

The Futility of North Korean Propagandistic News

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On 5 July 2021, *Rodong Sinmun* published an article claiming that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un received “congratulatory messages and letters from different countries” on “the 57th anniversary of Chairman Kim Jong Il’s start of work at the Central Committee of the Workers’ Party of Korea.” It was reported that such messages and letters were received from Nepal, Bangladesh, Syria, India, Palestine, Kyrgyzstan, Indonesia, Denmark, Romania, Russia, Switzerland France, Italy, Ghana, Guinea, Nigerian, Mali, Congo, Mexico, Croatia, Spain, Serbia, Slovakia, Thailand, Pakistan, Iran, Norway, Romania, Bulgaria, Belarus, Belgium, Sweden, the Czech Republic, Finland, Austria, South Africa, Mali, Senegal, Uganda, Brazil, and Ecuador. It has also been mentioned in the article that *Juche* societies of various countries also sent their messages.

Of course, the news was distributed for domestic consumption in North Korea. However, since the newspaper’s online version is also circulated across the world, whether the news is true or not is open to fact-checking. For example, the article claims that from India, “the senior leader of the Indian People’s Party” as well as “high-ranking personages of political, public and economic circles” sent such messages. As per the latest data available with the Election Commission of India, India has eight national parties, 52 state parties, and 2638 unrecognized parties. A party in India with said name could not be found in the list. This means that the party is either non-existent or unregistered in India. In both cases, North Korea’s claim is misleading. It also seems that similar fact-checks about other countries may lead readers to identify more problems in the news.

The occasion of these congratulatory messages and letters is also strange. There are various important dates in the journey of North Korea including birth and death anniversaries of the leaders; to claim that leaders of so many countries voluntarily considered the anniversary of Kim Jong Il’s start of work in the Central Committee of the Workers’ Party of Korea important enough to send congratulatory messages appears strange.

It is quite common for the *Rodong Sinmun* to report news items that have many incorrect or misleading facts. In another instance, it was reported on 19 July 2021 that internet photo exhibitions with various titles such as “Kim Il Sung, prominent great leader” took place in China, Russia, Nepal, Laos, Iran, Indonesia, India, Thailand, Bulgaria, Austria, Serbia, Senegal and Brazil.” The news item is

said to have been disseminated in India through the Indian internet news *Voice of Millions*. The *Voice of Millions* is a newspaper vendor, but it is not possible to find its website and thus the “internet photo exhibitions.”

Furthermore, on 20 February 2021, the *Rodong Sinmun* reported that the “personages of the Communist Party of India, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), the National Committee of Minorities of India, the Nationalist Congress Party of India, the Indian People’s Party and the All-India Forward Block made public a joint statement on 11 February” that “the Chairman (Kim Il Sung)’s whole life was indeed a noble life during which he dedicated his everything to the people.” After all possible efforts, the author was not able to find out such news about the joint statement in India. Moreover, there is no such thing as the “National Committee of Minorities in India.” Rather, there is a National Commission of Minorities in India, which is a body of the Government of India and does not make any joint statements with any political parties of India.

Moreover, on the official website of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), there are many press releases and statements, but such joint statements are not available. There is also no mention of such joint statements on the official website of the Nationalist Congress Party of India. As mentioned earlier, information about the Indian People’s Party is again impossible to locate in India.

Actually, it must also be clarified that the name of the ruling party in India is the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), which is also translated as the Indian People’s Party. However, it can be noted that by looking at claims that the Indian People’s Party signed a joint statement with a left leaning party such as the Communist Party of India (Marxist), it is quite clear that the Indian People’s Party mentioned in the *Rodong Sinmun* is not the BJP. In several other news items of the *Rodong Sinmun*, the Indian People’s Party has been mentioned along with communist parties of various countries, which further clarifies that it could not be the BJP.

Rodong Sinmun also frequently reports activities of *Juche* societies in various countries. However, *Juche* societies in other countries are essentially close coteries of a few people, which are connected to one another through the International Institute of the *Juche* Idea located in Japan. It has been noted that these societies generally have strong connections with North Korean embassies in these countries. North Korea uses and allegedly suggests these societies to organize a few activities every year and take pictures of them. There have been cases in which the people involved in these societies were of reportedly dubious backgrounds. Interestingly, the pictures taken at these events are hardly being used by the mainstream media of these countries similarly to how they have been used in North Korea. That way, North Korea tries to convey its own people of how the *Juche* idea and North Korean leaders are appreciated across the world.

North Korea is one of the most isolated countries in the world, with just 24 foreign embassies in Pyongyang. North Korea has 47 embassies in foreign countries. But almost every day, North Korean official media reports that North Korea and its leaders have been appreciated by other countries. The more North Korea gets isolated, the more these reports become frequent. The more these reports become frequent, the more North Korea becomes exposed in the community of nations. The purpose of such news is to keep North Korean people in a bubble where they remain unaware of the fact that their system is inefficient and problematic. The Kim Jong Un regime feels that through these news publications, the pride of the North Korean people is being nurtured in their system.

There have been articles in the *Rodong Sinmun* attempting to portray North Korea as having seen a “rapid rise” in their regional status. In one of such articles published on 4 July 2019, it was argued that “the world has never seen such an exceptional speed of development like ours” and it has happened only because of the “greatness of our leader, a man with exceptional ability.” There appears to

be no factual basis of the article; it is pure imagination and propaganda.

Domestic and international implications of this propaganda strategy of North Korea appear to be different. A North Korean citizen may feel good by these news reports in *Rodong Sinmun*, but such propaganda news is not taken seriously by the international community. In the digital age, it is not possible for North Korea to keep them exclusive for domestic consumption. Even in North Korea, people are relatively more aware about the outside world; they, also, can decipher such meaningless propaganda.

In the changed world, the old way of propaganda negatively impacts North Korea's reputation rather than serves it. North Korea must realize that they need to stop producing such propagandistic news and focus on their political and economic reforms, which would bring credibility to the country. North Korea must also give up its stubborn approach towards nuclear and missile programs. South Korea's Moon Jae-in administration's current approach to engage North Korea must be met with positive response from North Korea. North Korea should use it as a window to reform itself and make an attempt to join the community of nations as a responsible country. North Korea must realize that whatever it does in its own domestic media is no longer inaccessible to the outside world and that the best form of image building is actions on the ground, instead of constructed and inaccurate claims. ■

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