



**NORTH KOREA
TODAY**



GOODFRIENDS



Weekly Newsletter

No.461

(Released in Korean on June 27, 2012)

["Good Friends" aims to help the North Korean people from a humanistic point of view and publishes "North Korea Today" describing the way the North Korean people live as accurately as possible. We at Good Friends also hope to be a bridge between the North Korean people and the world.]

Drought and Lack of Fertilizer Result in Worst Crops This Year

Each Cabinet Office Struggles to Meet Its Target for Fertilizer Purchase

NK Officials Based in China Avoid Visiting Officials from NK

The Path of Independent National Economy, a Shame for the Word Independent

"Juche-steel Has Virtually Failed"

Textile Production Is Not Going Well

Drought and Lack of Fertilizer Result in Worst Crops This Year

Many farmers are becoming increasingly distressed as they are unable to water their fields. Moreover, because of the scorching mid-June heat, many farmers have become weak or have fainted while working. To make matters worse, the authorities do not have a set plan to prevent farmers from severe malnutrition or heatstroke and they certainly do not have an extra supply of water for these distressed farmers. Conditions in North Korea have become so difficult that even government officials say among themselves, "These conditions may equate to those of national disasters." One official from Haeju City, South Hwanghae Province, said shaking his head, "Every year we say this is the worst year, but this year is the absolute worst in our history." He further explained in despair, "Because the three main components of good agriculture - fertilizer, water, and labor - are severely lacking, we have to sustain ourselves on grass porridge, and even that now seems difficult. The aridity of the ground hinders grass growth, and the increased periods of drought have resulted in contaminated water, propelling the spread of diseases. Patients are crowding the hospitals and demanding medicine, but there is none. There is no hope right now."

An officer at a collective farm in Sahriwon, North Hwanhae Province, declared that he did not expect any crops because of a lack of fertilizer. "It's not a matter of fertilizer shortages for the farming season. There just isn't any to begin with. I thought the Heungnam fertilizer factory would produce some but I haven't heard anything from them. The little fertilizer we get from now and then all come from China. Because we are designated for providing army provisions, the Defense Ministry officials told the trade officers abroad to get fertilizer from Chinese traders for a higher price, promising to pay back in the fall. At first, the suppliers refused the deal, saying payment needs to be made first. However, after realizing the harsh situation we were in, they agreed to provide fertilizers on credit. And yet, the amount is still very far from being enough." North Korea needs to import 500,000 tons of fertilizer, but the government decided to purchase only 200,000 tons because it lacks funds. Even that amount is difficult to secure because of the Chinese government's control over its fertilizer export.

Each Cabinet Office Struggles to Meet Its Target for Fertilizer Purchase

North Korean farms are experiencing severe shortages of fertilizer this year. It is almost impossible to find domestic fertilizers. Each sub-cabinet office had been tasked to secure fertilizers, and some low-quality fertilizers were imported from China through March and April. "In the beginning, the fertilizer purchase assignment was given to the Ministry of Foreign Trade, but it was later reassigned to the Internal Cabinet with a target of securing 200,000 tons of nitrogen and urea fertilizers. The Trade Department was reassigned with food purchase.

The government suggested that each trade officer contribute as much as they could according to their conscience, and everyone was trying to figure out how much food would be the proper amount to submit. In the cabinet, if the officers submit money or fertilizer to fulfill their fertilizer assignment, they will get a waiver of their personal contribution to the country at the end of the year commensurate to the amount they submit now. Half of the fertilizer assignment target is taken care of by the cabinet officials within the country while the other half is given to the officials who are sent overseas by the cabinet unit. For instance, the Ministry of Physical Culture and Sports will collect a ton of fertilizer, or its equivalent in funds, inside the country while the other half will be provided by its staff overseas. "We try to manage the shortage by importing Chinese fertilizer but the amount is not sufficient," a cabinet official admitted.

NK Officials Based in China Avoid Visiting Officials from NK

North Korean officials who are stationed in China are increasingly trying to avoid meeting any newly-appointed NK officials visiting China. Taking care of these visitors seems to be a more difficult task than their official assignments.

Upon their arrival, overseas officials are expected to take care of the visitors completely by providing meals and accommodation, and even sending them off with gifts when they return to North Korea. An official at the Central Party explained, "In the old days, the authorities encouraged the overseas officials to be patriotic when performing their tasks but now they simply impose heavier workloads and threaten them to complete them. No way that the overseas officials would welcome this practice. There was a major turnover in staff at the overseas offices last September. Since last October, with the exception of a few top officials, most of officials have been replaced in the trade offices inside North Korea as well. Most of those fired were sent to prisons or to revolution education. In general, their positions were filled by new faces. Now the newly-appointed officials are coming to visit China for the first time with their official titles, the officials in overseas representative offices have more things to take care of. They have to introduce the new officials to Chinese traders and train them on diplomatic procedures as well as everyday conduct. Moreover, they need to take care of the visitors' meals and accommodation as well. For all these reasons, the overseas officials are reluctant to meet the new officials at all."

The Path of Independent National Economy, a Shame for the Word Independent

The three main nationalistic pillars of economic independence, *Juche*-steel, *Juche*-fertilizer, and *Juche*-fiber, are not likely to be revived. These concepts are now often uttered in a self-deprecating tone as being independent is no longer believed possible. Earlier this year, before the announcement of the first year of the "Strong and Prosperous Nation 2012," the national propaganda had been declaring that "A solid foundation is created by aggressively pursuing *Juche*-steel, *Juche*-fertilizer, and *Juche*-fiber," but production is much lower than demand.

Chairman Kim Jung-il once declared that, "Building an independent national economy means a country developing its economy by using its own people's power and natural resources. It is an economy that is walking on its own feet, serving its own people and not subordinate to anyone else."

