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DPRK UNIFICATION FRONT ENVOY TOURS ROK INDUSTRIES

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Kim Yang-gon, head of the DPRK Workers' Party Unification Front department, led a North Korean delegation to the South, and after two nights and three days, returned to the North on December 1. The last time a North Korean head of the KWP's Unification Front department visited the South was seven years ago, when, in September 2000, Kim Yong-soon visited Cheju Island. Government authorities are saying that Kim's trip to the South was publicized in order to facilitate the smooth implementation of the 2007 inter-Korean Summit Declaration

On the day Kim's delegation arrived, the group visited the Songdo Free Trade Zone, where he and his delegation were moved by a presentation by officials explaining the value of an Incheon-Kaesong-Haeju 'West Sea Belt'. On the second day, the group visited Daewoo shipyards in Koje, the Busan Customs House, and other facilities.

The trip was reminiscent of when DPRK Cabinet Prime Minister Kim Young-il led a group of more than thirty North Korean entrepreneurs to Vietnam last October, spending four nights and five days walking around tourist areas, an export-processing zone, port facilities, and other industrial areas.

The Unification Front department is but one department within the Workers' Party responsible for policies toward the South and other countries. Unlike the foreign liaison department, Office 35, and the strategy office, the Unification Front operates openly, but distribution of propaganda leaflets, management of pro-North groups, enticement of overseas Koreans, and other activities are also underway.

The trip South by Kim's delegation happened just before ROK presidential elections, and highlights the fact that there is barely a month left before North Korea must have its nuclear program frozen and fully disclosed. Kim's trip to the ROK was promoted and publicized from the beginning, but little information was given to the press, other than coverage of tours of economic facilities.

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