



PRODUCT PLACEMENT. North Korean shop assistants work at a supermarket in Pyongyang, North Korea. In the era of Kim Jong Un, North Korea is learning to embrace its inner consumer. The rise of the consumer is a major feature, not a bug, of Kim's plans to strengthen the country's sad-sack economy and lift the people's standard of living. (AP Photo/Kin Cheung)

North Korea learns to embrace its inner consumer

By Eric Talmadge
The Associated Press

PYONGYANG, North Korea — In an instructional television program about table tennis on the state-run sports channel, every ball, paddle, and shirt bear the logo of “Naegohyang,” one of North Korea’s most recognizable brands. A documentary about the Pyongyang Maternity Hospital ends with new mothers being handed smartly packaged disposable diapers — with the local brand featured prominently.

Has North Korea discovered the art of product placement?

Subtle shifts like the quiet insertion of what looks a lot like advertising onto the North Korean airwaves exemplify how in the era of leader Kim Jong Un the North is learning to embrace its inner consumer. Officials won’t come right out and say so, but the rise of a consumer culture is a major feature of Kim’s plans to strengthen the economy and lift the people’s standard of living.

Entertaining and innovative aren’t words often used to describe North Korean TV, which has just one channel available every day throughout the country and just a few more a few days a week in Pyongyang, the capital. Programming is relentlessly ideological and always on-message.

But examples like the Naegohyang-laden table tennis program suggest at least some officials within the regime have been given a green light to push the envelope.

And it’s not just happening on TV.

While the rest of the world has been focused on its nuclear weapons and missile tests, North Korea watchers have remarked on the spread of market-style capitalism ever deeper into the country’s officially socialist and centrally controlled economy in the past few years. The evidence is unmistakable — from the haggling-friendly, bazaar-like atmosphere of Pyongyang’s Tongil Street marketplace to street-food stalls and the prominence of brands like Naegohyang, seen on cigarettes, liquor, and sporting goods including, of course, ping-pong balls.

Exactly how the country has maintained domestic economic growth despite some of the toughest international sanctions it has ever faced is a topic of hot debate. Most experts agree China is a major factor.

But what is often overlooked is the role of the North Koreans themselves, especially those who developed an entrepreneurial spirit after the dark days of the 1990s, when the Soviet Union and its socialist satellites crumbled and natural disasters and bureaucratic inefficiency meant that survival literally often meant learning how to fend for oneself.

The rise of the North Korean consumer under Kim is not limited to the affluent, politically privileged elite. In Kim Jong Un’s North Korea, you don’t need to be the spoiled daughter of a senior official to be able to get a strawberry smoothie.

Still, the consumer sector remains warped, as it does in many developing countries, with large disparities of wealth.

Millions of North Koreans still suffer from poor diets and a lack of clean water, struggling through the country’s bitterly cold winters. Farmers out in rural collectives lack the time, energy, and income to worry about what flavor ice cream they might fancy.

But there are plenty of people who might.

It is for that demographic the O-II General Process Factory boasts 55 flavors of “Eskimo,” the word used here for popsicles. That’s in addition to full lines of ice cream cones, yogurt drinks, jellies, sports drinks, milk products, and assorted juices — all of which are featured in a glossy new promotional brochure obtained by The Associated Press that is directed at potential foreign export partners. The factory is no Potemkin bluff — its products can be found in stores and restaurants all over Pyongyang.

Shops and department stores in other major cities, such as Wonsan, Hamhung, and Chongjin on the east coast and even smaller stores in the provinces have shelves full of chips, sugary drinks, cigarettes, and candies. The focus on variety is more akin to what’s found in a capitalist consumer culture than in one that’s more strictly socialist and utilitarian.

The trend has the leader’s blessing.

Factory managers, restaurant operators, and people in the service industries have all been quick to stress to The AP over the past several months that the central government, and Kim himself, want the country to focus its collective energy on pushing out more and better consumer goods. Beyond that, doctors say they are being urged to help raise the standard of living, despite a chronic lack of supplies and equipment, by finding innovative ways to fight threats like tuberculosis, decrease infant mortality, and increase life expectancy.

Many outside of North Korea assume that wanting to catch up with South Korea is the biggest factor behind Kim’s campaign.

But the regime has its own reasons for tweaking its system. Kim has big plans for the country’s economy. More business means he’ll have more money to fund those plans. And big, state-owned companies like Naegohyang aren’t disruptive outsiders but part of the North’s status quo.

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India’s #MeToo comes amid calls for 2013 law’s enforcement

By Emily Schmall
The Associated Press

NEW DELHI — Indian actresses and writers are flooding social media with allegations of sexual harassment and assault, releasing pent-up frustration with a law that was lauded internationally but that critics say has done little to change the status quo in the world’s largest democracy.

