

## North Korea Executes Kim Relative

From VOA Learning English, this is In the News.

This week, North Korea executed the uncle of leader Kim Jong Un. The official Korean Central News Agency said Jang Song Thaek was put to death on Thursday after facing a special military court. It said Jang was found guilty of attempting to overthrow the state, party and leadership. He was also accused of womanizing and drug abuse.

The announcement came just days after Jang Song Thaek was publicly ousted from power for suspected disloyalty and corruption. Korean Central Television broadcast images of his arrest on Sunday at a meeting of the Korean Workers' Party.

On Friday, the official Rodong Sinmun newspaper published pictures of Jang at the military trial. They showed him lowering his head, with guards on both sides.

Andrei Lankov is a professor of Korean history at Kookmin University in South Korea. He says ousters, or purges, of North Korean officials are not uncommon. But he says the level of publicity in this case is unusual.

“In the past, hundreds or maybe even thousands of high level officials have been purged. Some of them executed. Some of them were sent to exile or prison. However, with very few exceptions in most areas, purges have always been fixed. Unlike say the Soviet Union under Stalin, when they remove the high level official, they usually did not make it public. When they did, it was never on such a scale.”

Leonid Petrov is a Korea expert with the Australian National University. He questions whether Jang Song Thaek was actually plotting to overthrow the government.

“I think this has nothing to do with what really happened. Jang Song Thaek was a loyal member of Kim’s regime. He was appointed by Kim Jong Il to supervise his son. Jang Song Thaek was doing everything possible to promote Kim Jong Un’s image.”

Leonid Petrov says a personal or family dispute could have led to the execution. But he says it is also clear that Mr. Kim considered his uncle a threat. And he says the North Korean leader felt the need to send a message that he is in complete control.

“The elites are scared to death at the moment. And the grassroots population of North Korea also gets the message that it is Kim Jong Un who is in the driving seat. They must follow his orders, and there’s simply no alternative or any place for dissent in North Korea.”

Mr. Jang was quietly ousted from power not once, but two times under the former North Korean leader. But he regained power with the help of his wife Kim Kyong Hui, the sister of the former leader.

Much of North Korea's central leadership is from the rule of Kim Jong Il. Many officials are in their 60s or 70s. This has led some observers to debate the level of their support for 30-year-old Kim Jong Un.

Mr. Kim took power two years ago. Since then, he has replaced more than 40 percent of high level officials, and built his rule with a younger generation loyal to him.

There were no signs of unrest in North Korea following the execution. But the South Korean Defense Ministry said it was closely watching the North Korean military for aggressive movements.

On Friday, the office of South Korea's president held a national security meeting to discuss the situation on the Korean peninsula. A Unification Ministry official said South Korea is watching the events with concern.

And that's In the News, from VOA Learning English. I'm Steve Ember.