



GOODFRIENDS



Weekly Newsletter

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["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.]

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[In Ryanggang Province, Farmers Live off Frozen Potatoes](#)

Farmers in Ryanggang Province are living off frozen potatoes as their daily sustenance. The potatoes could not be harvested on time due to last year's floods, and this resulted in the potatoes freezing up in the fields. Provincial research shows that many households have barely had even corn since February, implying that the food shortage this year is much more severe than in previous years. Ryanggang Province was even excluded from the nationwide military provisions remittance obligation, which was resumed in January, indicating the severity of the food crisis is. Affluent groups like government officials and farm managers are slightly better off, for they at least eat rice mixed with corn. However, the difficulty of the situation in Ryanggang Province is still evident when compared to other provinces, where the government officers are able to eat white rice.

Freezing is one way to preserve potatoes to be eaten as a staple food, besides steaming and converting to potato starch. The outer skin turns black, but it is not bad to eat once it is

steamed. Even rotten potatoes are not thrown away because they can be made into potato starch. Residents of Ryanggang Province often say, "Frozen or rotten, we eat it all... Never do we throw away a potato." Making starch from rotten potatoes, however, cannot be done even in large cities like Pyongyang and Pyongsung, for it is a complicated process, requiring large quantities of water.

In Gapsan County, People Look Toward Grass Roots after Running Out of Frozen Potatoes

Residents of Gapsan-eup, Gapsan County in Ryanggang Province are searching for grass roots, given the looming shortage of frozen potatoes, especially come March, when the ground is smoothened out. The people do not own enough money to buy rice and corn at the market. Those who cannot afford to be engaged in business are digging out grass roots, with small children, in the mountains and on the field. With the will to keep on living, they travel up to several miles through mountains and field. If they happen to pick up some frozen potatoes while roaming the field, half turn out to be rotten and inedible. Unfortunately, many potatoes go bad even before they freeze.

Kim Il-soon, a potato broker, took her meal out to eat when on her way back home. She had started the day early without any breakfast, so she was about to eat the potatoes she had bought that day, when she suddenly found someone forcefully digging into the ground. Knowing that the potato harvest was over, she assumed the man was gleaning grains. He was accompanied by his young daughter, beside him looking for grain. Kim tried to ignore them, thinking that they were just another Kkotjebi(homeless) family, but the little girl in shabby clothes was staring at the potato in her hand. She could not ignore it, despite her own hunger. Kim called out to the man to take a rest, handing him a cigarette, and gave three potatoes to him and his child. The little girl gulped the potatoes after a moment of hesitation. Looking at his daughter with deep sympathy, the man said, "I am a laborer at a factory producing daily necessities, and we have been eating frozen potatoes with grassroots since February. We have gone through the potato fields several times and know there is not much potato left, but we have no other choice but to look again." He said he had already lost two children, and had only one daughter left. "My oldest son died of dysentery, suffering for three days with bloody stool running like urine. It was the year 2008, when he was eleven years old. The second one died in poor health. I have my wife and this child and I am not sure if I can feed them." He burst into tears in deep sorrow, from telling the story. The little girl, looking to be about three or four years old, also cried after him without knowing why. Kim was taken aback by the family crying, but left with words of encouragement.

Effects of Famine Brought Home to Hamheung City Security Department Officers

Sources report that the quality of life once enjoyed by law enforcement officers in Hamheung City, South Hamgyeong province, is deteriorating. One officer in Hamheung said that while up until last year he was able to eat meat and rice and even provide candy and cookies to his children, his ability to obtain rice has gradually become more and more

difficult this year. The situation is the same for security officers. One security officer said, "The number of families I know in the Legal Affairs Department who are able to eat white rice is enough to count on one hand. I saw that most of them were eating 5 by 5 rice (a meal of white rice and corn mixed together). Those around me say that they are lucky if they are able to eat pork once or twice a month. Buying snacks for children every couple days is also difficult. I can only imagine how others less fortunate than us are faring." The situation of city and county employees is more of the same. Those able to eat white rice on a regular basis tend to be those earning foreign currency through trade, or are one of the few wealthy people who were not wiped out by the recent currency reform.

Officials of Heungnam City Party are also finding it difficult to obtain food, saying that they have never felt the effects of the famine plaguing the general population as hard as they are now. In the past, street sellers would provide money and other items to city employees in exchange for security guarantees, but this practice was generally regarded as a nuisance and ignored. However, now the city party officials are going out of their way to help the sellers in whatever way possible. This changed attitude reflects their desire to secure more food provisions. Officials in Hamheung and Heungnam City say that they are in the worst possible conditions, no matter how hard living conditions are reported to be in Ryanggang province. Reflecting this sentiment, an official in the Hamheung City government said, "Ryanggang province is full of barley and potato fields so no matter what the farming conditions may be there is always some food to go around. However, Hamheung and Heungnam City are densely populated and even finding a piece of grass to eat is next to impossible. Officials and ordinary citizens alike are saying that the current food crisis is worse than the Arduous March." A security officer in Hamheung City said, "I am worried that if the food crisis is not resolved we will be seeing a repeat of the crisis in the 1990s with corpses lining the streets." He said this crisis was the worst he has seen since the period of the Arduous March.

