KOREAN COMPLICATIONS. *South Korean gymnast Lee Eun-ju, right, and her North Korean counterpart, Hong Un Jong, pose together for photographers during the artistic gymnastics women's qualification at the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Like dozens of athletes at the Rio Games, some competitors from North and South Korea have posed together for grinning selfies, which have then been posted to social media and documented by some of the hundreds of journalists. The interactions are not strictly illegal in South Korea, but they are complicated by the long history of animosity and bloodshed between the countries. (Kim Do-hoon/Yonhap via AP)*

Even Olympic selfies are complicated by Koreas' rivalry

By Foster Klug
The Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO — Nothing is ever easy for the rival Koreas, even that most ubiquitous and usually innocent of Olympic interactions, the selfie.

Like dozens of athletes at the Rio Games, gymnasts Hong Un Jong of North Korea and Lee Eun-ju of South Korea met on the sidelines during competition and training.

The 17-year-old Lee, who is at her first Olympics, posed for a smiling selfie with Hong, a 27-year-old veteran. That friendly encounter and others between the two were captured by journalists — and immediately took on larger significance for two countries still technically at war.

Such meetings are not illegal in South Korea, but they are complicated by the two countries' long history of animosity and bloodshed.

Hong became the first female gymnast from North Korea to win a gold medal in 2008, when Lee was nine years old and living in her native Japan. Lee moved to South Korea in 2013 because her Korean father wanted her to learn more about the country's culture.

A few days after the selfie was taken, Lee and Hong met again while on the floor at the same time during preliminary competition. Lee was eliminated, while Hong finished sixth in the vault competition.

International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach described the Koreans' selfie as a "great gesture."

"Fortunately, we see quite a few of these gestures here during the Olympic games," Bach said.

Photos of their warm moments delighted many South Koreans and provided a rare note of concord in otherwise abysmal relations between the rivals. It is unclear if the gymnasts' interaction was seen in the North, an authoritarian state with extremely limited press freedom and where access to outside media is usually blocked.

The Korean Peninsula is still technically in a state of war because there has been no peace treaty signed to officially end the 1950-1953 Korean War. Nearly 30,000 U.S. troops are stationed in South Korea as a deterrent against North Korea, and the neighbors regularly trade insults and warnings of war, including recent threats from the North of missile strikes on Seoul and its ally, Washington.

A web of laws, most leftover from the days when the South was ruled by a dictatorship, govern how South Koreans are supposed to interact with North Koreans. Travel and communication are severely restricted; even praising the North is illegal in the South.

South Koreans are required by law to obtain government permission for any planned meeting, communication, or other contact with North Koreans.

This requirement is waived for spontaneous interactions with North Koreans that can happen during foreign travel, like the Olympics. But South Koreans must still provide an account of what happened to the South Korean Unification Ministry, which handles inter-Korean issues, within seven days, according to the ministry.

So while it's OK for South Korean athletes to talk to the North Koreans they meet at the Olympics, they must later submit reports about the encounters to their Olympic committee, which will then pass the information to the government.

These brief, friendly moments between North and South Korean athletes at the Olympics may not seem to be

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Who is Naruhito, Japan's likely next emperor?

By Mari Yamaguchi
The Associated Press

TOKYO — Japanese Emperor Akihito's recent video message, though subtle, suggested that he wishes to abdicate, and the attention now goes to his elder son, the first in line to Japan's Chrysanthemum throne.

In his 10-minute recorded message, Akihito primarily cited his old age and concerns that it may become difficult for him to fulfill his duties, but some palace watchers say a hidden reason for his desired abdication might be his successor.

Like his father, Naruhito is a soft-spoken and smiley man. A bit stocky at age 56, he's married to a Harvard-educated former diplomat, Masako, who has been ill for more than a decade and seldom appears in public. But she is better known abroad and his presence is often eclipsed whenever she comes out.

Having a father who has tried to break down Japan's ancient imperial traditions to bring his cloistered family closer to the nation, Naruhito was raised as a new breed of royals who grew up in a family seen as a model for the nation. His name in Chinese characters means a person with heavenly virtues.

His mother, Michiko, the first commoner to become empress, helped to bring in fresh changes to the palace in child-rearing and education. The couple eliminated a wet nurse for Naruhito, born February 23, 1960, and his two younger siblings. When they went on official trips and left Naruhito behind, they handed his nannies a list of rules for the then-prince in what was known as a "Naru-chan Kempo," or "Constitution."

Naruhito attended Gakushuin, a private school for former aristocrats. After graduating from college, he studied at Oxford University, living in a dorm for two years for the first time while earning a master's degree in Thames River water transport systems.

An avid hiker, skier, and viola player, Naruhito first met Harvard-educated diplomat Masako Owada at a party in 1986, but it took him eight years of waiting and two rejections before he won her heart in what is remembered as a modern-day royal romance.

Their marriage raised expectations of adding a modern face to imperial institutions, but Masako is still recovering from stress-induced mental conditions she developed after giving birth to their daughter, following criticism that she had failed to produce a boy.

The succession law allows only male emperors, so Naruhito's only child, Aiko, 14, cannot inherit the throne. Instead, his younger brother Akishino, 50, is second in line, and Akishino's son Hisahito, age nine, is third. Discussions on changing the law to allow female succession ended with Hisahito's birth.

NEW BREED OF ROYAL. *Japan's Crown Prince Naruhito plays the viola during a concert of the Gakushuin University alumni in Tokyo, in this July 7, 2013 file photo. Emperor Akihito's recent video message, though subtle, conveyed his wish to abdicate, and the attention now goes to his elder son Naruhito, the first in line to Japan's Chrysanthemum throne. Naruhito would be the 126th emperor in a line believed to date to the fifth century. (AP Photo/Shizuo Kambayashi, Pool, File)*

For more than a decade, Naruhito has mostly travelled alone while performing his traditional duties, unlike his father, who is almost always with his wife by his side. This raises a question as to whether Masako can do even part of the work Michiko has done as empress.

Palace watchers and experts say Akihito wants to abdicate possibly to help smooth the transition, rather than waiting until the last minute to burden his son with such a heavy immediate responsibility.

Naruhito would be the 126th emperor in a line believed to date to the fifth century.

The emperor is a purely symbolic figure today, with no political power. Akihito is known as a strong proponent of Japan's war-renouncing constitution, repeatedly showing support for the charter, which stipulates his symbol status.

"(Akihito) reflects obviously the mistakes and the errors made earlier on in his father's (Hirohito's) reign," said Robert Campbell, a University of Tokyo professor who is an expert of Japanese history and culture. "That's something I think everyone hopes will be carried on into his son's reign."