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CANADA-DPR KOREA E-CLIPPING SERVICE

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Germany and Luxembourg have normalized relations. Greece is to follow within the week, Ireland soon after. France's resistance is softening as a result of concessions won by Germany. Canada's Ambassador Howard Balloch presents his credentials, accompanied by journalists of The Toronto Star, The Globe and Mail, La Presse and the CBC. This week's FOCUS section offers perspectives of two of the Canadian journalists who made the trip to Pyongyang.

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1. CREDENTIALS PRESENTED TO KIM YONG NAM BY FIRST CANADIAN AMBASSADOR
Korea Central News Agency (KCNA), Pyongyang, 28 February 2001

Kim Yong Nam, President of the presidium of the DPRK Supreme People's Assembly, received credentials from Howard Robert Balloch, first Canadian ambassador e.p. to the DPRK, at the Mansudae Assembly Hall today. Present there was vice-minister of foreign affairs Kung Sok Ung. After receiving credentials, the president had a talk with the ambassador.

2. GERMAN DIPLOMATS TO ENJOY SPECIAL STATUS IN DPRK
by Shin Yong-bae, The Korea Herald, 3 March 2001

Germany became the first foreign nation to be permitted to have their diplomats and civilians engage in free activities in North Korea when it established diplomatic ties with the Communist state Thursday. But the agreement is expected to invite similar demands from other foreign nations that have recently opened ties with the North, Seoul officials said yesterday.

The German Embassy in South Korea said Germany had reached a four-point agreement with North Korea, including the guarantee of freedom by German diplomats and aid groups to be stationed in the North. The North's guarantee

is seen as a diplomatic favor to Germany given the Pyongyang regime restricts movements or other activities of foreign diplomats and non-governmental organization (NGO) members residing in its country. Foreign diplomats have been required to be stationed in a special district designated by the North Korean government and obtain government permission to move out of the zone. The embassy said the North also agreed to guarantee German aid groups' observation of the aid distribution process, provide the necessary facilities for German journalists' news coverage and discuss the non-proliferation of the North's weapons of mass destruction and human rights conditions.

Diplomatic observers said the North seems to have made far more concessions to Germany than other European nations with which it recently forged diplomatic relations. While opening ties with Belgium and the Netherlands early this year, the North accepted their demands to have their ambassadors to South Korea concurrently serve as envoys to Pyongyang.

"There is a high possibility that the Germany-North Korea agreement will lead other European nations to raise the question of equity to North Korea," said an official at the South Korean Foreign Ministry.

Germany is the latest European Union (EU) member country to normalize relations with the North, which has been actively engaging in a diplomatic campaign to join the international community. Among the 15 EU members, four countries - France, Luxembourg, Greece and Ireland - do not have diplomatic links with the North.

"Germany has decided to open ties with North Korea figuring that it will contribute to having the North become a responsible member of the international community and promote its reform and openness," the embassy said in a press release. "We also believe that the setup of diplomatic ties will also help open the way for dialogue with the North on areas of mutual concern, including security issues," according to the statement.

Embassy officials said that Germany and North Korea had agreed to set up a resident embassy at the other's capital and will soon appoint new ambassadors. Germany has an embassy building in Pyongyang, which had been used by East Germany until the reunification of Germany in 1990, and has operated the Interest Section as a dialogue channel.

3. AFTER LUXEMBOURG, GREECE, THEN IRELAND AND FRANCE?

by Shin Yong-bae, The Korea Herald, 7 March 2001

North Korea's aggressive diplomatic campaign to normalize relations with all European Union (EU) members is reaching its final stages as it has opened ties with most of the EU states, officials said here yesterday. In its latest diplomatic achievement, North Korea added Luxembourg to its column of EU members forging ties with the Communist state. The North set up ties with Germany last week and reportedly plans to do so with Greece this week at the latest.

This would decrease the number of EU states without diplomatic links with North Korea to two - France and Ireland. "The remaining two countries are expected to set up diplomatic ties with the North within the first half of this year," said a government official, speaking on condition of anonymity. Ireland already expressed its will to normalize relations with the North and France looks likely to follow suit as the Pyongyang regime seems ready to accept Paris' conditions for improving ties, the official said.

France has taken a defiant stance on the early opening of ties with North Korea, taking issue with the North's human rights condition, development of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and restriction of activities of foreign non-governmental organization members.

But observers said France may soon start normalization talks with North Korea

as the North surprisingly accommodated its demands that were similar to the ones made by Germany when the two agreed to forge diplomatic ties March 1. Pyongyang agreed to guarantee the free movement of German diplomats and aid group members to be stationed in the North and discuss the issues of the WMD and human rights with Germany.

