

Writer Yi Finds Father Still Alive in NK

By Yang Sung-jin
Staff Reporter

Famous novelist Yi Mun-yol recently received a letter from his father living in North Korea, marking the first contact between father and son since the elder Yi fled north during the Korean War, it was learned yesterday.

According to a report by a local Korean-language daily, Yi's father, identified as Yi Won-chol, 84, is still alive in North Korea.

The 51-year-old writer revealed that he received a letter from his father in North Korea via a Korean-Chinese living in the city of Yenji last December.

According to the liaison, his father is married, has five children and lives in a small, remote village in Orang-kun, Hamkyong-pukto, Yi said.

Yi Won-chol, who served as dean of the agricultural college of Seoul National University (SNU) when the Korean War broke out in 1950, crossed the border to the North during the war.

Yi's father was the basis for the main

character in "The Age of Heroes," a popular novel by Yi. A figure reminiscent of Yi Won-chol is the father of the main character in "The Frontier," a much-celebrated epic novel that Yi recently completed.

In the two-page letter, Yi's father reportedly inquired about his five sons and other family members in the South, naming each of them.

"My father sent this letter to a Korean-Chinese in China last November and the person, in turn, mailed it to me the next month," Yi said.

According to the Korean-Chinese, Yi's father retired after working as an expert on rice farming and irrigation in North Korea.

Yi added that "my father seems to



Yi Mun-yol

know that I became a writer in the South, considering the fact that he knew of my novels such as 'The Son of A Man and The Portrait of Days Gone By' presumably through North Korean authorities."

"Back in 1991, I heard from a Korean-Japanese that my father was alive in the city of Chongjin in Hamkyong-pukto, but I was unable to confirm it. Now that I have come to know that he's alive, I am very happy," Yi said.

Yi added that his father seemed to be going through some troubles after moving from the big city of Chongjin to a small village.

The writer recently completed a 12-volume epic novel, "The Frontier," the last volume of which featured a number of passages mourning the death of his father. The insertions were written based on Yi's assumption that his father, over 80-years-old by that time, had died.

Yi has been widely regarded as a leading Korean literary figure since the 1980s. His works are typically painful family histories set in the turbulent era following the Korean War.

CHRC Pulls Out of Probe of Lt. Kim's Death

The members of the Catholic Human Rights Committee (CHRC) yesterday announced their withdrawal from the special investigative team which is looking into the death of 1st Lt. Kim Hun, claiming the military authority is still trying to cover up the truth.

In an announcement issued yesterday, the committee members said the entire investigation process is still "rigged" and that there is "no point in remaining" part of the investigative effort.

"The special investigation team is deceiv-

ing the public. They have been excluding civilian members from the investigation," said a CHRC representative.

At the same time, the CHRC demanded the disbanding of the special investigative team, the punishment of Lt. Gen. Yang In-mok, head of the team, and the immediate resignation of Defense Minister Chun Yong-taek.

They also claimed that a public hearing of pathologists held at the War Memorial building to look into the controversial death of 1st Lt. Kim did not give them a

fair chance to choose between "murder" and "suicide" as the cause of death.

"Defense officials invited seven pathologists and Louis Roh from the U.S. was the only one on the murder side. The rest were puppets of the Defense Ministry," the representative said.

"They were simply attempting to overpower Roh and to reach a conclusion that the young Army officer killed himself. It was in no way a fair public hearing," he added.

Meanwhile, Roh, deputy medical examiner of Westchester County's Laboratories and Research Department in the U.S., said the hearing was conducted "ridiculously."

"I have never seen such an one-sided hearing. There is no point in my raising any doubts as I am pitted against six other pathologists," said the renowned U.S. pathologist.

"I even feel insecure staying in Seoul. The defense people will perhaps do something if I cling to my views against their earlier rulings," Roh continued.

1st Lt. Kim's death, which occurred in the Joint Security Area of Panmunjom on Feb. 1998, became a major controversy after questions were raised about the military's official ruling that Kim committed suicide.

Minister Kim Outlines Gov't Reform Plan

WASHINGTON (Yonhap) — South Korea plans to privatize 11 of 108 state firms and either close or merge 19 of 133 government institutions, a cabinet minister said Thursday.

Government Administration and Home Affairs Minister Kim Jung-kil, speaking before the Korea Society, said government will repeal more than 5,000 administrative restrictions.

Kim is in Washington attending an international seminar on government reform, chaired by U.S. Vice President Al Gore.

Explaining South Korea's restructuring efforts in the public sector, Kim said the number of central government workers will be reduced by 17,600, or 11 percent, in the next three years.

Local government workers will also be reduced by 87,500, or 30 percent, by the end of 2007, he said.

South Korea will adopt principles of competition and market economy in state organizations as well, introducing corporate-style management, Kim said.

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Employees of the Tongjak ward office, southern Seoul, pack shoes to send them to the homeless Friday. A total of 1,000 pairs of shoes were collected in its shoe collection campaign. Korea Times



Inmate Takes 'Conversion Letter' System to Court

By Hong Sun-hee
Staff Reporter

An ex-student activist and long-term prisoner Monday filed suit at the Seoul Administrative Court against the justice minister, questioning the legal grounds for so-called "conversion letters," in which prisoners who violate national security laws are required to forsake communist ideology before being considered for special pardons.

Prisoners subject to the requirement have typically been North Korean spies captured here and those arrested for their alleged activities supporting or sympathizing with North Korea's ideology.

