

# North Korea dismisses South Korean family reunion proposal

By Hyung-jin Kim  
The Associated Press

**S**EOUL, South Korea — North Korea has dismissed a South Korean proposal to resume reunions of families separated by war, but used an usually mild tone that indicated it still wants better ties with its rival to help boost its struggling economy.

The reunion program has been stalled amid tension between the rival Koreas since late 2010. The Koreans had agreed to resume the humanitarian program last September but North Korea abruptly cancelled the plan.

North Korea wants to link the reunions to a restart of a lucrative joint tourism project at its scenic Diamond Mountain, according to Seoul officials. But South Korea wants to deal separately with the tourism project, which provided a legitimate source of hard currency for the impoverished North before it was suspended when North Korean soldiers fatally shot a South Korean tourist there in 2008.

South Korea offered to hold talks about resuming the reunions around the Lunar New Year holiday this month, saying it could help improve strained ties. The Lunar New Year is celebrated by both Koreas and is traditionally a time when relatives get together.

North Korea responded that the talks could take place “at a good season” if the South is willing to discuss “the proposals of our side,” an apparent reference to the tourism project.

The North’s Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea also said the reunions could not occur this month because of annual springtime military drills planned by South Korea and the United States, saying the separated families could not have “reunions in peace amid gunfire,” according to the North’s official Korean Central News Agency.

However, North Korea’s statement did not include its typical harsh rhetoric against Seoul, and proposed that the countries could meet later if conditions are met. Analysts said this suggests that North Korea doesn’t want to completely cut off ties with South Korea because it needs outside investment and assistance to achieve leader Kim Jong Un’s vow of developing the economy and improving living standards.

“It’s like rejecting the South Korean offer in a very euphemistic manner,” said Lim Eul Chul, a North Korea expert at South Korea’s Kyungnam University. “Cutting off ties with South Korea would be burdensome for North



**REUNION RENEGED.** North Korean refugees and their family members bow out of respect for their relatives in North Korea to celebrate the Lunar New Year at Imjingak Pavilion, near the demilitarized zone of Panmunjom, South Korea, in this file photo. North Korea has dismissed a South Korean proposal to resume reunions of families separated by war during the upcoming Lunar New Year holiday. (AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon, File)

Korea.”

North Korea urgently wants to restart the tourism project because “South Korean investment would set the tone for drawing other foreign investment,” said Chang Yong Seok of the Institute for Peace and Unification Studies at Seoul National University.

South Korea expressed its regret over the North Korean decision.

“The North must show its sincerity by actions rather than talking about improvement in South-North Korean relations only with words,” the Unification Ministry said in a statement.

North Korean leader Kim called for better ties with South Korea in his annual New Year’s Day message, but also warned of possible nuclear war.

Millions of families have been separated since the 1950-1953 Korean War, which left the two Koreas divided by a tightly militarized border. The reunions are highly emotional because most participants are in their 70s or older and are eager to see their relatives before they die.

Tensions rose sharply last spring when North Korea issued a series of threats of nuclear strikes against Seoul and Washington. Prospects for inter-Korean ties became uncertain last month after North Korea’s execution of Kim’s uncle, Jang Song Thaek, on treason charges, with South Korean officials saying the North might launch provocations against the South to boost internal unity.



**TOUGH ROLE.** Hong Kong actor Donnie Yen smiles during a press conference in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The action star plays a small role in the upcoming fantasy epic *The Monkey King*, which will be released in China and Hong Kong on January 30, before the Lunar New Year holiday. (AP Photo/Lai Seng Sin, File)

## Donnie Yen finds ‘Monkey King’ a test of endurance

**HONG KONG (AP)** — Donnie Yen found playing the Monkey King in the upcoming fantasy epic *The Monkey King* to be a test of endurance.

The action star spent six hours in the makeup chair daily during filming. “After the makeup is done, then comes the pressure of wearing the armor,” he said. “It’s very painful.”

Yen and the film’s director, Cheang Pou Sui, presented the latest trailer for the film at an event in Hong Kong.

Yen, barely recognizable, is seen in full costume as the Monkey King fights off evil and shows off superpowers.

The story, based on Chinese mythology, is about the pilgrimage of the Monkey King, who accompanies a Buddhist monk to retrieve a sacred Buddhist text. The Monkey King battles the Bull Demon King, played by another Hong Kong A-lister, Aaron Kwok.

The 50-year-old Yen, whose films include Zhang Yimou’s *Hero* and the comic Hollywood crossover *Shanghai Knights*, acknowledges that his strength as a lean, mean fighting machine is not the same as before. But he said he still can fight the bad guys on the big screen.

“I think to shoot a movie takes stamina,” he said. “I don’t think that has anything to do with age. It’s all right. At least I feel that in the past two years, my body has no aches and pains. I can still keep going.”

*The Monkey King* also features Chow Yun Fat and Kelly Chan and will be released in China and Hong Kong on January 30, before the Lunar New Year holiday.



**SORE SPOT.** A hot-air balloon that Japan’s 11th Regional Coast Guard says a Chinese cook took for a ride is seen in waters near the East China Sea islands known in Japan as Senkaku and Diayou in China. Xu Shuaijun, 35, who crashed into the sea after hitting turbulence while approaching the islands claimed by both China and Japan, was rescued by the Coast Guard. (AP Photo/Japan’s 11th Regional Coast Guard)

## Chinese cook crashes on balloon to disputed isles

**TOKYO (AP)** — A Chinese cook who crashed into the sea while trying to fly on a hot-air balloon to islands claimed by both China and Japan has been rescued by Japan’s coast guard.

Xu Shuaijun, 35, crashed after hitting turbulence as he approached the islands, known in Japan as Senkaku and Diayou in China, according to the coast guard.

The coast guard said it received a missing-person report from Taiwanese officials and that one of its helicopters spotted Xu about 12 miles from the islands.

He was picked up by a boat and later handed over to a Chinese patrol ship, the coast guard said.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Qin Gang said Xu was in good condition.

Qin disavowed any official ties with Xu. “I note that he is a hot-air balloon enthusiast,” he said.

The islands have been a sore point in bilateral relations for years, and nationalists from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong have occasionally tried to sail to them.

A recent visit by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to a Tokyo shrine that honors World War II war criminals has outraged China, adding to the bilateral tensions.

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4		5	6		7
	2		7		4
9	5			6	3
		5			
	3	4	1	8	
		8			
7	2			4	9
	9		2		6
1		6	7		2

Difficulty level: Medium #45672

**Instructions:** Fill in the grid so that the digits 1 through 9 appear one time each in every row, column, and 3x3 box.

**Solution to last week’s puzzle**

Puzzle #17359 (Easy)

All solutions available at [www.sudoku.com](http://www.sudoku.com).

1	4	7	2	3	5	9	8	6
8	3	9	1	7	6	2	5	4
6	5	2	4	9	8	3	7	1
3	2	1	7	5	4	6	9	8
5	6	8	3	2	9	1	4	7
9	7	4	8	6	1	5	2	3
2	9	3	6	4	7	8	1	5
7	8	5	9	1	3	4	6	2
4	1	6	5	8	2	7	3	9

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