

On the Special Feature: Trends of the DPRK and Northeast Asia

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In this issue, we are publishing three papers on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (hereinafter referred to as North Korea). The first paper, that is my paper, "Policies That Attach Importance to Economy in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea – from the Beginning of Kim Jong Un Era to the Fifth Plenary Meeting of the Seventh Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea –." Putting emphases on economy is one of the characteristics of the Kim Jong Un era. Focus is placed on policy development which underscores economic reform that has been carried out very carefully, and touches on the fact that it was being carried out even during the "byunjin line". It also illustrates that the most difficult and crucial part of the reform will come after the resolution of the conflict with the United States.

The second paper is "Russia's Policy on Economic Cooperation with North Korea" by ARAI Hirofumi. This paper describes the economic cooperation between Russia and North Korea, a relationship which has been attracting attention since the Russo-DPRK summit meeting in Vladivostok in April 2019. The paper also describes the history of exchange between Russia and

North Korea after the establishment of the Russian Federation, trade, infrastructure development, and the acceptance of North Korean workers into Russia.

The final paper, which is also my paper, "DPRK's Response against COVID-19." This paper tentatively summarizes how North Korea has responded to the novel coronavirus infectious disease mainly through an analysis of 903 articles published in the party gazette, *The Rodong Sinmun*, between January 26, 2020 and May 25, 2020.

The interest level of the Japanese society in North Korea's actions has waned recently, as the US-North Korea talks are deadlocked. However, North Korea seems to be steadily preparing for post-US negotiations. This preparation includes both good and bad scenarios. Neighboring countries such as China and Russia seem to expect a fairly long transition period, although they require North Korea to make a minimum adjustment to denuclearization. As a neighbor of North Korea, Japan must consider how to deal with North Korea regardless of relations with the United States. We hope the three papers will help you with such thinking.