

Defense Ministry Shelves 30 Projects Due to Plunging Won

By Oh Young-jin
Staff Reporter

About 30 of this year's military force improvement (FI) projects worth about 500 billion won, most of them to procure new weapons from overseas, were put on hold or cancelled largely due to budget cuts amid the plunging won from the nation's severe economic crisis.

According to the Defense Ministry yesterday, out of a total budget of 3.97 trillion won earmarked for this year's FI projects, about 500 billion won was dropped — 154 billion won due to a budgetary cut; 260 billion won from the depreciated won and 88 billion won because of increased consumer prices.

The ministry said that because of the dwindled defense budget, the purchase of C-130 transports were postponed

indefinitely, and plans to beef up coastal radar systems were down-scaled, among other things.

The ministry expects most FI projects scheduled for next year will be seriously affected due to the lower value of the won and further budgetary constraints.

"We have to wait and see how much downward adjustments we will need for next year's budget allocations," a ministry budget officer said. "But it appears a forgone conclusion we will have to live with far less next year."

The Defense Ministry is the largest dollar spender among government agencies, with roughly one fifth of its budget executed in dollars.

According to some ministry officials, the ministry may have to drop all new FI projects and downscale many of the ongoing multi-year procurement pro-

jects to cope with next year's military budget that will be much smaller than this year.

This year, meanwhile, the ministry spent a total of 880 billion won for 72 ground force improvement projects. They include large-caliber multiple rocket launchers, a low altitude radar & surveillance system, portable air defense system Mistral missiles and scout helicopters.

An additional 45 FI projects for the Navy and Air Force, worth 290 billion won, have been approved. They include the purchase of anti-submarine surveillance helicopters and CN-235 mid-range transports among other things.

For last month alone, a budget of about 300 billion won was executed for the purchase of scout helicopters and the development of unmanned aerial vehicles.

Central Road Marker to Be Unveiled Today

The Seoul City Government will unveil a stone post at the very heart of the metropolis today, marking the distance between Seoul and cities in and outside Korea.

Located in front of the Kwanghwa-mun Police station diagonally across from the Kyoho Building, the 1.5 meter-diameter, 90 centimeter-high monument indicates the distance between the point and 53 cities across Korea and 64 cities overseas, in Korean and English.

It lists the distance along expressways and intra-province driveways for Korean cities and the lineal distance for cities in North Korea and elsewhere.

The old marker that stood at the corner of a pavilion in front of the Kyoho Building was sent to the Seoul Metropolitan Museum.

"We have introduced the new marker because the old one produced during the Japanese colonial era put the distance in the Japanese method of measurement and there remain bullet scars from the Korean War," a city official in charge of erecting the post said.



A Seoul City official examines the central road marker Friday to be unveiled Monday. Located near the Kwanghwa-mun Intersection, the stone post indicates the distance between Seoul and 53 cities in Korea and 64 cities around the world. Korea Times

Some Colleges Facing Bankruptcy Amid National Economic Crisis

The ongoing national economic crisis is hitting some universities that have been engaged in heavy borrowing for expansion plans.

According to education experts, one university is teetering on the brink of bankruptcy, unable to meet its repayment schedule to private money lenders for loans to relocate its campus out of Seoul.

"Its faculty members have not received their pay for two months," one expert said. "I understand the school owner, a company with interests in the dairy business and office rentals, is also in serious trouble with little prospects for providing emergency loans to the school."

This school is one of many which has borrowed heavily to expand its campus, bring in noted scholars and import expensive scientific equipment to receive a higher grade in school evaluations by the Education Ministry.

The schools, especially the newly established ones, were in a spending spree with borrowed money to receive a better grade from the ministry

which entitles them to larger government subsidies.

Some of those universities are also suffering from the plunging won.

According to industry watchers, many universities have received education loans of \$500,000 to \$1 million dollars from the World Bank to import fancy scientific gadgets. Now with the won depreciated almost by half, the schools have to double their monthly or annual dollar payment to the international lending organization.

