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Grisly tapes reveal hasty trials, public executions

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SEOUL -- Two gruesome videos showing cursory trials and public executions in North Korea are sparking calls among opposition South Korean lawmakers and activists for Seoul to take a stronger stand on human rights violations.

The chilling footage lends credence to sometimes dubious accounts by defectors who say trials in the communist country are arbitrary and punishment is conducted without a second thought.

"Having seen this video, what I can clearly say is that this is not a false image or concocted footage," said Park Kwang-il, who defected to the South in March 2001. "It is true."

Mr. Park spoke Friday during a screening of the videos by Grand National Party lawmakers and North Korean human rights activists at the national assembly. The footage, bought by Japan's NTV television station, aired last week in Japan.

It has not been disclosed how the Japanese station obtained the two gritty recordings, comprising a total of 105 minutes. The first video was made on March 1 in Hoeryong, a North Korean city on the border with China.

The city is known as the hometown of the mother of North Korean leader Kim Jong-il and is a brisk hub for trade with China.

The opening scenes show a van passing through a market area with large speakers encouraging people to "keep the order" and come to the trial site.

Near a milling crowd in a field, 11 defendants stand loosely grouped in front of authorities. Three of them are sentenced to death on charges of human trafficking.

After they are found guilty, a voice on the recording is heard in Korean saying, "Carry out the execution immediately." The three men are tied to poles, and three sets of three shots are heard.

"It took less than 20 minutes," said Kwak Dae-jung, editor of the Daily NK, a Web site focusing on North Korean issues. "There was no opportunity to appeal or speak."

To confirm elements of the video, the Japanese television station used satellite photos of the city, footage taken from across the city's river border with China and several accounts from defectors who watched the video and said they had witnessed similar scenes.

A second video from March 2 shows the execution of a single person in the city of Yusundong, about seven miles from Hoeryong. Officials are seen setting up a pole even before the death sentence is announced.

When the video is magnified, three uniformed shooters are seen lining up before the accused is tied to

the pole. Upon commands in Korean, they raise their weapons and shoot the defendant, who is seen doubling over and falling to the ground.

The body then appears to be stuffed into a sack before being driven away in a truck.

Grand National Party members have been scathing over the South Korean government's reluctance to criticize the North's treatment of its people. But President Roh Moo-hyun's government says improvements in human rights will follow after successful economic cooperation.

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