If all of the EU member states establish diplomatic links with the North, it would lead to the normalization of relations between the EU and the North, the observers said. Swedish Prime Minister Goran Persson's plan to visit the

North during the first half of this year bolsters the possibility as Sweden currently holds the rotating EU presidency. (...)

FOCUS: Canadian Journalists visit DPRK

4. THE COLD WAR'S LAST OUTPOST

by Miro Cernetig, The Globe and Mail, Pyongyang, 28 February 2001

In this crumbling state, secret police lurk in the shadows and political dissent is still a deadly crime. But Canadian diplomats will take North Korea

out of its half-century diplomatic deep freeze today, hoping its reclusive leaders can be persuaded to change their ways.

The historic initiative is being made because Canada believes the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is moving beyond its "rogue" status -- an image ingrained by the anti-West rhetoric of iron-fisted leader Kim Jong-il, who has threatened to build a nuclear-missile arsenal at the very time 22 million

North Koreans face famine.

After viewing the grey capital yesterday, where office towers are half-completed and people walk many kilometres to work because there are few means of transport, Canadian diplomat Howard Balloch said Pyongyang reminds him of China or Eastern Europe 20 years ago, during the Cold War.

Indeed, the city is cloaked in pollution from aging 1950s power plants not far from the city centre. Entering Pyongyang is to step back in time: five-star hotels still have 1950s-vintage rotary phones -- which everyone assumes are bugged -- and green-suited soldiers are everywhere. Along the streets the only splash of colour are gigantic propaganda posters of the Kim dynasty.

A sign of how far North Korea needs to go can be found at the intersections of the capital's broad boulevards: Policewomen wearing sky-blue, fur-lined uniforms wave commands at nearly empty streets, save for the occasional rusting truck, dilapidated bus or the shining convoys of government Mercedes,

used to ship VIPs and officials around under close guard.

Mr. Balloch, Canada's ambassador to China, landed in Pyongyang's airport yesterday and will open diplomatic relations at a meeting today, after he lays a wreath at the monolithic monument to North Korea's "eternal president," the late Kim Il-sung. Mr. Balloch said Ottawa believes ending

North Korea's isolation will be another contribution toward bringing the country into the international fold, persuading it to move ahead on political

and economic reforms and bring peace to the Korean peninsula.

"This is simply a step," said Mr. Balloch, who is making his first visit to the insular country. "It is not a major breakthrough, nor do we pretend that it will fundamentally change [North Korea's] relations with the rest of the world."

Canada, which has joined other nations in trying to alleviate the starvation in North Korea's devastated economy to stabilize the country, has already given more than \$30-million in humanitarian aid since 1997. Diplomatic relations will mean more for aid in the years to come, but those relations, Mr. Balloch added, will also mean Ottawa can better ensure the secretive regime is spending Canada's aid money properly.

"I think Canadians have a stake in what is happening here. We want to make sure that taxpayers' money is being spent in the way it was intended." Ottawa remains cautious, however. It will not open an embassy or mission in North Korea yet, but instead administer matters out of the embassy in Beijing.

North Korea's decades-long isolation followed the Communist North's invasion of the South in 1950. That led to the Korean War, a bloody conflict that left

two million casualties and ended in a stalemate, with the Korean Peninsula divided at the 38th parallel. With the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the crumbling of the Berlin Wall, the two Koreas remain the last major schism of the post-Second World War period. North and South Korean armies still face each other across the barbed wire and minefields of the Demilitarized Zone, ready for war.

The North, which has been attempting to construct nuclear weapons, builds missiles that are exported to places such as Iran. That has earned it the title of rogue state from the United States, where North Korea is often held up as a reason to build the proposed \$60-billion (U.S.) antimissile shield. Despite a past that saw North Korea linked to the 1987 bombing of a South Korean airliner, which killed 115 people, and the assassination of members of

the South Korean government visiting Burma in 1983, North Korea's reclusive Mr. Kim is opening up to the world. The thaw began last June, when he met with South Korean President Kim Dae-jung in Pyongyang, a move that many saw as the beginning of the end of the military standoff.

Canada's decision to open diplomatic relations -- following Italy and Australia in the past few months -- stems from that historic meeting, which earned Kim Dae-jung the Nobel Peace Prize.

The North's intentions, however, remain uncertain. While many believe Kim Jong-il is ready to start reforming his state's command economy, others believe it is embarking on a shrewd effort to obtain more Western aid money. His citizens are facing the worst conditions of the country's history.

Famine

is rampant, factories have ground to a halt, electrical blackouts are routine. A recent UN survey found that two-thirds of children are malnourished and aid workers say the country is suffering from another brutal winter.