Making the situation even worse is the government's plan to freeze tuition at the same level as last year. The tuition freeze is being pushed out of fear an increase would aggravate consumer prices expected to rise dramatically next year.

"The problem is that most private universities, except for the top few, rely on tuition for 80 to 90 percent of their annual budget," said one education expert. "If the tuition is frozen at the present level, I wouldn't be surprised to see some universities topple under the debts next year."

Some university hospitals, symbols of the schools' prestige, are facing prospects of losing money for the first time in many years.

Yonsei University's Severance Hospital has had to cough up an additional 30 billion won due to the plunging won for expensive medical equipment leased from overseas.

Accordingly, many universities are briskly downscaling their ambitious long term plans or engaged in a major retrenchment process in order to tide their institutions over the ongoing tight money crunch from the national economic crisis.

Population Traveling for New Year Holiday Expected to Decrease

The population traveling during the upcoming New Year holidays is expected to decrease by 1.8 percent from last year to 12.15 million people.

It is expected to take about nine hours to travel by car from Seoul to Pusan and about the same time for the Seoul-Kangnung drive — almost double the normal driving time but less than in previous holiday seasons.

The decreased traffic for the traditional homecoming season is attributed to the ongoing economic crisis, according to the Construction and Transportation Ministry.

The ministry had initially projected a 7.5 percent increase but revised their forecast downward citing higher gas prices and the general downturn in the national economy.

"In addition, the decreased number of people traveling during the holidays is also due to the lunar New Year holiday that falls this year in late January," one ministry official said.

By Hong Sun-hee
Staff Reporter

Sign-Up for Organ Donations Jumps Markedly

People signing up for organ donation pledges have increased by 23 percent this year.

A total of 14,065 people made pledges to the Korea Organ and Tissue Donor Program to offer their organs to save other's lives so far this year, compared with 11,368 people from the corresponding period, last year.

The number is four times the 3,692 people who did so in 1991, the year when the organization was established. It was followed by 7,270 people in 1992, 8,870 people in 1993 and 15,313 people in 1994.

Among this year's group, 4,974 pledged to donate their corneas, 3,667 signed living wills, 2,348 signed for the donation of their bodies for medical research. Another 1,940, 723 and 413 people signed up for the donation of

bones, bone marrow and kidneys respectively.

During the same period, 132 people enlisted with the program underwent surgeries alive or after death to have their organs removed for others suffering from a variety of chronic ailments. They broke down to 72 for kidneys, 48 for corneas, five for livers, six for hearts and one for lung.

"As our campaign takes root in society, the number of prospective organ donors is rising. I hope our activities will put an end to the practice of organ trafficking," said Lee Won-gyun of the nonprofit organization.

Last week, the organs and body parts of a 12-year-old girl who died on Christmas morning were given to eight people.

Chang Yong-ju, a fifth grader at Myongjong Elementary School in Ulsan, Kyongsang-namdo, collapsed

at school because of a malignant brain tumor on Dec. 18 and was declared brain dead at the Paik Hospital in Pusan at 5 a.m. on Dec. 25.

The organ removing operation lasted six hours. The heart and lungs were sent to Incheon's Kil Hospital, the liver and bone marrow to Pusan's Koshin University Hospital, the corneas to Pusan's Donga University Hospital and Seoul's Yonsei Medical Center, one kidney to Koshin Hospital and the other to Paik Hospital.

In Seoul, meanwhile, a duo were recently arrested for having swindled some 200 million won from victims under the false pretense of selling their body organs.

The two came to the attention of their victims who saw posters posted in the rest rooms of subway stations, express bus terminals and general hospitals.

Salvation Army Donation Beats 'IMF Cold Wave'

The warm helping heart of the Korean people for their less privileged neighbors overpowered the so-called "IMF cold wave."

A fact proved by the final tally of the annual charity drive by the Salvation Army ending at midnight on Christmas eve.

According to a spokesman of the Salvation Army, a total of 1,350 million won was collected in the charity pots installed along the major streets of Seoul and provincial cities.

The amount far exceeded the target goal of 1.2 billion won for this year and was 130 million won higher than last year's total of 1,220 million won, he said.

