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## Koreans in Sakhalin Caught Amid Russia-Japan Rivalry

This is the first in a series of articles highlighting the lives of Koreans on Sakhalin Island.

By Andrei Lankov  
Korea Times Columnist

**SAKHALIN** — In spring 1946, hundreds of Korean miners and fishers came to the small port city of Korsakov, located in the southernmost part of the Sakhalin Island.

Southern Sakhalin had just changed ownership. After 40 years of Japanese rule, its territory was retaken by the Russians, so local Japanese were moving back to their native islands.

Koreans came to Korsakov because rumors were circulating that ships would soon arrive to take all Koreans back home to the southern provinces of Korea. Those who came to Korsakov wanted to be first to board those ships. But the ships never came.

This was, in a sense, a sign of things to come. The Koreans found themselves locked on the island, so-called *so-bhaks*, against their will, and for a long time they hoped for some miracle which would let them return to their homes. They miraculously materialized, but only after it was too late for most of them.

Sakhalin Koreans were not migrants in a strict sense. It was the ships which changed ownership, so its inhabitants found themselves in a new country which they could not leave at their own will. When the Soviet Union took over the area, it expelled nearly all Japanese, but forced Koreans to stay. At first, Sakhalin Koreans were slaves of the Japanese empire, and then they

became hostages of Cold War politics. In 1903, Sakhalin was divided between Russia and Japan with the Japanese occupying the southern half. The island had large coal deposits and abundant fish stocks as well as large forests. However, developmental projects needed cheap labor, and this was easily found in Korea, then a Japanese colony.

From the 1930s, the Koreans began to arrive on the island. At first, they came voluntarily, attracted by high wages. Indeed, a Sakhalin coal miner could make 80-100 yen a month — a fortune for a Korean countryside lad who would be happy to get 20 yen a month back home. Initially, these salaries were indeed paid, but when the military situation began to deteriorate, the payments were greatly reduced. Even until today, descendants of those miners are engaged in a legal battle with the Japanese companies and banks, trying to recover this money.

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Kim Yu-na wins Trophée Bompard, Korean figure skating star. Kim Yu-na performs in the free skating event in the first ISU Grand Prix of the season — the Trophée Bompard in Paris, Sunday (KST). The 16-year-old became the champion, setting a new world record with 218.23 points.

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## Korea Will Use Museum to Upgrade National Image

By Chung Ah-young  
Staff Reporter

In the past century, museums were confined to the realm of consolidating national identity via preservation and development of Korean cultural assets while struggling through Japanese colonial rule (1910-1945) and the Korean War (1950-1953).

But the 21st century has ushered in a new concept to become the main player in promoting the "national brand" by providing abundant cultural content.

The past hundred years was a turbulent era that saw the harsh Japanese colonial rule and the Korean War. Despite the difficulties, the museums across Korea have been committed to the preservation of cultural heritage. Now the museums are seeking to upgrade the national brand," said Choe Kwang-dik, director of the National Museum of Korea, in an interview with The Korea Times.

The 56-year-old director said that the museums have evolved into Korea's treasure houses. This year is considered to be the 100th anniversary of the country's first modern museum, the Imperial Museum of Korea of the Gyeongseong Palace, which was opened to the public in 1909 under the orders of King Sunjong, the last king of the Joseon Kingdom.

To commemorate the occasion, Choe, as the head of the country's flagship museum, has

50th ANNIVERSARY THE KOREA TIMES Interview



Choe Kwang-dik, director of the National Museum of Korea, talks in the office in Seoul about plans to fully state-run museums, play a more integral part in improving the country's brand image on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the country's first modern museum.

Choe Kwang-dik Photo by Shin Hyun-duk

announced a variety of plans to help state-run museums play a more integral part in improving the country's brand image, which includes establishing a massive complex for museums in downtown Seoul that he believes will become a major tourist and cultural destination.

