North Korea is north of the demarcation line set by the Korean Armistice Agreement in July 1953. Its total area is 123,458 km², accounting for approximately 55.4% of the entire Korean Peninsula which is 225,660 km². The population of North Korea is about 26,243,000, and its population density is 193 persons per km². This is close to 83% of that of South Korea whose population density is 499.1 persons per km².

North Korea faces the East Sea on the east coast of Korea Peninsula and which runs from north to south. The following ranges are also part of North Korea: 1. Jachigu (Baekdudaegan), 2. Guemgang (Kumgang), and 3. Taedong. This is close to 40% of that of South Korea, accounting for approximately 145.1 km².

The Korean Peninsula is one of the top six countries in the world with the largest reserves of non-ferrous metal resources, such as lead, silver, copper, zinc, tin, and gold. There are over 40 kinds of natural mineral resources, which are economically valuable.

North Korea is in a temperate climate region and has a continental climate. Its winters are very cold and its summers are hot and humid, due to the northeastern monsoons which bring moist air from the Pacific Ocean. The average annual rainfall is between 600-1,200mm, and 50-60% of all precipitation occurs from June to September. The overall rainfall is less than that of South Korea and varies widely depending on the region.

In the past, North Korea had an abundance of natural resources that had geological value. However, its forests have been consistently damaged due to the forces of nature and human activities. The reforestation campaigns that began in the 1970s; and the project of “New Field Finding,” which began in the 1980s; particularly in the 1990s, favored the forestation of natural forests, as people find food and fuel in the mountains.

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Population and Cities of North Korea

In 1949, a year after Korea’s liberation from Japan, the total population of North Korea reached 9.24 million. However, when North Korea and North Korea fought the Korean War in the 1950s, the population declined to its lowest level at 6.4 million. By 1960, the population had regained its 1950s level. The country’s population recorded a net loss in 1992 and reached 20 million by the late 1980s. According to the population had grown continuously to surpass the total population of North Korea reached 9.26 million.

Pyeongyang live in the southern and western parts of country where the population finally exceeded 24 million in 2004. The largest city in the North, stands at 3,255,000, followed by Pyeonganbuk-do (64.9%) where the special city of Nampo is located. Hamheung, Cheongjin, is the second most urbanized area with an urbanization rate of 70.7%, followed by Pyeongannam-do (60.4%) when the capital city of Pyongyang is located. As of 2008, the population of Pyeongyang, the country’s capital, and its neighboring Pyongsan-am-do show the highest population density. The population density is generally low in the mountainous northern and eastern parts (Hamgyeongnam-do, Hamgyeongbuk-do, Hwanghaebuk-do, Hwanghaenam-do, and Gangwon-do), with the exception of scattered cities, such as Hyesan, Chongjin (Cheongjin-si), Hamhung (Hamheung-si), and Gangneung and the southeastern coastal area.

According to UN population census statistics, the migrant population above the age of five in 2008 showed less than 1% of the total population, which demonstrates that international migration is not extensive. Exceptions are Pyeongyang and Pyongsan-am-do where the largest volume of migrant population is generally evenly distributed. One of the interesting features of Pyeongyang’s population movement is that a significant number of people move to Yanggang-do (9.0%) and Hwanghaebuk-do (9.0%) compared to all other provinces. Similarly, most people moving from Yanggang-do and Hwanghaebuk-do to Pyeongyang stand only at 0.5% and 0.9%. This trend may be due to the fact that the two provinces have smaller populations. However, given that the undiversified Peninsula of Gangwon-do that accounts for as much as 6.5% of Pyeongyang’s incoming population and 13.0% of its outgoing population, the net migration trend for Yanggang-do and Hwanghaebuk-do appears to be ruled by socioeconomic conditions, two of the most industrial provinces in the country.

As of 2008, 46.4% of North Korea’s total population lives in urban regions. Pyeongyang is the most urbanized area with 50-60% of its population residing in its urbanized area. Hamheung-si, which has major cities such as the Jang-Namdo Special Economic Zone and the city of Cheongjin, is the second most urbanized area with an urbanization rate of 78.7%, followed by Pyeongnam-do (64.0%) when the capital city of Pyongyang is located. All of the other provinces, however, have a net average urbanization rate. Regional inequality in terms of urbanization is a serious problem.

Historically, North Korea once experienced rapid urbanization as it actively pursued industrialization right after Korea’s liberation from Japanese colonial rule in 1945. As a result, their urbanization rate jumped from 31% in 1953 to 56.7% in 1976; the pace has significantly slowed down since. As of 2008, the population of Pyeongyang, the largest city in the North, stands at 3,255,000. However, as Hamheung increased in size, the trend changed in 1967 to; Pyeongyang, Hamhung, Cheongjin, and Wonsan. Then in 1982 Cheongjin became North Korea’s second largest city, and the trend changed once again to the following: Pyeongyang, Cheongjin, Hamhung, and Wonsan.

During the 1990s, Hamhung regained its 2nd place spot and Nampo showed rapid growth. As of 2008, the largest cities rank as follows: Pyeongyang, Hamhung, Cheongjin, and Nampo. The map shows that the two pillars of North Korea’s urban development are Pyeongyang and the Hamheung-Nampo region. As Hamhung, Cheongjin and Nampo in the northern eastern area and Pyeongyang, Gangwon, and Pohang in the central area have a high urbanization rate, over 50% of the population is concentrated in these areas.
North Korea’s economy is a centrally planned and unified system in which the State Planning Commission of the central government determines economic development plans and strictly controls overall economic units, such as regional governments, factories, and companies. Along with a centrally planned system, another important feature of North Korea’s economy is that the country has isolated plans to assign top priority to developing heavy industry with parallel developments in agriculture and light industry. Due to the lack of capital and resources, however, heavy industry was expanded at the expense of light industry and agriculture. With the collapse of the Soviet economic models around the world during the 1990s, the plights of expanding heavy industry and ignoring agriculture and light industry became serious, and it led to financial difficulties and food shortages in the mid-1990s. The North’s economy began to recover after 1999 but it has experienced an average annual negative growth rate since 2010.

As of 2009, 36% of North Korea’s population has been working in its primary industries, 34.9% in secondary industries, and 29.6% in tertiary industries. As for Mongolia, the proportion of the population working in secondary industries is the highest in Mongolia, and the second highest is in the economy of North Korea, while in the output of its tertiary industry, the proportion of the population working in the tertiary industry is the highest in Mongolia, and the second highest is in the economy of North Korea. As a result, North Korea has imported a significant amount of raw materials and industrial goods from China and other countries. Ministry of Unification (2014) - The Appendix Agreement for the Implementation of Act on the Prevention of Flooding in Light Industries and Underground Resource Development is adopted.

On the other hand, Food shortages in the mid-1990s. The North’s economy during the 1990s, the problem of favoring heavy industry and light industry. Due to the lack of 93% of high-quality agricultural land, and the emphasis on heavy industry, there was a shortage of agricultural labor. The North Korean government attempted to address this issue by importing labor from China and other countries.

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