was foretold by a swallow, and that his birth was heralded by the appearance of a double rainbow over the mountain and a new star in the heavens.

Kim was a young child when World War II ended in 1945. His father returned to Pyongyang in September 1945, and in late November the younger Kim returned to Korea via a Soviet ship that landed at Sonbong (Unggi). The family moved into a former Japanese officer's mansion in Pyongyang, with a garden and pool. Kim Jong-il's brother Shura Kim (also known as the first Kim Pyong-il) drowned there in 1948. In 1948, Kim Jong-il began primary school. In 1949, his mother died in pregnancy.

Kim probably received most of his education in the People's Republic of China, where he was sent away from his father for safety during the Korean War. According to the official biography, he graduated from Namsan School in Pyongyang, a special school for the children of communist party officials. He is later said to have attended Kim Il-sung University and to have majored in Political Economy, graduating in 1964. His graduating class won the highest academic honor, Double Chollima. By the time of his graduation, his father, revered in the government's official pronouncements as "the Great Leader" had firmly consolidated control over the government. He is also said to have received English language education at the University of Malta in the early 1970s, on his infrequent holidays in Malta as guest of Prime Minister Dom Mintoff.

The elder Kim had meanwhile remarried and had another son, Kim Pyong-il. It is unclear if Jong-il was chosen over Pyong-il, or whether Pyong-il was ever seriously considered as successor by his father. Since 1988, Kim Pyong-il has served in a series of North Korean embassies in Europe and is currently the North Korean ambassador to Poland. It is suspected that Kim Pyong-il was exiled to these distant posts by Kim Il-sung in order to avoid a power struggle between his two sons.

**Early political career**

After graduating in 1964, Kim Jong-il began his ascension through the ranks of the ruling Korean Workers' Party, working first in the party's elite Organization Department before being named a member of the Politburo in 1968. In 1969 he was appointed deputy director of the Propaganda and Agitation Department.

In 1973, Kim was made Party secretary of organization and propaganda, and in 1974, he was officially designated his father's successor. During the next 15 years, he accumulated further positions, including Minister of Culture and head of party operations against South Korea.

Kim gradually made his presence felt within the Korean Workers Party from the Seventh Plenum of the Fifth Central Committee in September 1973, leading the "Three Revolution Team" campaigns. He was often referred to as the "Party Center", due to his growing influence over the daily operations of the Party.

By the time of the Sixth Party Congress in October 1980, Kim Jong-il's control of the Party operation was complete. He was given senior posts in the Politburo, the Military Commission and the party Secretariat. When he was made a member of the Seventh Supreme People's Assembly in February 1982, it had become clear to international observers that he was the heir apparent to succeed his father as the supreme leader of the DPRK.

At this time Kim assumed the title "Dear Leader", *ch'inaehanŭn chidoja*), the government began building a personality cult around him patterned after that of his father, the "Great Leader". Kim Jong-il was regularly hailed by the media as the "peerless leader" and "the great successor to the revolutionary cause". He emerged as the most powerful figure behind his father in North Korea.

In 1991, Kim was also named supreme commander of the North Korean armed forces. Since the Army is the real foundation of power in North Korea, this was a vital step. It appears that the veteran Defense Minister, Oh Jin-wu, one of Kim Il-sung's most loyal subordinates, engineered Kim Jong-il's acceptance by the Army as the next leader of the North Korea, despite his lack of military service. The only other possible leadership candidate, Prime Minister Kim Il (no relation), was removed from his posts in 1976. In 1992, Kim Il-sung publicly stated that his son was in charge of all internal affairs in North Korea.

According to defector Hwang Jang-yop, the North Korean system became even more centralized and autocratic under Kim Jong-il than it had been under his father. Although Kim Il-sung required his ministers to be loyal to him, he nonetheless sought their advice in decision-making; Kim Jong-il demands absolute obedience and agreement, and views any deviation from his thinking as a sign of disloyalty. According to Hwang, Kim Jong-il personally directs even minor details of state affairs, such as the size of houses for party secretaries and the delivery of gifts to his subordinates.

By the 1980s, North Korea experienced severe economic stagnation. Kim Il-sung's policy of *juche* (self-reliance) cut the country off from almost all external trade, even with its traditional partners, the Soviet Union and China. South Korea accused Kim of ordering the 1983 bombing in Rangoon, Burma (now Yangon, Myanmar), which killed 17 visiting South Korean officials, including four cabinet members, and another in 1987 which killed all 115 on board Korean Air [Flight 858](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_Air_Flight_858). No direct evidence has emerged to link Kim to the bombings. A North Korean agent, Kim Hyon Hui, confessed to planting a bomb in the case of the second, saying the operation was ordered by Kim Jong-il personally. In 1992, Kim Jong-il's voice was broadcast for the first and only time. During a military parade, he approached the microphone and said "Glory to the heroic soldiers of the people's army!"