He reminisced about Korean museums' 100-year history ahead of the anniversary, which falls on Nov. 1.

King Sunjong conceived his intention to accept his decision, signaling the founding of the nation's first public museum and giving ordinary citizens access to his valuable collections.

"It was the first time a museum was open to the public. At the same time, it meant ordinary people were allowed to gain access to the royal palace, opening an era for civil society to communicate with the royal families," said Choe.

"But people are not aware of this special occasion without knowing that the country's first modern museum was launched 100 years ago. So through various promotions, we are expecting the museums to make a giant leap forward."

Although the Imperial Museum of Korea was downsized into the Museum of the Yi Royal Family under Japanese colonial rule in 1911, it continued to exhibit its collection of 18,000 precious treasures such as the gilt-bronze statue of Guanyesire, the Bodhisattava (National Treasure No. 93, Joseon painter Kim Hong-do's paintings and Gooyeon porcelains, which are now in the representative collection of the National Museum of Korea.

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## Seoul Denies Summit Proposal From N. Korea

By Kang Hyeon-kyung  
Staff Reporter

North Korean leader Kim Jong-il has proposed summit talks with South Korean President Lee Myung-bak in Pyongyang, a high-ranking U.S. official said Sunday.

But Seoul's presidential office denied the claim, saying there had been no official summit proposal from the North. Chong Wn also made it clear that President Lee would not sit down with his North Korean counterpart just simply for a photo session.

The Pyongyang official said Korean reporters in Washington may be misinterpreted the North Korean leader had invited Lee to Pyongyang to hold a summit.

He made the comment while briefing Korean reporters that Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates was scheduled to visit South Korea on Oct. 21 for the Korea-U.S. Defense Security Cooperation Meeting (DSCM).

Shortly after the U.S. defense official made the remark, Chong Wn also dismissed it, saying the U.S. official was "misinterpreted" about the results of the Korea-U.S. defense talks over the month and the North Korean

deliberation's meeting with President Lee on August.

A source from the presidential office said on condition of anonymity that Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao asked President Lee if he would agree to an inter-Korean summit when there is progress in South-North relations. The source also said the North Korean leader sent a similar message to President Lee in August when a North Korean delegation visited Chong Wn. The North sent a six-member delegation to the South in August for the funeral of the late former President Kim Dae-jung.

The source said South Korea reiterated its position that it is ready to hold talks with any inter-Korean summit, adding that the U.S. official was not of course and what he said was far from the reality.

Lee Dong-hoon, senior presidential secretary for public affairs, also had an unpublicized press briefing Sunday to explain the government's position on the inter-Korean summit.

"There has been no change in South Korea's position on inter-Korean relations. We keep all options open, including summit talks with the North," he said.

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## Overseas Koreans Angry Over Empty Promises on Suffrage

By Lee Tag-heon  
Korea Times Correspondent

HAWAII — Many Koreans living abroad are becoming increasingly critical of lawmakers' failure to provide specific plans regarding their rights to vote.

"We have recently seen a surge of lawmakers visiting the United States since the Election Law was revised in February," said Jeff Lee, a director of the Korean American Federation of Los Angeles. From the coastal city's Koreanists.

"Yet, many of them have come up with specific plans to simplify the registration and voting process, which takes a couple of

days for many to cast a vote at the nearest Korean consulate or embassy and to counter fraudulent votes when the mail voting system is introduced," Lee said.

Both governing and opposition party lawmakers submitted bills last September and March that would introduce a postal voting system to protect the right to vote of those living abroad and to boost their voting turnout rate.

Yet, legislators have put the suffrage issue on the back burner amid political bickering over the recent Cabinet reshuffle and parliamentary inspection of the administration.

Both parties are hesitant about passing the bill because it is difficult to determine which side it would benefit more.

"It is hard to predict which party overseas Koreans will support in the 2012 elections," Lee said. "Koreans have a long history of immigration, but they have never been given a chance to vote to pick a politician in their homeland."