Mr. Kim has made concessions to the West and to South Korea, which Canada and

other countries believe is a signal of more openness and reform. During last year's summit with his southern counterpart, Mr. Kim said his goal is to end the military standoff and eventually reunify the two Koreas. As a sign of

good faith, he allowed reunion visits of families from the North and South, and there have been rumours he will visit South Korea later this year. Meanwhile, the new Bush administration in Washington is taking a harder line against North Korea, calling for a reanalysis of former president Bill Clinton's push to end its isolation.

5. CANADA ENDS 50-YEAR CHILL WITH DPRK

by Martin Regg Cohn, The Toronto Star, Pyongyang, 28 February, 2001

Diplomatic ties established today with Pyongyang.

A half-century of hostility comes to an end today as Canada's newly-appointed

ambassador to North Korea inaugurates diplomatic relations with the world's most isolated nation.

Howard Balloch stepped off an aging, Russian-built Air Koryo Ilyushin 62 at Pyongyang's desolate airport yesterday, after a short flight from his base in

Beijing where he will continue as Canada's ambassador to China. The Canadian

delegation was whisked along wide boulevards bereft of cars, while work gangs

along the route stared at the passing convoy.

Balloch was scheduled to formally present his credentials to Kim Yong-nam, president of the Supreme People's Assembly. For protocol reasons, Korea's paramount ruler, Kim Jong-il, does not normally receive ambassadors personally, though a visit with Balloch has not been ruled out.

Canada is anxious to establish a diplomatic presence in what has long been known as the "Hermit Kingdom" in order to help coax it further into the international arena, reducing the risks of instability in the heavily armed Korean peninsula. Canadian troops fought alongside South Korea and the Western allies in the 1950-53 Korean War, and the North's build-up of weapons

- backed by more than 1 million troops - continue to unsettle neighbouring Japan and South Korea.

"I'm convinced that this is part of a process that will lead to less and less

isolation, and more exposure for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," Balloch told a small group of Canadian journalists whose visa applications were approved at the last minute by North Korea.

"The highest priority is to engage the government in Pyongyang on important national security issues," he said, describing North Korea as "a country that

does not see eye to eye with us on most international issues."

But bilateral ties are growing despite the differences. With North Korea reeling from years of famine and economic collapse, Canada is the fifth-biggest contributor of humanitarian aid. With ties renewed, Ottawa hopes its diplomats will gain greater access to remote corners of the country

that have benefitted from more than \$30 million in assistance from Canada since 1997, most of it through the World Food Program.

"Canadians have a stake in what happens here," Balloch said. "We wish to ensure that that money is spent in the way it was intended." Balloch added he

was struck by North Korea's economic plight on his first day here, recalling similar scenes in China and Eastern Europe in past decades. The difficult conditions on the ground here are deterring Ottawa from opening an embassy

in

Pyongyang any time soon.

"We know from other countries' experiences that it's not an easy place to open a mission" at this stage, Balloch said. "Our relationship is simply not mature enough." North Korea intends to open an embassy in Ottawa in the near future, but Balloch will handle relations from his base in nearby Beijing. The prelude to this week's establishment of diplomatic relations with North Korea came nearly a year ago, when Ottawa belatedly recognized the Democratic

People's Republic of Korea as a state for the first time. Though comparisons

are often made with Canada's early decision to recognize the People's Republic of China more than 30 years ago, this time Ottawa is far down the list of countries to open a dialogue with North Korea.

Sweden has long had an embassy in Pyongyang, and has looked after Canadian consular interests here. Encouraged by South Korea's attempt at rapprochement with the North, nine countries joined the list last year, notably those providing bilateral aid to Pyongyang.

"Canada isn't at the front of the engagement train as we were with China 30 years ago," says University of British Columbia professor Paul Evans. "We're in the middle of the train." Evans said in an interview that Ottawa's approach is based on realpolitik, and geopolitical considerations. The pressure for closer ties isn't coming from big business, but from academics who are anxious about stabilizing an often volatile region.

"Anybody who pushed the trade side would be thinking of 50 years from now, not tomorrow," said Donald Rickerd, who teaches Asian business studies at the

University of Toronto. "Our great interest is in seeing that a secure North East Asia situation emerges." Canada's diplomatic initiative has been a long time in the making. A bilateral dialogue was mooted in the 1990s when Joe Clark was external affairs minister, but made little headway because of strong American opposition. Last year, relations warmed up when four officials from North Korea's foreign ministry visited Canada and attended a hockey game on their free night.