“People using social media to articulate their complaints should be recognized in the context of failure. The system has in effect failed us, has failed women,” T.K. Rajalakshmi, the president of the Indian Women’s Press Corps, said in a panel discussion in New Delhi.

The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act of 2013 holds Indian workplaces liable for sexual harassment, and prescribes a system for investigating and redressing complaints. Employers must create committees that are at least 50 percent women, presided over by a woman and with one external expert, to process complaints. The law builds on the landmark 1997 Vishakha case, in which India’s Supreme Court held that sexual harassment at work violated a woman’s constitutional right to equality.

But nearly five years since the law came into effect, many managers and employees are not aware of it. Those who do rarely implement it fully, in part because of the enormous taboo in India of discussing anything related to sex, said Naina Kapur, the attorney who argued the Vishakha case before the Supreme Court.

“Every time I get a call it’s after the event has happened. It’s supposed to be effectively communicated and it hasn’t been,” Kapur said, adding that in India, “as women get more into the marketplace and the workplace, their experience of sex harassment and violence is a growing area of concern but it’s not being heard.”

Based on the nonstop TV coverage, alleged victims are making themselves heard on social media, bypassing completely the protocol created by the 2013 law.

The social-media storm began in September, when former Bollywood actress Tanushree Dutta spoke to several Indian TV news channels about her frustration with a fruitless police complaint she filed in 2008 against actor Nana Patekar for alleged sexual harassment on a Mumbai movie set.

Dutta said that after Patekar groped her during a dance routine, she fled the set and a mob surrounded her car, smashed the windshield, and trapped her inside.

Patekar has denied the allegations.

Then on October 4, Mumbai comedy group AIB announced it had decided to de-list every video featuring former member Utsav Chakraborty, whom women had taken to social media to



#MeToo MOVEMENT. Activists of the congress party’s women’s wing shout slogans against Bollywood actor Nana Patekar during a protest in support of former Bollywood actress Tanushree Dutta in Mumbai, India. A social-media storm began in September when Dutta spoke to several Indian TV news channels about her frustration with nothing resulting from a police complaint she filed in 2008 against Patekar for alleged sexual harassment on a Mumbai movie set. The complaint by the retired actress living in the United States could be a tipping point for the country’s burgeoning #MeToo movement. (AP Photo/Rafiq Maqbool)

condemn for alleged sexual harassment.

On October 7, an unnamed former employee at Phantom Films writing in the Huffington Post described allegations she had made in 2015 against one of the company’s partners, director Vikas Bahl, whom she said behaved inappropriately during a trip to Goa.

The following day, company partners Anurag Kashyap and Vikramaditya Motwane dissolved Phantom Films. Bahl has filed an intent to sue his former partners for defamation.

Also on October 8, journalist Sandhya Menon shared screenshots of her conversation with two women claiming that actor Rajat Kapoor harassed them over the phone.

Kapoor apologized on Twitter if he had “slipped and through my actions or words caused pain or hurt.”

That same day, former TV producer, director, and writer Vinta Nanda said on Facebook and in TV interviews that she was raped 19 years ago by actor Alok Nath.

Nath said in a TV interview that he neither denied or agreed with the allegations. “It must have happened, but someone else would have done it,” Nath said.

TV actress Sandy Mridul expressed her support for Nanda in a tweet. Fellow TV actress Deepika Amin followed on Twitter: “Everyone in the industry knows that #AlokNath is an obnoxious drunkard who harasses women.”

On October 10, actor and heavyweight Bollywood producer Aamir Khan and his wife Kiran Rao put out a statement saying they were “committed to doing any and everything to make our film industry a safe and happy one to work in.” In a tweet, Khan said they were about to begin work with someone who had been accused of

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Philippine president: Tests show “I’m not yet cancerous”

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ailments, including recurring migraines, as a result of a motorcycle accident and drinking. But he said his most serious ailment is Barrett’s esophagus, a condition thought to be caused by stomach acid washing up into the esophagus. That may have been caused by his drinking, which he continued despite warnings from his doctors, he said.

Duterte said he underwent an endoscopy and colonoscopy about a month ago but his doctor was advised recently to repeat the tests. Both tests aim to diagnose any abnormality in the digestive tract and colon.

Roque said Duterte would abide by the country’s constitution, which requires presidents to publicly disclose any serious illness, but he added that since “it is not

serious, he will treat his medical condition as confidential.”

Duterte said the cabinet would decide if a president is “fully incapacitated to discharge the functions of the office.”

The Philippine constitution provides that the vice president, currently opposition leader Leni Robredo, would take over if the president cannot lead the country due to health problems or other reasons.

Duterte has questioned the competence of Robredo, a respected human-rights lawyer, to lead the country and has suggested he preferred a military junta to take over in case he is removed from office. Top defense and military officials, however, have said they would follow the political succession specified by the constitution.