Lee said the percentage of voter turnout among 2.4 million overseas Koreans eligible to vote will most likely remain in the single digits as the majority of them will be reluctant to travel several hours to register and cast a vote.

But he predicted turnout would surpass 20 percent if mail voting is implemented.

## TV Decency Rules to Be Tightened

By Lee Jong-hyung  
Staff Reporter

The government is voting to place stricter control on television materials amid growing viewer complaints over sex, violence and obscenity.

Although the strengthened decency standards will be referred to all national, local and cable channels, the Korea Communications Standards Commission (KSC) said the dramas and game shows on national networks clearly seem to be the prime targets.

It remains to be seen how television stations will react to the plan of however from now on, as they have been complaining that the decency rules were vague and curbing creativity.

However, KSC is under pressure to take stronger action to clear up the airwaves, with an increasing number of national television programs being slammed for their disturbing content and offensive language.

The debate over taste and decency has reached a point where extreme dramas and blunt game shows have become part of daily vocabulary here.

"Extreme dramas, based on plots about twisted relationships between men and women and between family members, and the many game shows that allow

viewer to determine which side it would benefit more.

"We will continue to monitor these programs and also announce the number of violations by each television network and individual entertainers appearing in game shows."

Adultery, corruption and vengeance have been popular themes for day-time and evening television dramas recently as networks engaged in heated competition over viewer ratings.

"The MBC series 'Flirt In' airing from Mondays to Fridays, is based on a complicated plot of love and betrayal between its two main characters, and is surrounded by a chaotic mixture of sex, violence, suicide and tragedy that violates

Advertisement for Seven Luck. It features a woman in a red dress and a man in a suit. Text includes: "Seven Luck Seoul Campaign Grand Opening October 2009", "www.7Luck.com | Tel. 02-3860-6100".

# Italian Language Week to Open Today in Seoul

By Kim Se-jeong  
Staff Reporter

Italian Language Week, a campaign to promote the Italian language and culture, opens today in Korea.

This year's theme is "Italian as the language of arts, science and technology," for which several lectures and performances have been prepared.

Italian architect Arturo Vittori, founder of the architecture firm "Architecture And Vision" will give three lectures at Myongji University on Oct. 20, Hongik University on Oct. 21, and Hanyang University on Oct. 23.

A topic for the lectures will be "From Pyramids to Spacecraft" and Vittori will explain history and evolution of architecture and how this influenced and affected the approach of "Architecture And Vision."

He is also participating in the Seoul Design Olympiad that will run until Oct. 29.

Italian contemporary dance company Aterballetto will be in Korea, taking part in the 12th Seoul International Dance Festival (SIDance).

It will present "Romeo & Juliet" at Goyang and Aram Nuri Arts Center on both Oct. 23 and 24.

Contemporary dance company Artemis Danza/Monica Casadei

will present the show, "I Bislacchi. Homage to Fellini" at the Seoul Arts Center on Oct. 19.

A concert dedicated to the life and works of Leonardo Da Vinci, an Italian artist will take place with Filippo Maria Pagliano, a musical director at Sungshin Women's University on Oct. 21.

Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Seoul and Pusan University of Foreign Studies will this week welcome Angelo Chiu and Giuseppe Pace, Italian foreign language specialists, who will meet professors and teachers in the universities' Italian-language departments.

Three Italian professors — Maria Adorno, Giuseppe Maugeri and Vincenzo Campitelli — will give lectures on this year's Italian language week topic at Sogang University, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies and Pusan University of Foreign Studies.

Physics professor Stefano Scopel from Seoul National University will give a lecture on the role of Italy in the world of research, science and technology at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Yongin Campus, on Oct. 22.

For more information about each activity, visit [www.iicseoul.esteri.it/IIC\\_Seoul](http://www.iicseoul.esteri.it/IIC_Seoul).

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