"Juche-steel Has Virtually Failed"

The steel material required for the construction of the 100,000 houses in Pyongyang has been imported from China. It was originally planned to be procured from Kimchaek Steel Mill in Chongjin, North Hamgyong Province. One official of the Central Party reported that they were initially pleased about the prospect thanks to the success of the method for producing *Juche*-steel, but ultimately the result was a failure. "In January last year, the propaganda was exceedingly fierce due to the attainment of the knowledge on the process of producing steel by the oxygen thermodynamics which is one of the most cutting-edge scientific technologies in the world. We thought all the houses and common service facilities would be completed by April 15th at the latest. However, we soon realized that we shouldn't rely on the *Juche*-steel production. Kimchaek Steel Mill was a little bit better than

other steel mills due to the national attention and support, but it definitely didn't meet our level of expectation. Producing less than half of what is expected, people at the mill are now speechless. It still is not producing well this year. The Central Party cannot just overlook this and arrested many technicians responsible for the failure."

One official in Chongjin confided, "It is true that our new experiment succeeded last year. We have four bigger size furnaces and four smaller ones in Kimchaek steel mill, and we made a separate small furnace for an experiment. Even though the experiment was successful in the small one, errors always occur while using actual size furnaces. That's why the experiment should be started with a big size furnace, but to do so requires huge amount of money, material and labor as failures tend to happen many times. We didn't have the money, time, and know-how for that. It was too much for us in the first place."


As they are currently relying on imports due to the low level of Juche-steel production, the completion of housing construction is delayed indefinitely. A short while ago North Korea reported, "The skeleton assembly of tens of high-rise apartment buildings at the Pyongyang housing construction site has been completed successfully". However, there still remain places without the framework completed, let alone the interior work. The end of this year is the new goal for completion, but people wonder what percentage can be done with the shortage of both material and funds.

Textile Production Is Not Going Well

Last May, a large volume of cotton and fabric goods were imported from China to North Korea. One official in Sinuiju, North Pyongan province said, "The people who are buying new clothes belong to the rich class. Most people barely can cover themselves well. People cannot afford to think about their clothing because their concern for food is so pressing. But the clothing issue is also serious. Our country's textile production is so bad, and our only choice is to import from China. However, how many people do you think are really concerned about their clothes when they have no food to eat? I tend to remain silent because it is too shameful to talk about, and I just sigh when I see people wearing shabby clothes. This indicates that the production of Juche-fiber is not going well contrary to the predictions." This means that the 2.8 Vinalon* Factory is not meeting the expectations for production.

One official of the Central Party said, "At first the 2.8 Vinalon Factory was going to be shut down during the period of the third 7 year plan. Instead, they planned to develop the Sooncheon Chemical Cooperative Enterprise into a huge Vinalon factory, but as every one already expected, the plan failed. 16 years after that, Comrade Kim Jong-il expressed his strong will for the factory's reconstruction. The outcome was not good. Shouldn't we have by now Vinalon fabric and blankets on the shelves in state-operated markets and regular markets? It is difficult to find even one meter of ordinary cloth, not to mention any Vinalon and blankets. Recently, even the army uniforms have been imported from China. If you go to the border area, our soldiers are not distinguishable from Chinese soldiers from a

distance. Despite its poor production, we thought the 2.8 Vinalon Factory would be able to supply army uniforms at the very least, but even that is not possible.” Although 2.8 Vinalon Factory has been reconstructed after 16 years, it faces the same difficulties of a shortage of raw materials, shortage of electricity, and out-dated technology.

* Vinalon: A synthetic fiber invented by North Korean scientist called Lee Seung-ki, two years after the invention of nylon. This fiber is close to cotton that Kim Il-sung awarded Vinalon as the Juche Fiber. 



Good Friends: Center for Peace, Human Rights, and Refugees



Please become a good friend of the Good Friends

Good Friends– An International NGO for Peace, Human Rights and Refugees

Good Friends provides relief works for international refugees to become all lives' friends, peace movement to fundamentally resolve disputes and conflicts that human beings face, and human rights movement to protect human rights.

Good Friends has been providing information on food shortages in North Korea, raising funds for humanitarian assistance, dispatching activists to national border areas between China and DPRK and having them investigate local situations, and publishing reports on food shortages in North Korea.

Currently, Good Friends is making efforts to improve humanitarian and human rights situation of North Korean people and to inform this situation to the international community by:

- 1) Collecting information on food shortages, public health conditions, education, the basic necessities situations and inform humanitarian organizations so that they can support North Korean people effectively.
- 2) Reporting the current human rights situation in North Korea where rights duly protected by law are being violated; assessing incidents of human rights violations in the process of arrest, punishment, and imprisonment and informing international communities; and requesting that the North Korean Government act to improve human rights.
- 3) Investigating the current situations of North Korean refugees in China, and providing protections and aid for them and their children in particular.

For these purposes, Good Friends USA publishes the weekly newsletter North Korea Today (English edition) to inform the international public.

You can make a difference by donating to **Good Friends USA, Inc.** Contributions to the Good Friends USA, Inc. (a tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code) are tax deductible.

Individuals wishing to make a financial donation to **Good Friends USA** may send a check to the following address. For more information, please contact us.

Good Friends USA

4361 Aitcheson Rd., Beltsville, MD 20705

Phone: 240-786-7528

E-mail: goodfriends.usa@gmail.com

<http://www.goodfriendsusa.blogspot.com>

Good Friends Korea Headquarters

E-mail: goodfriends@jungto.org

Tel: 82-2-587-8992; Fax: 82-2-587-8998

<http://www.goodfriends.or.kr>

