

Value of USFK-Used Land to Be Assessed

By Oh Young-jin
Staff Reporter

The value of the land used by U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) here is emerging as one of the outstanding issues the two countries will soon have to grapple with.

According to Defense Ministry officials yesterday, the two countries plan to hire an international real estate consultant to come up with the exact value of the land and realistic leasing fees.

The ministry's 1998 Defense White Paper shows that as of the end of 1997, the USFK was using a total of 46 million pyong (one pyong is equivalent to 3.3 square meters), a land area 46 times the size of Yoido, Seoul's business district. Out of this total, more than three fourths is under exclusive U.S. control.

In its 1997 report to the American Congress, the U.S. Defense Department said that the land it uses in Korea costs Korea \$270 million in lost leasing fees per year. The ROK Defense Ministry, on the other hand, has estimated it at \$1,557 billion.

Korean ministry sources said that government authorities lodged a protest at the Pentagon over the disparity and the U.S. promised to conduct a joint study to come up with a more realistic amount.

As a consequence of this situation, the Korean ministry for the first time

published its own estimate in the Defense White Paper, perhaps in order to drive home its dissent to U.S. authorities.

The issue of land value is important to both the ROK and the U.S.

For Korea, it has a direct bearing on the amount of its financial contribution to the maintenance of U.S. troops here under the U.S.-initiated host nation support program, which sees to it that in whatever country its troops are stationed, the cost of supporting them is shared by the host countries.

"Our effort to have our contribution estimated correctly is closely related to rising sentiment in the U.S. Congress calling for more money from host countries," one ministry official said.

Using the U.S. estimate, Korea's contribution would amount to about \$916 million in 1997. This total breaks down to \$270 million in real estate, \$399 million in cash payments and other direct support and \$247 million in tax breaks and other indirect support.

Based on its disputed assessment of the value of Korea's contribution, the U.S. government and Congress concluded that Korea's host nation support is one fourth that provided by Japan and one third of the total expenditures the U.S. makes on maintaining the USFK.

This conclusion provided the U.S. with the ammunition needed to exert

pressure on Korea to cough up more funds. The U.S. Congress has reportedly demanded a rise in Korea's host nation support based on the fact that Japan provides \$100,000 for each U.S. troop stationed there, while Korea's per capita contribution is a mere \$10,000. At the same time, increasing public pressure has recently been exerted on the Korean government to take back land leased to the USFK. One such example is U.S. Camp Hialeah in Pusan. Civic groups and the city government there have long been waging a crusade to have this site returned to Korea in the face of dwindling room for expansion in the southern Korean port city.

From the U.S. perspective, it has been stated that the ministry's figure of \$1.5 billion is too high an estimate. Some expect that the realistic amount will come down significantly, especially considering the burst of a land speculation bubble that occurred as a result of the economic crisis that hit the country in late 1997. In a statement last year, the USFK said it has promptly returned land it no longer uses.

To come up with a mutually agreeable figure, the two countries agreed to initiate a survey through an international real estate consultant this year. One thing that the two sides can agree on, even before the survey begins, is that an assessment is long overdue, the last having been conducted just after the 1950-1953 Korean War.



Adventurous visitors swim and float along a waterway at Caribbean Bay, part of Everland Amusement Park in Yongin, south of Seoul, Sunday. Park patrons can relax in hot water heated to over 30 degrees C while enjoying the view of the snow-covered grounds all around them.

Korea Times

Elderly Ideological Prisoners' to Be Pardoned

By Hong Sun-hee
Staff Reporter

Seventeen elderly former North Koreans who have been in prison for decades for their beliefs will be granted a special amnesty around Feb. 25, the first anniversary of President Kim Dae-jung's inauguration.

The usual requirement that "ideological prisoners" sign so-called "letters of conversion" will be dropped for Uh Yong-gak, who has been in prison for 41 years, and 16 others who have spent at least 29 years behind bars.

They are mostly North Korean partisans or spies arrested in the 1950s and subsequently freed sometime after the April 19, 1961, Students Movement, only to be imprisoned again in 1975 in accordance with the Public Security Law introduced at that time by then-president Park Chung-hee.

Past governments had obligated social-ist convicts and other political prisoners to make written promises to abandon their leftist beliefs and other radical ideologies in order to receive amnesty.

The Kim government replaced the conversion letters with a written pledge to obey the law, but critics said there is little difference between the old and new obligations.

"Even if these people want a pardon, they can't sign the letter for fear of jeopardizing the safety of their families back in North Korea. So the government has decided to waive the requirement on humanitarian grounds," a high-profile Justice Ministry official said.

In a meeting with a group of the families of dissidents and political prisoners last Sunday, the President hinted at the possibility of releasing and reinstating the civil rights of political prisoners under an amnesty on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the March 1 Independence Movement against Japan's

1910-1945 colonial rule. At the same time, he rejected the group's request that the government drop its requirement for the written pledge to be law-abiding. He was quoted as saying that "freedom of thought is one thing and observance of the law is another."

