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Analysis of Characteristics of Kim Jong-un's First Public Activities Each Year During His 12-Year Rule

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1. Study Purpose and Background

From January 1, 2012, to February 29, 2024, Kim Jong-un's total number of public activities disclosed through North Korea's official media outlets, Rodong Sinmun and Korean Central News Agency, is 1,446. The highest number of public activities was in 2013, with 227 instances, while in 2024 (as of February 29), there have been 20 activities. From 2012 to 2023, Kim Jong-un conducted an average of 118 public activities annually. The public activities of North Korea's supreme leader can be used as important data to understand the governance style, strategies, and internal situation. In North Korea, the public activities of the supreme leader are interpreted as significant governing actions that provide insights into policy direction and state management, beyond mere inspections and visits.

This report aims to examine the characteristics of the first public activities of each new year during Kim Jong-un's 12-year rule, to identify patterns and meanings. The first visit location of the supreme leader each year holds significant meaning, as it plays a role in conveying important political messages for that year.

2. Overview of Kim Jong-un's First Public Activities of the New Year

First, Kim Jong-un's first public activities of the new year focused on the military and economic sectors. From 2012 to 2024, he visited facilities related to the military and economy five times each, the most frequent among his visits.

Second, a total of 48 people have accompanied Kim Jong-un on his first public activities of the new year.[1] Among them, Jo Yong-won (in 2017, 2018, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024) accompanied Kim Jong-un the most, a total of seven times.

Third, Kim Jong-un's first public activity of the new year, on average, took place eight days after January 1.[2] There have been three instances when he visited on New Year's Day itself: in 2012, 2015, and 2016. Except for 2021 and 2023, Kim Jong-un's first public activity of the new year has typically taken place before mid-January.

1) This is based on the names mentioned in North Korean media such as *Rodong Sinmun* and *Korean Central News Agency*.
2) Year 2021 was excluded as his first public activities were delayed to March due to various events such as the 8th Party Congress schedule, military parades, performances, and meetings.

<Table 1> Locations of Kim Jong-un's First Public Activities(2012-2024)

Year	Location	Date of Visit (date reported)	Field
2012	105th Guards Seoul Ryu Kyong-Su Armored Division	January 1, 2012	Military
2013	Daegongsan General Hospital	January 20, 2013 (reported)	Military (medicine)
2014	Seafood Refrigeration Facility Constructed by KPA Unit 534	January 7, 2014 (reported)	Military/ Economy (fisheries)
2015	Pyongyang Nursery and Orphanage	January 1, 2015	Society
2016	Completion Ceremony of Sci-Tech Complex	January 1, 2016	Science and Technology
2017	Pyongyang Bag Factory	January 5, 2017 (reported)	Economy (livelihood)
2018	State Academy of Sciences	January 12, 2018 (reported)	Science and Technology
2019	Dandong, Beijing	January 7-10, 2019	Diplomacy
2020	Sunchon Phosphatic Fertilizer Plant	January 7, 2020 (reported)	Economy (agriculture)
2021	Groundbreaking Ceremony for the Construction of 10,000 Households in Pyongyang	March 23, 2021	Economy (livelihood)
2022	Attendance at the Hypersonic Missile Test Launch by the Academy of National Defense Science	January 11, 2022	Military
2023	Congratulatory Visit and Commemorative Banquet at the People's Army General's Dormitory	February 7, 2023	Military
2024	Visit to the Agricultural Machinery Exhibition Hall ('Agricultural Machinery Industry Development-2023')	January 2, 2024	Economy (agriculture)

3. Analysis

Analyzing Kim Jong-un's first public activities of the new year reveals the following: First, during his 12 years in power, Kim Jong-un has most frequently made visits regarding military and economic purposes, each on five occasions for his first public activity of the year. This focus on military and economic purposes suggests an effort

to create a power base and promote regime stability through the military and the improvement of the residents' livelihoods.

Second, there is a distinct difference between the locations visited during the early years of his rule and those visited later. In the early years of his rule, from 2012 to 2014, Kim Jong-un concentrated on visiting the military and related facilities, which are the physical foundations of his regime, to strengthen regime solidarity. His focus on military facilities in the early years of his rule is analyzed as a means to establish a power base rooted in the military by forming a close relationship with the army, inheriting Kim Jong-il's "military-first" policy, and demonstrating his authority as the supreme military leader. After the early years of his rule, Kim Jong-un displayed a pattern of visiting a wider variety of facilities beyond those related to the military. This indicates his intention to assert his status as a national leader overseeing all areas of governance based on power stabilization. Additionally, it serves to encourage the responsible officials in these fields to achieve policy goals. In particular, following the announcement of the 'Five-Year Economic Development Strategy' at the 7th Party Congress in 2016, five of Kim Jong-un's first public visits of the year between 2016 and 2021 were regarding economic and scientific purposes. This highlights a concentrated focus on these sectors during that period.

Third, the individuals accompanying Kim Jong-un during his first public visits of the year have also differed between the early years of his rule and the subsequent period. In the early years, his main companions were elderly high-ranking party and military officials who were close associates of Kim Jong-il. In the mid-period of his rule and beyond, it has become more challenging to identify his primary companions, which can be attributed to the diversification of the types of institutions he visits. However, it is possible to discern his intentions for economic development and power consolidation by noting the presence of close aides such as Jo Yong-won and Kim Tok-hun, as well as family members like Ri Sol-ju, Kim Yo-jong, and Kim Ju-ae, during these visits.

4. Plans and Tasks for Research Utilization

In a monolithic political system like North Korea, the actions of the supreme leader, such as the first public activity of the year, carry both symbolic and policy significance. Over his 12 years in power, Kim Jong-un's first public activities of the year can be used to understand his efforts at power stabilization and consolidation, as well as the main policy directions of the North Korean regime. Kim Jong-un's pattern of first public activities suggests a combination of factors, including the degree of power stabilization, enhancement of nuclear capabilities, and external political dynamics. Specifically, there appears to be a correlation between Kim Jong-un's stabilization of power, the expansion of his policy interests, and changes in his first public activities of the year.

The significance of this study lies in its analysis of Kim Jong-un's first public activities of the year, examining his activity patterns and their implications for the first time. Going forward, there is a need for more in-depth research to further discuss Kim Jong-un's annual first public activities. This will help to anticipate the continuity and changes within the North Korean regime and its supreme leader.

The content of this article is the author's personal view, and it is not the official view of the Korea Institute for National Unification.