**"Highest post of the state"**

Kim Il-sung died in 1994 at age 82. Although the post of President was left vacant, and appears to have been abolished in deference to the memory of Kim Il-sung, Kim officially took the titles of General Secretary of the Workers' Party of Korea and chairman of the National Defense Commission, the real center of power in North Korea, on October 8, 1997. In 1998, this position was declared to be "the highest post of the state", so Kim may be regarded as North Korean head of state from that date. This is the first, and so far only, time a communist country's leadership has progressed in a dynastic succession. Since Kim is not the president, he is not constitutionally required to hold elections to confirm his legitimacy and has not done so.

The state-controlled economy continued to stagnate throughout the 1990s, as a result of poor industrial and agricultural productivity, the loss of guaranteed markets following the fall of the Soviet Union and the introduction of a market economy in China, and the state's continued large expenditures on armaments, possibly the highest relative to the size of the economy of any country in the world. By 2000, there were frequent reports from reliable sources (such as the UN) of famine in all parts of North Korea except Pyongyang. North Korean citizens ran increasingly desperate risks to escape from the country, mainly into China.

On the domestic front, Kim has given occasional signs that he favors economic reforms similar to those carried out in China by Deng Xiaoping, and on visits to China he has expressed admiration for China's economic progress. In 2002, Kim Jong-il declared that "money should be capable of measuring the worth of all commodities". North Korea has begun limited market experimentation.

In the time span coinciding with Kim Dae-jung's visit to the North (see the section on international affairs below), North Korea introduced a number of economic changes, including price and wage increases (June 2002). Some analysts said that these measures were designed to lift production and rein in the black market. Kim announced plans to import and develop new technologies and ambitions to develop North Korea's fledgling software industry. Kaesong Industrial Park is being developed just north of the border, with the planned participation of 250 South Korean companies, employing 100,000 North Koreans, by 2007.

North Korea does not seem to be in imminent danger of collapse, despite its international and economic difficulties. Trade with China nearly doubled between 2002 and 2004 to US$1.39 billion. Kim's possible successor is a continuing topic of speculation. South Korean media have suggested that he is grooming his son, Kim Jong-chul. His eldest son, Kim Jong-nam, was earlier believed to be the designated heir, but he appears to have fallen out of favor after being arrested in New Tokyo International Airport (now Narita International Airport) in Narita, Japan, near Tokyo, in 2001 while traveling on a forged passport, when he wanted to visit Tokyo Disneyland. However, some analysts believe he may be back in favor.

On April 22, 2004 a large explosion occurred at the Ryongch'ŏn train station nine hours after a train passed through the station returning Kim from his visit to China. The Red Cross reported 54 killed and 1,249 injured. Despite speculations of an assassination attempt at the time, South Korea later said it appeared to be an accident.

In November 2004, the [ITAR-TASS](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ITAR-TASS) news agency published reports that unnamed foreign diplomats in Pyongyang had observed the removal of portraits of Kim Jong-il around the country. The North Korean government has vigorously denied these reports. Radio press, the Japanese radio monitoring agency, reported later that month that North Korean media stopped referring to Kim by the honorific "Dear Leader" and that instead Korean Central Television, the Korean Central News Agency and other media described him under "lesser" titles such as "General Secretary of the Workers' Party of Korea", "Chairman of the DPRK National Defense Commission", and "Supreme Commander of the Korean People's Army". It is unclear whether the possible curtailing of Kim's personality cult indicated a struggle within the North Korean leadership or whether it was a deliberate attempt by Kim to moderate his image in the outside world. Current KCTV news broadcasts make frequent use of honorifics such as "Great Leader," "Dear General," and "Dear Father," and occasionally "The Sun of the 21st Century."

**International affairs**

Kim Jong-il's government has made some modest efforts to improve relations with [South Korea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Korea), and the election of [Kim Dae-jung](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kim_Dae-jung) as South Korean president in 1997 created an opportunity for negotiations. In June [2000](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2000) the two leaders held a summit meeting, the first such meeting. But the two sides were subsequently unable to agree on any substantial (as opposed to symbolic) improvement in their relations. (For additional details on the June 2000 summit between the leaders of the two Koreas, see Sunshine Policy.)

