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Breaking News – Death of Kim Jong Il

LSE IDEAS

By the LSE East Asia Web Blog Editor.

North Korean state media has announced, to its own people and the world, the death of Kim Jong Il. Reports indicate that he died on a train in Pyongyang from a heart attack, which if true is the same illness that claimed his Father's life and propelled Kim Jong Il into power in 1994.



This is likely to dominate today's news cycle on East Asia today, and I hope to bring you more detailed analysis from our contributors as and when it is available.

In short term, the immediate issues that come to mind are the following:

In North Korea itself, firstly Pyongyang has been preparing for the death of Kim Jong Il for some time and when I visited the secretive state earlier in the year the official line was that Kim Jong Un was in place to take over when the time came. Unfortunately, the second thing we should keep in mind is that this is North Korea and things are often very unpredictable. Things could be very interesting over the next few days and weeks in Pyongyang and events could unfold in ways that have not been expected.

In Seoul, my contacts in the South Korean military are telling me that the armed forces have been put on high alert. The immediate period in this transition of power in North Korea from Father to Son is likely to be perceived by the South Korean national security council as the most difficult. However, it is important to keep in perspective that Seoul has no choice politically other than to put the military forces on high alert and this should not necessarily be seen as an indication that trouble is inevitable.

However, the real key player in all of this, remains the regional power and chief North Korean source of support, China. So it is perhaps towards Beijing we should be directing our attention over the next few days.

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