A "Faceless Angel," who donated 1 million won in a cash envelope at the charity pot in Myong-dong for the last 12 years, didn't fail to appear. But conscious of public interest, he or she showed up at the charity pot installed in front of Seoul City Hall on Dec. 10 instead of the usual Myong-dong loca-

tion.

In an apparent move of sharing the "holy" mind of the angel, five more faceless angels — four in Seoul and one in Kwangju — appeared this year. One of them donated 2 million won in a cash envelope at a pot in Sogong-dong, central Seoul, according to the spokesman. The money collected through the charity pots will be spent for those on welfare lists and poor heart patients to enable them to have operations, he said.

Around the Nation

Sheraton Donates Lost Properties to Welfare Home

A Nike blazer, Levi's jeans and a Versace T-shirt and carton full of other clothes were donated to Hyangnimwon, a welfare home in Yongok, Joju-gun, Kyonggi-do by the Sheraton Walker Hill Hotel Friday.

The hotel discovers about 10 lost items a day and many guests fail to retrieve them. So ever year-end since 1990, the hotel donates the garments to the welfare center where the physical handicaps of its residents causes clothes to be worn out quickly.

Additionally, cleaning ladies and doormen of the hotel contributed two million won, a collection of the small change they received as tips from guests.

Train Office Launches Ticket Delivery Service

PUSAN — The Korea National Railroad Pusan Office has introduced a home deliver service to promote train ticket sales hard hit by the nation's financial downturn.

Those who order the tickets will have them delivered by KNR employees, who will visit the clients homes or other designated places.

If the program turns out to be successful, the service will expand to Taegu, Ulsan, Masan and Kyongju areas, an official in charge of the program said.

Kwachon iMulls 4Lco Bridge' o Lure Wildlife

An "ecological bridge" will be built over the Namtaeryong — a hill along the way from the second government building in Kwachon to Seoul — to bring back wildlife which disappeared from the region due to the highway linking Kwachon City and Seoul's Sadang-dong. The road cut through the lower edges of Mt. Kanak and Mt. Umyon.

The Kwachon City Government has earmarked 500 million won to set up the bridge, plant cherry and oak trees and other vegetation conducive to the wild animals who used to inhabit the region. The government will also set up sound absorbing walls on the both sides of the bridge.

Weather Forecast

TODAY

Clear turning cloudy. Morning lows range from -7 to 4°C (19-39°F), daytime highs, 2 to 10°C (36-50°F).

Sunrise: 7:46 a.m.
Sunset: 5:22 p.m.

Seoul: Clear turning cloudy
-2°C (28°F) / 8°C (46°F)
Taejon: Clear turning cloudy
-4°C (25°F) / 6°C (43°F)
Chuncheon: Clear turning cloudy
5°C (23°F) / 7°C (45°F)
Kangnung: Clear turning cloudy
1°C (34°F) / 8°C (46°F)
Kwangju: Clear turning cloudy
3°C (37°F) / 8°C (46°F)
Taegu: Clear turning cloudy
0°C (32°F) / 9°C (48°F)
Pusan: Clear turning cloudy
4°C (39°F) / 10°C (50°F)
Cheju: Cloudy, afternoon shower
9°C (48°F) / 13°C (55°F)

TOMORROW

Cloudy turning clear. Morning lows range from -2 to 5°C (28-41°F), daytime highs, 5 to 10°C (41-50°F).

Sunrise: 7:45 a.m.
Sunset: 5:23 p.m.

Seoul: Partly cloudy
2°C (36°F) / 6°C (43°F)
Taejon: Partly cloudy
2°C (36°F) / 8°C (46°F)
Chuncheon: Partly cloudy
-1°C (30°F) / 6°C (43°F)
Kangnung: Partly cloudy
3°C (37°F) / 6°C (43°F)
Kwangju: Light rain
5°C (41°F) / 10°C (50°F)
Taegu: Light rain
3°C (37°F) / 7°C (45°F)
Pusan: Light rain
3°C (47°F) / 9°C (48°F)
Cheju: Light rain
11°C (52°F) / 14°C (57°F)

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