Now, the diplomatic ties have ended five decades of hostility with the Communist state. Few observers are expecting any earthshaking effects from the initiative, because North Korea's moribund economy offers few trade prospects for Canada, and cultural ties between the two countries are minimal.

However, Ottawa believes its interests are best served by encouraging stability in East Asia, where Canada has significant trade ties with Japan, China and South Korea. Diplomatic ties will also make it easier to disburse humanitarian aid to the North to help it cope with disastrous food shortfalls

that have resulted in up to 3 million deaths from starvation.

A Beijing-based representative of the Canadian International Development Agency is accompanying the ambassador on this week's visit. Since 1995, the World Food Program, a United Nations agency, has delivered about \$1 billion in food aid.

Analysts believe diversifying North Korea's diplomatic ties reduces the risk that the new hardline Republican administration in Washington might try to isolate Pyongyang once again. North Korea's objective is to be removed from Washington's list of "states that sponsor terrorism," a designation that was applied after its involvement in the midair bombing of a South Korean plane near Burma 14 years ago that killed 115 people.

Indeed, North Korea is keen to cement ties with Ottawa because of its proximity to Washington, and its perceived influence with the U.S.

government. Canada is believed to be the first country permitted to bring in a small group of journalists to accompany an ambassador's maiden voyage. Italy was the first of the industrialized countries to get the ball rolling last year, followed by Australia, the Philippines and Britain. Last month, the Netherlands set up ties, followed by Belgium. Canada formally announced diplomatic ties Feb. 6, followed by Spain the next day. Greece and Luxembourg will follow soon, leaving France as a conspicuous holdout. The French government argues Pyongyang must first improve its human rights record and commit itself to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. It also insists that North Korea give non-governmental organizations free access in the country, and grant entry visas to European journalists.

6. SLOWLY, DPR KOREA'S MASK IS SLIPPING

Martin Regg Cohn, Asia Bureau, The Toronto Star, Pyongyang, 5 March 2001

They wipe away tears and stifle sobs, the faces of a nation in mourning. Millions have died from famine and disease in this isolated Communist enclave, and thousands more are doomed to a similar fate. But on this day, the weeping masses are not shedding tears for their fellow North Koreans. Crowded into Pyongyang's Memorial Palace, they are overcome with emotion by the sight of eternity incarnate: The Great Leader, Comrade Kim Il Sung - his corpse pumped with embalming fluids, his leathery skin swathed in makeup, his

essence encased in a crystal sarcophagus. Father of the nation. He fostered a cult of personality, suffocated its politics, and presided over a stunted economy that culminated in famine.

Still, they worship him. Eight years after his death at age 82, he remains the country's Eternal President - the only world leader who rules from his grave.

As thousands of mourners line up for a glimpse of the Great Leader on this day, Howard Balloch - Canada's new ambassador to Pyongyang - has joined them for the mandatory diplomatic pilgrimage. For foreign visitors, the monumentality and the minutiae say much about a regime that still holds so many people under its spell. (...)

With Balloch presenting his ambassadorial credentials, Canada became the latest to join a growing list of Western countries ready to deal with Pyongyang. North Korea rarely grants press visas, but Balloch was accompanied

by four Canadian news organizations - apparently because the North Koreans assumed that The Toronto Star, The Globe and Mail, La Presse and the CBC were

all government-controlled media.

Mostly, though, the mask remains in place. Even in its moment of greatest need, North Korea is obsessed with show-and-tell. On the eve of the Canadian

ambassador's visit, the cash-starved government announced plans to build another monument - a 30-metre-high tribute to reunification of north and south - in a capital already overburdened by hubris. (...)

But even in the showpiece that is Pyongyang, cracks appear in the facade. Public buildings are unheated, forcing hospital patients and government officials to wear winter parkas indoors. In state-owned shops, sales of Double Happiness Super Longs are brisk as frigid buyers stock up on thermal underwear.

Beyond the bone-chilling cold is the ever-present spectre of food shortages for city dwellers, who are ineligible for the foreign aid earmarked for the

countryside. Outside the capital, water treatment plants have broken down and hospitals lack electricity, leaving rural people vulnerable to disease and death. It is a sight few foreigners get to see.

"Conditions outside Pyongyang are much more difficult," says David Morton, who directs United Nations relief operations in North Korea. "They are weak and undernourished. ... It doesn't take much to tip them over the edge." One

Canadian who has had access to the countryside said he often saw women and children foraging for grains of rice left behind by passing trucks. When shipments of cooking oil leaked on to a muddy road, villagers rushed to the puddles and ladled the oil into buckets to bring home.

