

# NORTH KOREA



Area: 120,540 sq. km.  
Population: 22,580,000.  
Language: Korean.  
Head of state: Kim Jong-il.

**The totalitarian regime in North Korea keeps its people in a state of ignorance through tight control of the media. Foreign-based radio stations and independent websites do try to break this isolation and a new magazine using journalists working incognito was launched in 2007. A few foreign reporters were given permission to visit the country, but under the watchful eye of minders.**

North Korea is the world's most isolated country and the security forces are responsible for keeping it that way at all costs. A state-run company's director was executed by firing squad in 2007 for having made phone calls abroad without permission. A South Korean Institute has revealed a marked increase in executions for the offence of communicating with people outside the country.

The year was marked by the launch in November of the first magazine to be produced secretly by North Korean journalists. Working closely with a Japanese news agency, *Rimjingang* has promised unprecedented news about the situation within the country. Around a dozen journalists received secret training in China before returning to their country. The first editions carried interviews with North Koreans and an analysis of the economic situation. This group of journalists also helped Japanese and South Korea media to broadcast exclusive footage from within the country, including of public executions. "North Korean reporters are looking for subjects that reflect the lives of the people, their attitudes and aspirations", the project's founders said, adding that the magazine will be distributed secretly inside North Korea.

## DISSIDENT RADIOS JAMMED AGAIN

Several foreign-based radio stations have increased their airtime, while newspapers available online, in particular *Daily NK*, have stepped up their coverage. But the regime responded to the challenge on 11 May by resuming jamming independent and dissident radios broadcasting to the people of North Korea: *Free North Korea Radio*, *Voice of America*, *Open Radio for North Korea*, *Radio Free Asia* and *Radio Free Chosun*. A manager at *Open Radio for North Korea* told Reporters Without Borders that this backward step could be linked to the opening of a railway line between North and South.

Jamming of short wave radios had noticeably eased after July 2006, since the authorities, hampered by a serious energy crisis, did not have the capacity to scramble broadcasts all day and on all frequencies.

The Korean Workers' Party, headed by Kim Jong-il, in April fiercely condemned foreign news aimed at "destabilising" the regime. The security forces were ordered to act to prevent foreign videos, publications, telephones and CDs from coming into the country of.

## KIM JONG-IL, MEDIA GUIDE

In a propaganda film posted on one of the very few websites favourable to the North Korea regime, Kim Jong-il is presented as a direct inspiration to journalists. He is seen visiting media newsrooms, giving orders to reporters and correcting the editorials. The overblown commentary describes the "dear leader" as the driving force behind the "revolution in the people's media". "All night if necessary, he gives his opinion on the articles and photographs and edits the leaders. He guides the media in their mission which is the promotion of the *juche* (national self reliance) ideology. Thus the radio enthusiastically broadcasts what the worker's party undertakes. With the media under the leadership of Kim Jong-il, the country continues to triumph" intones a voice-off.

Kim Jong-il is in direct control of the North Korean press, including *Rodong Shinmun* (The workers' newspaper), the *Korean Central News Agency*, and national television *JoongAng Bang Song*. Each journalist is indoctrinated so as to unfailingly reflect the regime's ideology and to condemn "bourgeois and imperialist corruption." A typing error can prove costly: several North Korean journalists have been sent to "revolutionising"



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camps for a simple typing slip. In another case, Song Keum-chul, of state television, was sent to a concentration camp at the end of 1995 for having set up a small group of critical journalists and nothing has been heard of him since.

## **INTERNET AND FOREIGN JOURNALISTS ALLOWED IN TINY NUMBERS**

During the October summit between Kim Jong-il and his South Korean counterpart Roh Moo-hyun, only 50 journalists from the South were allowed into Pyongyang. The rest of the press was restric-

ted to covering the visit on giant screens set up in press rooms in Seoul. No more than a dozen foreign media, most of them Chinese, have a presence in North Korea and reporters who obtained visas in 2007 were very closely watched by official guides.

The country remains one of the world's least connected to the Internet. However, many exiled North Korean journalists do contribute to the blogosphere. Most of the websites are hosted in Japan or South Korea because the ".nk" domain name has yet to be launched.