

Health of an Individual can affect the World

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With the death of Kim Jong-il, head of state of North Korea, the world is wondering what will happen in this isolated poor communist country. While many government organizations and international observers concentrate on political issues related to Kim's death we focus on the health issue.

As far as we know Kim Jong-il has died from a heart attack while he was travelling in his heavily protected train to some place outside Pyongyang. Kim Jong-il was known to fear flying or passing tunnels. He was supposed to be 69 years old, when he died (* 16. 2. 1942).

A heart attack is no surprise

From a medical point of view it is not a surprise that Kim Jong-il got an heart attack. Three years ago he already had a stroke and he also was told to be suffering from diabetes and probably other risk factors like hypertension and dyslipidemia. He also was told to smoke a lot and suffered from overweight. Every heart attack (if it really was his first) can lead to cardiac arrest.

There is a lot of speculation about the specific circumstances of his death. One can imagine that he had medical personnel travelling with him that tried to resuscitate him on the spot. Normally a medical team continues to resuscitate a person with cardiac arrest for about 50 minutes before giving up and declaring a person to be dead. Keeping in mind that Kim Jong-il was still ruling his state and felt to be enormously important to his people - and also keeping in mind that the medical personnel might have experienced fear of being punished by declaring him dead the medical personnel might have continued their resuscitation efforts even longer – even as it must have been clear that the chance to succeed – to get him back to breathe – was very low from the beginning.

It is astonishing that Kim's body was autopsied. Who ever followed an autopsy realizes that this postmortem examination somehow destroys a body – or at least the picture and remembrance of a personality. All the inner organs are taken out, cut in pieces, examined and put back in the body. From a medico-legal point of view it must have been clear that it was most probable that death occurred from a heart attack. One could have thought that no autopsy would have been allowed in order to prevent such a „treatment“ of the „Dear Leader“.

Or did he die even earlier?

Several sources reported that Kim collapsed in August 2008 due a stroke. But Waseda University professor Toshimitsu Shigemura had a different opinion. He claimed that Kim Jong-il died already in late 2003 due to complications to his diabetes mellitus. Sources close to Kim's family had explained that his health condition got worse and he even had to use a wheelchair for several years. According to Shigemura a stand-in had replaced the dead Kim in public appearance. A voice print seemed to support that version. There were also many reports about struggles within the political and military elite concerning ruling the country, about a pancreatic cancer and about suffering from epilepsy.

Now whether the real „Dear Leader“ died in 2003 or two days ago: Personal health of an individual like Kim can affect a country, its people and even the whole world. That is why key people health management has its importance especially with statesmen (in order to prevent a bad outcome or at least to foresee it).

Several sources have been used in order to write this report.