The Chief Executive's latest move is thought to be a response to the plight of elderly prisoners whose days are numbered and whose life-long dream to see their families in the Communist-led North is uncertain at best.

Other than the 17 ex-North Koreans, some 1,000 people will be freed or reinstated on Feb. 25 under the government's measure, including 320 people imprisoned or wanted for anti-state activities or labor protests under previous governments. The rest are mostly petty criminals who are in prison because they cannot afford to pay fines which average in the neighborhood of several million won.

Anti-Corruption Office to Be Set Up

The Justice Ministry is considering prohibiting prosecutors from introducing legal cases to certain lawyers in an effort to uproot the use of bribes in the legal sector, it was learned yesterday.

According to a ministry spokesman, the prospective measure would completely ban prosecutors from introducing legal cases to lawyers, even if the cases are not under their jurisdiction.

A set of measures aimed at removing any room for corrupt relationships between prosecutors and lawyers will be announced tomorrow, he said.

In connection with this, the ministry is also considering inaugurating a new office exclusively in charge of investigating corruption by high ranking officials and politicians.

The Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office (SPPO) will announce today the results of its investigation into the massive payoff scandal surrounding Taejon-based lawyer Lee Chong-ki.

The rampant practice among prosecutors of introducing the cases under their jurisdiction to certain lawyers, often their close friends, has long been cited as a source of corruption in legal circles.

The massive payoff scandal in Taejon was touched off when a former clerk of Lee exposed a secret document listing the names of prosecutors and judges who received money in return for bringing clients to the lawyer.

More than 300 prosecutors, judges, police officers, and other related officials were named in the document as

having introduced clients to Lee. For some of them, the amounts of money they received were specified.

The ministry spokesman revealed that the new measures will also prohibit prosecutors from receiving money from lawyers or being entertained at salons or posh restaurants by them.

It has long been a customary practice among prosecutors to receive cash envelopes from lawyers at Chusok, the Korean version of Thanksgiving Day, or when they are transferred from one city to another as "farewell money."

However, he said, casual contacts for the purpose of having meals or exchanging inexpensive gifts will be allowed in view of the fact that most lawyers maintain alumni relationships or are former fellow prosecutors.

The detailed guidelines for the contacts have yet to be worked out, according to the spokesman.

A total of six prosecutors, some of them senior level officials, were forced to resign and seven others will be reprimanded in connection with their involvement in the Taejon payoff scandal, according to the SPPO.

Some of them, pressured by the SPPO to resign, resisted strongly and initially refused to comply with the demand, claiming their innocence.

The resistance culminated in the open revolt of Shim Je-ryoon, head of the Taegu High Prosecutor's Office, against his superiors. Shim, who was asked to resign for his alleged involvement in


the scandal, held a press conference last Wednesday at which he called for the resignation of Prosecutor-General Kim Tae-joung, his immediate superior.

Due to Shim's unprecedented act, the Justice Ministry suspended him from performing his official duties and referred his case to a disciplinary committee to be convened on Wednesday.

Shim, ordered to stop performing his official duties Friday, nonetheless reported to work and spent the day in his office. He also made it clear that he would continue to come into his office until Wednesday, when the disciplinary committee meeting will be held.

In the meantime, Prosecutor-General Kim will make a statement today in which he is expected to apologize for the recent series of events that have shocked the public.

In the statement, Kim reportedly plans to express deep regret for the payoff scandal triggered by the Taejon-based lawyer and the resulting controversy over Shim's revolt.

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Sunrise: 7:38 a.m.
Sunset: 5:53 p.m.

Seoul: Clear
-4°C (25°F)/ 0°C (32°F)

Taejon: Clear
-4°C (25°F)/ 3°C (37°F)

Chuncheon: Clear
-9°C (16°F)/ 1°C (34°F)

Kangnung: Clear
0°C (32°F)/ 7°C (45°F)

Kwangju: Clear
-2°C (28°F)/ 5°C (41°F)

Taegu: Clear
-3°C (27°F)/ 5°C (41°F)

Pusan: Clear
-3°C (27°F)/ 8°C (46°F)

Cheju: Cloudy
5°C (41°F)/ 8°C (46°F)

TOMORROW

Clear, then partly cloudy. Morning lows will range -11 to 1°C (12-34°F), daytime highs, -1 to 6°C (30-43°F).

Sunrise: 7:38 a.m.
Sunset: 5:53 p.m.

Seoul: Cloudy
-8°C (18°F)/ -2°C (28°F)

Taejon: Cloudy, light snow
-6°C (21°F)/ 2°C (36°F)

Chuncheon: Cloudy, light snow
-11°C (12°F)/ 0°C (32°F)

Kangnung: Cloudy, light snow
-2°C (28°F)/ 6°C (43°F)

Kwangju: Cloudy, light snow
-5°C (23°F)/ 4°C (37°F)

Taegu: Clear
-3°C (27°F)/ 4°C (37°F)

Pusan: Clear
1°C (34°F)/ 6°C (43°F)

Cheju: Cloudy, light snow
3°C (37°F)/ 7°C (45°F)

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