

# ONE YEAR LATER: NO MORE TRAINS BETWEEN KOREAS



The history is repeating. North Korea is shutting down the train transport between the North and the South Korea. The trains that went from South to the North Korean city of Kaesong had a symbolical value to both nations.

The renewed train transport started only a year ago and was meant to improve the relations between the two countries. The trains were used by tourists from South, who were allowed to go to the North. The initial idea was that the railway would be used to transport needed materials to the Kaesong industrial region where South Korean companies, with the DPRK's permission, employ approximately 33,000 low-wage North Koreans. The companies, nevertheless, prefer to use cars and so the trains were nearly empty most of the time. The region is the only major economic connection between the two countries and it represents an important income for the DPRK's economy.

The relations between the two countries have, however, worsened recently. New South Korean president, Lee Myung-bak, practices a stricter policy toward the DPRK than his predecessor Kim Dae-jung did. The new policy has angered North Koreans and they have reacted by suspending the train and a popular tour program to historic city of Kaesong which was once the capital of Korea. Kim Dae-jung criticizes the new president for moves that have damaged the South-North relations.

Today South Koreans are leaving Kaesong. There were 4,000 of them living in the region but North Korean officials have decided that only some 1,500 will be allowed to stay starting on December 1. There are also other aspects except the new South Korean policy that might have caused the closedown of the train project. North Koreans might have seen this year-long project as destabilizing. After all it gave the South and North Koreans possibility to learn at least little bit about each others' standards of living, which is definitely not favorable for the North.

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