



FILE – Flags of China and North Korea hang outside the closed Ryugyong Korean Restaurant in Ningbo, Zhejiang province, China, April 12, 2016.

www.voanews.com/content/most-north-korean-defectors-avoid-asylum-seeking-in-china/3445300.html
by Brian Padden August 02, 2016 7:06 AM

SEOUL—The South Korean Foreign Ministry, during its weekly press briefing on Tuesday, did not address the reported defection of a North Korean national allegedly seeking asylum in Seoul’s diplomatic mission in Hong Kong. Beijing also has refrained from comment on reports that Jong Yol Ri, an 18-year-old North Korean student who was attending an international mathematics competition in Hong Kong, last week sought refuge in the South Korean consulate, according to the *South China Morning Post* newspaper.

Hong Kong police have since increased their presence around the Far East Finance Center where the consulate is located.

China’s hard line

South Korea is not expected to make a public plea to China to allow the North Korean student to leave for Seoul or a third country on humanitarian grounds.

“If you pressure Beijing too much they could do it just for the sake of really going the other way, instead of responding to public pressure,” said Arnold Fang, East Asia researcher for the human rights organization Amnesty International in Hong Kong.

Instead, the two sides will likely engage in quiet negotiations.

To discourage asylum seekers, Beijing is known to wait months and even years before expelling defectors to a third country.

“During a period of one to two years, which is not short, [the South Korean government] negotiates with the Chinese government and the defectors are expelled, by about that time people tend to forget,” said Kim Yong-hwa of the North Korean Refugees’ Human Rights Association in Korea.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, an almost constant influx of North Korean asylum seekers climbed the walls of foreign diplomatic missions in China.

On one day alone in 2004, 44 North Korean men, women and children entered the Canadian Embassy in Beijing seeking asylum.

Forcing asylum seekers to remain basically as captives inside foreign diplomatic missions in China, and increasing security on both sides of the Sino-North Korean border, has greatly reduced the number of North Korean asylum seekers in China in recent years.