Kang Yong-ju, 38, has been incarcerated at Andong Prison for 15 years for his involvement with a pro-Pyongyang Korean collegians' ring discovered in Western Europe in 1985.

Kang's suit contends that the pertinent authority's refusal to reveal the justification for the conversion letters is a clear violation of the Information Disclosure Act. Kang is seeking the revocation of the ministry's action.

It is the first court case to be launched on the controversial system, which originated during Japan's colonial rule of Korea, when it was forced upon Koreans arrested for anti-Japanese activities.

Kang, a former Chonnam National University medical student, was sentenced to life imprisonment for his "liaison" role with the ring in 1986. The term was commuted in 1993 to 20 years.

While the main culprits in the case were released from prison through a special pardon offered on the occasion of the anniversary of the nation's independence last August, Kang remained behind bars simply because he did not sign a conversion letter. Human rights organizations maintain that such letters ran counter to basic democratic principles guaranteeing freedom of thought.

He is the youngest of the Korean prisoners of conscience who are serving more than 10 years in one of the nation's prisons.

Last summer, Kang filed a similar suit with the Taegu Prosecutor's Office branch in Andong, Kyongsang-pukto but the office responded by letter that

the case would be transferred to the Justice Ministry. The ministry granted him access to some of the documents related to the case at that time.

On the suit at the Seoul Administrative Court, Kang said, Though the prosecution is under the umbrella of the Justice Ministry, the former is an independent state organization free from the ministry. The transfer of the case to the ministry is a result of the prosecution's misunderstanding of the logic of the law. The ministry's rejection of inmates' requests for information disclosure is based on the excuse that it is feared to disturb the execution of sentences, correctional duties and other matters and is beyond its jurisdiction.

In the suit, Kang wrote that he has been subject to the worst treatment possible and excluded from standard inmates' activities. He is not allowed to leave his cell to work, use the telephone, or attend Bible and calligraphy classes.

While most inmates are transferred from one prison to another, Kang has been in Andong Prison for the past 15 years.

Japan's Environmentalists Here to See Wetlands

A group of 15 wetland preservation activists from Japan arrived in Korea yesterday for a tour of wetlands in the western coastal mudflats here and for a symposium with their Korean counterparts.

"In Korea, the reclamation of wetlands was started during the Japanese colonial rule of Korea and the government is still following in the footsteps of Japan in terms of its course and technical matters concerning the wetland development, posing a grave threat to the ecosystem," said Chang Chi-young of the Korea Federation for Environmental Movement, the group hosting the Japanese visitors.

"The wetlands in the two countries are very similar in terms of geological and ecological matters. And Korea, which still has vast wetland areas, will serve as a crucial model for Japan for the preservation and restoration of wetlands, many parts of which have been covered with soil. A strong solidarity between Korean and Japanese activists is needed in light of these two features," Chang continued.

The representatives from the Japan Wetlands Action Network (JAWAN) visited Yongjong-do yesterday, where a new airport is being constructed on reclaimed land, shortly after their arrival. This morning they will visit Saemangum, Cholla-pukto, the site of a

large-scale reclamation project. They will also stop by the Kumgang River estuary this afternoon.

In the evening, they will discuss the present and future of the wetlands in Korea and Japan in a symposium and adopt a joint declaration.

The Japanese delegation includes a lawyer, a photographer and a professor, each of whom belongs to one of several wetland protection organizations across Japan. Also joining the trip are Hirohumi Yamashita, winner of the 1998 Goldman Award, which is the most-coveted decoration conferred on an environmental worker, and researcher Richard Forest of the Environmental Diplomacy Institute.

Weather Forecast

TODAY

Clear across the country. Morning lows, -12 to -3°C (10-27°F), daytime highs, 0 to 7°C (28-41°F).

Sunrise: 7:46 a.m.
Sunset: 5:38 p.m.

Seoul: Clear
-7°C (19°F)/ 2°C (36°F)
Taejon: Clear
-7°C (19°F)/ 4°C (39°F)
Chunchon: Clear
-10°C (14°F)/ 1°C (34°F)
Kangnung: Clear
-2°C (28°F)/ 6°C (43°F)
Kwangju: Partly cloudy, light snow
-4°C (25°F)/ 7°C (45°F)
Taegu: Clear
-4°C (25°F)/ 5°C (41°F)
Pusan: Clear
-2°C (28°F)/ 7°C (45°F)
Cheju: Partly cloudy, light rain/snow
4°C (39°F)/ 7°C (45°F)

TOMORROW

Clear across the country. Morning lows will range -9 to -1°C (16-30°F), daytime highs, 2 to 9°C (36-48°F).

Sunrise: 7:45 a.m.
Sunset: 5:38 p.m.

Seoul: Clear, later partly cloudy
-6°C (21°F)/ 4°C (39°F)
Taejon: Clear, later partly cloudy
-6°C (21°F)/ 5°C (41°F)
Chunchon: Clear, later partly cloudy
-9°C (16°F)/ 3°C (37°F)
Kangnung: Clear, later partly cloudy
-1°C (30°F)/ 8°C (46°F)
Kwangju: Clear
-3°C (27°F)/ 9°C (48°F)
Taegu: Clear
-4°C (25°F)/ 6°C (43°F)
Pusan: Clear
-1°C (30°F)/ 9°C (48°F)
Cheju: Clear
4°C (39°F)/ 8°C (46°F)

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