# North Korean Trash Balloons Raise Tensions in Korean Peninsula



### North Korean Trash Balloons Escalate Tensions on the Korean Peninsula

Cheorwon, South Korea, May 29, 2024 — South Korean officials reported the sighting of a North Korean balloon carrying various objects, including trash and excrement, over a rice field in Cheorwon. This event has reignited the ongoing tensions between the two Koreas.

South Korea’s Joint Chiefs of Staff confirmed spotting the balloon in northern Gyeonggi Province around 9 p.m. local time. Subsequently, Seoul’s Metropolitan government issued a push notification advising citizens to avoid contact with downed balloons and report any sightings to authorities.

Since May, North Korea has sent over 1,000 balloons towards the South as a reprisal for South Korean activists’ leafleting campaigns critical of Kim Jong Un's regime. In response, South Korean advocacy groups have launched their own balloons carrying anti-North Korean propaganda and USB sticks with South Korean entertainment.

The South Korean Ministry of Defense’s analysis of the balloons revealed soil containing human genes and parasites, presumably originating from human feces, but determined no risk of infectious disease. The balloons also carried objects indicating hostility towards South Korean goods, such as damaged clothing and imitations of Disney characters.

South Korea’s military identified about 350 balloons in the latest campaign, with roughly 100 landing in Seoul and nearby areas. President Yoon Suk Yeol labeled the activity as "despicable and irrational" and emphasized South Korea’s readiness to respond to any provocations.

In response to the balloon launches, South Korea has considered resuming anti-North Korean loudspeaker broadcasts along the border, a tactic halted in recent years but used during the Cold War. These broadcasts often included K-pop songs, weather forecasts, and news, which North Korea heavily censors for its population.

Heightening the tensions, Russian President Vladimir Putin recently signed a defense agreement with North Korea, pledging mutual aid if either country is attacked. This move has drawn condemnation from South Korea, the U.S., and Japan, who cited concerns over deepening military cooperation between Russia and North Korea.

As part of its military strategy, a U.S. Navy aircraft carrier arrived in South Korea to conduct trilateral exercises with South Korea and Japan, reinforcing Washington’s security commitments. The situation remains volatile as diplomatic efforts remain at an impasse on the Korean Peninsula.