Nammoon-dong in Hoeryong, Storage Household Increasing

More and more people have started living in storages in Nammoon-dong in Hoeryong City, North Hamgyong Province. The result that had been surveyed by City Committee Urban Administrative Department have affirmed a total of 150 odd household who are mainly homeless people, old people and newly independent generation living in storages that are attached to the apartments in Nammoon-dong. Many of the old generations gave their houses to their children and moved to storages. Also the new household generations should live with their parents even after they got married or set up a branch family because they have not been allotted their houses yet.

Because of the food shortage and poor business it cost more for food and is difficult in many ways if all family members live together, so young people do not mind settling in their home even in storages if they can live by themselves after they get married. In the same way, the old people move into storages not to be a burden on their sons, daughter-in-laws, daughters and son-in-laws.

The increase of the storage household like this is the same everywhere, especially at Nammoon-dong area. The City Party have been forcefully clearing them out for years

because they damage the City Beautiful Movement, however it is rather increasing instead not decreasing.

Border Custom Locations Reinforcing Cavity Searches of Chinese People

Recently, every border custom location has been reinforcing cavity searches on Chinese nationals who are assumed to be responsible for the majority of the radios, MP3 players, USB keys, mini cameras, et cetera, secretly circulating the country. In fact, many Chinese people, particularly Chinese immigrants, have been caught in the act of smuggling in goods. Bribes have naturally increased with the jump in the rate of cavity searches. Although custom agents previously only demanded money from people they knew, they now also extort strangers for sums of 200 to 300 Chinese yuan since 100 yuan is thought to be insufficient.

They bluntly ask for bribes by saying, "Who would care about a stranger in trouble. Showing your face often and taking care of us before we ask will cost you less money." After people reluctantly offer agents money, they smoothly pass through the complication custom investigation. Sarcastic remarks are spreading regarding the cavity searches and how they only make custom agents rich. Moreover, Chinese custom locations also began reinforcing cavity searches of North Koreans. The word is circulating that "The Chinese people have animosities against the extremely thorough body search and conveyed the word about it when they return back to their country, so China reinforced the investigation as revenge."

Chinese Investors' Touring Schedule Become Flexible

Unlike the fastidious body search at the customs, the greatest benefits and accommodations are offered to Chinese trade investors than any other times. The touring schedules in which the entering trade representatives were rigorously compelled to follow have been repealed drastically. It is especially surprising because visiting Mangyungdae Home where the Great Leader was born, Panmunjom, the International Friendship Exhibition in Myohyang Mountain, and even paying homage to the statue of Leader Kim Il-Sung were abolished. The attitude of the security agents is generous, and they even grant some free time to act freely during the evening.

Among the Chinese who visited Pyongyang for the first time, people sometimes request to see the history revolutionary site of the Great Leader, but the security agents recommend them otherwise by saying "There is no need to trouble yourself by wasting precious time. Isn't business more important? Save your time and focus on the business discussion." Even the overseas representatives who led the Chinese representatives ask that the sites be visited, but they are told to rather focus on the business discussion. Without hesitation, they speak of the matters that would have ended their political lives and would have jeopardized the lives of their families and themselves under severe punishment in the past. It makes the Chinese to feel nervous and concern about whether these North Koreans would be all right to say so. At times, some Chinese trade officers show their hesitancy and say, "You ensure the management rights to us but if the foreign policy of North Korea changes again, everything will end in vain. Can you guarantee that the policy will not

change?” Still, the North Koreans encourage the signing of investment note by saying, “You are worrying too much. Even if the policy or the government is changed, the management right is like a private property.

As long as there are investor protection laws between nations, it is obvious that the invested property will be protected even if the current policy is changed. It is like owning a real estate, so why do you worry about so much?” An overseas representative who led the people from China to Pyongyang stopped them by saying, “Comrade, what are you talking about? Change of policy? Such treasonous words would destroy your whole family; why do you utter them so carelessly in front of the foreigners?” However, the representatives from the head office and the officers of the organization just smiled and rebutted his concern, saying, “I only said it to discuss the interest because Chinese people seemed to be very uneasy; you are overreacting.” “I do not know what on earth is going on. In the past, saying such things put their lives at risk, but now they are saying these things so casually; I am simply dumbfounded”, says the overseas representative.

“We will Give Up the Management to Attract Investment”

Refuting a comment concerning North Korea’s special attention to Chinese investors, one Pyongyang trader remarked, “About 200 Chinese companies are in North Korea. 70% of them are in the Rajin area. We pay special attention to them because they are in the beginning investment segment stage.” The investors pursue economic cooperation with North Korea based on four principles, are government-led, business-oriented, market management, and mutual benefits, the investors pursue economic cooperation with North Korea.

They have been convincing us by saying “You have nothing to lose although it’s upon a free trading concept. It benefits both of us.” We haven’t given up the management so far as we’ve said back to them “You just invest, we will do the management”. It made them reluctant to invest. One of my close Chinese investors said to me, “I can’t just invest any more due to the bad management.” As we sense of investor’s reluctance, we are willing to give up our management so that we could induce more foreign investment. Even if our hospitality is great, Chinese investors don’t make investment decision easily unless the potential market research and survey are done. It’s very important for us to have more investment from outside then anything else. He said lastly, “However, we don’t know what giving up the management means to us and how it will be taking place in reality.” 🌸



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.

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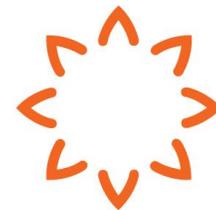
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