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World must unite before a major bombshell is dropped

TOKYO: North Korea's nuclear weapons development has entered a more dangerous stage. In light of the deteriorating security environment, Japan should strengthen its deterrence against Pyongyang in cooperation with the United States and other countries.

On Tuesday, North Korea went ahead with its third underground nuclear test. It was the first nuclear test under the regime of Kim Jong-un.

Pyongyang boasted that it successfully conducted a "high-level" nuclear test using "a miniaturised and lighter" nuclear device with greater explosive force than those used in the previous tests in 2006 and 2009. North Korea apparently aims to develop a nuclear warhead.

Given that North Korea also tested a long-range ballistic missile in the guise of a satellite launch in December, marking a dramatic extension of its missile range, there is no doubt that the country has moved a step closer to bringing nuclear missiles to the stage of practical use.

It was only natural for Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to make a statement strongly condemning North Korea's nuclear test, saying it is "totally unacceptable" as it "constitutes a grave threat to Japan's security".

Japan will come under the most serious threat due to deployment of nuclear missiles by North Korea. This is because Japan is within striking distance of North Korea's medium-range Rodong missiles, about 200 of which are believed to have already been deployed.

It is essential to improve Japan's missile defence capability based on cooperation between the Self-Defence Forces and the US military as well as to guarantee the reliability of the US "nuclear umbrella", which Japan, a nonnuclear nation, relies on as a deterrent.

We commend Abe for immediately tightening Japan's unilateral sanctions against North Korea by banning the re-entry of vice-chairmen and other senior officials of the pro-Pyongyang General Association of Korean Residents in Japan (Chongryon) if they leave for North Korea. Although it suspended production of plutonium for nuclear weapons, North Korea has resumed its enrichment of uranium. Therefore, it could begin mass production of nuclear weapons using enriched uranium.

The latest nuclear test by North Korea is a major test also for South Korean President-elect Park Geun-hye, who will officially take office on Feb 25. The Japan-US alliance must be strengthened as a matter of course and it is also crucial to establish a crisis management system between Japan, the United States and South Korea.

The UN Security Council must adopt a new resolution calling for stronger sanctions against North Korea.

On Jan 22, the Security Council adopted a resolution to expand sanctions against North Korea after it fired a missile in December and warned of "significant action" if North Korea went ahead with a nuclear test.

But North Korea has conducted missile and nuclear tests repeatedly in defiance of Security Council

resolutions because the adopted sanctions lacked practical effect.

To break this vicious circle, the Security Council should adopt comprehensive and practical sanctions and implement them thoroughly.

In connection with nuclear and missile development, North Korea has deep relations with Iran and Pakistan. With Iran, North Korea concluded an agreement on science and technology cooperation last autumn. The international community must strictly restrict and monitor the movement of goods, money and personnel to prevent North Korea promoting nuclear and missile development.

It is necessary to study comprehensive financial sanctions while bringing into perspective a plan to include financial institutions that do business with North Korea on the sanctions list. It is also important to impose mandatory inspections of cargoes suspected to be banned trade items such as weapons of mass destruction and related materials.

North Korea said it will regard ship inspections as a blockade at sea and retaliate with a “military strike”. Its moves must be constantly watched.

The role of China, a permanent Security Council member, is crucial.

China accounts for 70% of North Korea’s trade. The country has transshipment ports for many vessels from North Korea. It holds the power of life or death over North Korea as the biggest supplier of energy and food aid.

Ostensibly, Beijing expressed its “absolute objection” to North Korea’s nuclear test. But it hesitated to impose sanctions for fear of the Korean Peninsula being destabilised, thereby tacitly encouraging North Korea’s nuclear development.

The *Global News*, a Chinese newspaper affiliated with the *People’s Daily*, the organ of the Chinese Communist Party, has insisted on not hesitating to cut assistance if North Korea conducted a nuclear test. The Chinese government led by Xi Jinping must deal with North Korea sternly and put strong pressure on it to give up its nuclear ambitions.

Fear of being targeted by a North Korean missile attack is growing even in the United States. With this as leverage, the Kim regime intends to open the possibility of dialogue with Washington. It probably aims to have economic sanctions lifted and to gain US assurances of the safety of the current regime, all while keeping its nuclear arms.

But negotiations with Pyongyang should not be conducted easily. The international community should not lift sanctions on North Korea as long as it does not take concrete action to relinquish its nuclear ambitions.

Pyongyang must be aware that its own behaviour will ultimately undermine its regime.