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ASIA NEWS | OCTOBER 29, 2010, 7:45 A.M. ET

North Korea Fires Shots Across Border

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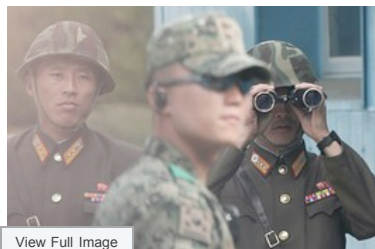
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By **EVAN RAMSTAD** and **JAEEYON WOO**

SEOUL—North Korean soldiers fired gunshots at South Korean soldiers in a guardpost along the inter-Korean border and the South Koreans fired three shots in return, the South's military said, in a new flare-up of hostility between the two countries.

No injuries were reported from the incident, which happened in a remote area northeast of Seoul in mountainous Gangwon province.



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European Pressphoto Agency

A North Korean soldier looks through binoculars at the Military Demarcation Line in the Demilitarized Zone in the border village of Panmunjom, South Korea, on Oct. 20.

The shooting happened at 5:26 p.m., a spokesman for the Joint Chiefs of Staff said. South Korean government officials gave no immediate reaction.

The incident is certain raise concern in South Korea because it happened just two weeks before the country hosts a summit of leaders of the Group of 20 wealthiest nations.

In the run-up to the summit, South Korean police and military officials have discussed their readiness to prevent an attempt by North Korea to disrupt the event. Police tactical teams are already deployed in the

Seoul neighborhood where the summit will be held.

South Korea's wariness of North Korea grew after the sinking of a South Korean naval ship in March killed 46 South Korean sailors. South Korea blamed the North for the sinking after finding remnants of a North Korean torpedo and other evidence. Pyongyang denies it sank the ship.

In the past two months, the two Koreas have taken small steps to move beyond the dispute over the ship sinking. Earlier this week, South Korea provided food aid to help the North cope with the aftermath of flooding in August and September. And this weekend, the two Koreas planned a reunion in the North for about 100 families separated since the Korean War of the 1950s.

In a reflection of the strained state of inter-Korean relations, the reunion event is smaller than last year, when two three-day reunions were held involving more than 1,000 people from the two countries.

The two Koreas started the reunions in 2000 hoping to foster a humanitarian program separate from inter-Korean politics. But they've instead become an annual tussle over whether the reunion will occur and, once that's settled, under what conditions.

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With a registry of more than 90,000 people who would like to see relatives in the North, South Korea has pushed for years to make the reunions a regular occurrence—and did so again this week.

In meetings facilitated by the International Red Cross earlier this week, South Korea proposed staging reunions once a month. North Korea said it only wanted three or four a year and, before allowing them, wanted South Korea to provide 500,000 tons of rice, 300,000 tons of fertilizer and resume tourist activities for South Koreans in the North.

Seoul halted most tourist projects after a North Korean soldier in July 2008 shot and killed a South Korean woman at the same mountain resort where this weekend's reunions will be held. Earlier this year, North Korea took over the resort, which was built and run by a South Korean company, and forced the South Korean workers to go home.

The status of the resort after this weekend's reunion events is unclear, South Korean officials say.

Write to Evan Ramstad at evan.ramstad@wsj.com

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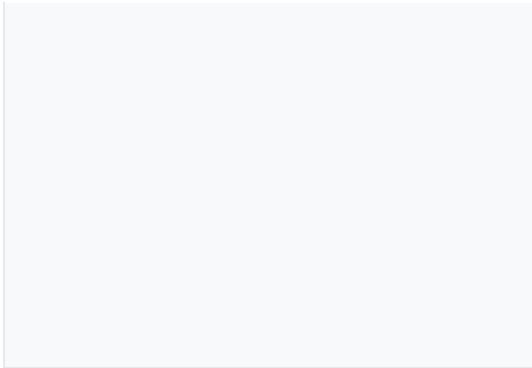
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