Kim's relationship with the United States has been more difficult. During the Clinton administration, U.S. and North Korea signed the Agreed Framework following a U.S. military buildup near the country, with the U.S. considering bombing the active Yongbyon nuclear reactor . Under this agreement North Korea would shut down its graphite-moderated nuclear reactors and plutonium processing program in exchange for two light water reactors paid for mostly by South Korea, together with interim fuel oil shipments by the U.S. In part because of U.S. Congressional opposition, construction of the light-water reactors fell behind schedule and delivery of the fuel oil was often late. North Korea was supposed to use these for energy only but was accused by the U.S. of pursuing nuclear weapons.

With the election of George W. Bush in 2000, the U.S. adopted a tougher, more aggressive stance toward North Korea. The Bush administration cut off one-on-one diplomatic relations initiated by the Clinton administration and accused North Korea of violating the spirit of the Agreed Framework by developing a secret uranium program that the U.S. believed would circumvent the agreement. The U.S. reported that North Korea confirmed the allegation, though North Korea denied this. North Korea stated it had a right to build nuclear weapons for defense unless the U.S. agreed to a non-aggression treaty. Bush declared North Korea to be part of the "Axis of Evil" along with Iran and Iraq. In December 2002, the U.S. stopped shipment of fuel oil it was providing under the Agreed Framework. On January 10, 2003, North Korea withdrew from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

On July 4, 2006, North Korea tested four or five short range missiles, which landed in the Sea of Japan. The sixth missile, the Taepodong 2, was a long range missile but either failed or was aborted 40 seconds after launch. The seventh missile was launched the following day at 8:22 UTC. Media reports out of South Korea indicate that North Korea has three to four more missiles on launch pads and ready for firing. These missiles are believed to be of short to medium range. Many in the international community are now calling for more aggressive talks to have North Korea give up its nuclear weapons.

**Personal life**

There is no official information available about the marital history of the leader of the highly secretive government, but Kim is widely believed to have been married three times. His last wife, Ko Young-hee (or Ko Yong Hi), reportedly died of cancer in 2004. Since then, Kim has been living with Kim Ok, who had served as his personal secretary since the 1980s.

Kim was also married to Kim Young-suk, although they have been estranged for some years. He has a daughter, Kim Sul-song (born 1974), from this marriage. His eldest son, Kim Jong-nam, was born to Song Hye-rim in 1971. With Ko Yong-Hi, he had another son, Kim Jong-chul, in 1981, and there is reported to be a second son, Kim Jong-un (name also spelled "Jong Woon" or "Jong Woong"). His second favorite mistress, Kyung-hwa Chang-ok had three children by him before she defected to South Korea in 2002. In August 2004, the Western media reported that Kim Jong-il's mistress Ko had recently died at the age of 51 from cancer. As of 2005, Kim Jong-chul was said to be his heir apparent.

Kim is said to be a film fan, owning a collection of some 20,000 video tapes, which Kim himself denies. It has been reported that Kim is an avid fan of the *Friday The 13th* series and *Rambo* among others. In 1978, on the orders of Kim, the South Korean film director Shin Sang-ok and his actress wife Choe Eun-hui were kidnapped in order to build a North Korean film industry. In 2006 he was involved in the production of the Juche based movie *Diary of a Girl Student* – depicting the life of a girl whose parents are scientists – with a KCNA news report stating that Kim "improved its script and guided its production". Still, Kim himself has said he rarely watches movies. He reportedly enjoys following National Basketball Association games. Madeleine Albright ended her summit with Kim by presenting him with a basketball signed by Michael Jordan.

Like his father, he has a profound fear of flying, and has always traveled by private armored train for state visits to Russia and China. He also sometimes wears lifts and platform shoes (he is 160 cm, or 5 feet, 3 inches tall). Before 1995, Kim was frequently accused of dishonesty, drunkenness, sexual excess of various kinds and even insanity, particularly in the South Korean press. He is also made fun of for wearing platform shoes and being a fan of James Bond. The BBC reported that Konstantin Pulikovsky, a Russian emissary who traveled with Kim Jong-il across Russia by train told reporters that Kim had live lobsters air-lifted to the train every day which he ate with [silver](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silver) chopsticks. He is also known to be one of the biggest clients of French vintner Hennessy as well as of Mercedes Benz. Kim is reported to have fathered thirteen illegitimate children. Kim is also known to be an avid fan of Cycling, owning a large collection of Bianchi bicycles for display purposes only.