More than \$1 billion in foreign aid has poured into the country since 1997 - some \$33 million from Canada, the fifth-biggest donor - yet the country remains on life support. Despite government propaganda that bad weather is to

blame, the causes are more fundamental. In fact, the economy is comatose largely because China and the former Soviet Union have cut off subsidies to their former client state. Unable to continue bartering cement for precious fuel, North Korea ground to a halt. (...)

For the moment, humanitarian aid is helping to feed people, but little else. After the bloated military is taken care of, there are few funds left over for North Korea's impoverished masses, who are increasingly vulnerable to disease.

"People are still dying," Morton says grimly. Even malaria, a disease that thrives in the tropics and had once been eradicated, is making a comeback in North Korea, says Janice Elloway, a Canadian public-health worker with the Red Cross. The mosquito-borne disease afflicted 100,000 people last year. Medical equipment is minimal in the countryside, and lacking enough food, people use corn husks and other indigestible plants to fill their stomachs, and drink contaminated water. (...)

7. AID WORKERS STRUGGLE FOR ACCESS IN HUNGRY DPRK

by Miro Cernetig, The Globe and Mail, Pyongyang, 7 March 2001

It's Friday night, the end of another week of trying to feed North Korea's hungry, and the foreign aid workers are settled in at a two-room bar, cracking open a few precious tins of imported beer, shooting some pool and commiserating about life in a police state.

"We call this place the Random Access Club because that's what we don't get in North Korea," said one aid worker, who like everyone else in the small foreign community asked not to be named for fear of reprisals from the xenophobic regime of Kim Jong-Il. "There's no way for us to check that all the humanitarian aid goes to the right places."

For aid workers, random access means being able to point to a village, an orphanage or rural market and say to local officials, "Take me there," to ensure that aid isn't ending up in the wrong hands. The lack of such spot checks often plagues international relief efforts, where bags of grain and desperately needed medicines end up with black-market profiteers.

But in the Democratic People's Republic of North Korea, whose leaders don't much care for democracy and cruise through empty streets in their Mercedes while half the country's children face malnutrition, the lack of random access is a serious concern.

North Korea ranks as the biggest project in the World Food Program's history,

with more than \$856-million (U.S.) spent since 1995, most of it targeted to children. Canadian taxpayers have kicked in \$30-million since 1997, with

millions more expected now that Ottawa has officially opened diplomatic relations with Pyongyang. The nagging question for aid groups is whether the largesse is getting to those who need it, or whether it's feeding a dictator and his cronies.

"Everywhere you go in North Korea, we are required to be with an official handler," said another aid worker. "The North Koreans won't let you go to markets, to see how the food is being dispensed. To see a village, you need to ask for permission four and five days in advance."

Such delays mean it is impossible to know if what aid workers see on inspection tours is real. While they rely on intuition and questions that may provide the truth, they must joust with the Communist regime, masters of the staged tour.

That was evident during a tour by Canadian diplomats, who came to Pyongyang last week to open diplomatic relations. Their tour of the capital focused on monuments and a showcase hospital and orphanage. (When they asked to see a hockey arena, they found that the minute they entered the rink, a small crowd

mysteriously filed in, as if ordinary citizens were suddenly interested in the team's practice moves.) "There's no doubt that some of the aid we provide

isn't going to the right people," said a third foreign aid worker. "But there

is no doubt that much of it is reaching its target. Look at the people -- their health has improved."

Two years ago, Pyongyang's streets were empty of children; 60 per cent faced malnutrition and were too weak to go outside. That number has dropped to 40 per cent in the wake of international aid. On their recent visit, Canadian diplomats saw joggers, and children playing outside after school.

"We think the anecdotal evidence shows that most of the aid is going to the people who need it," said a World Food Program official. But that is still only a guess. The government, which has limited the foreign community to about 90 people, won't give long-term visas to foreigners who speak Korean, fearing they may penetrate the police state's controls. Independent interviews, without the presence of officials, are nearly impossible.

The government views the capital city as its economic showcase. Meanwhile, aid workers say, daily scenes of desperate hunger are visible everywhere else

in the country of 22 million. "I have seen women scooping the top of puddles,

to try to save the cooking oil that has leaked from containers," said an aid worker. "Children wait for hours by our loading docks, hoping to steal a handful of grain."

International aid workers say that even though North Korea won't provide freedom to monitor projects, more humanitarian aid is essential. "The situation for children continues to be grave," said Andrew Morris, a Unicef aid worker. Malnutrition rates are improving, but another crisis could be imminent.

The recent famines may be over, but disease is still prevalent and childhood vaccine stocks will run out by summer. "There is a real risk that the national vaccination program may have to temporarily stop unless new funds are urgently identified -- a completely unacceptable situation," he said.

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