



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.]

**["Pyongyang within Pyongyang" – Electricity Provided 24/7 in Joong \(Central\) District
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"Pyongyang within Pyongyang" – Electricity Provided 24/7 in Joong (Central) District
Last winter, the residents of Pyongyang expressed discomfort at the fact that electricity was provided for less than one hour per day on average. It was more a matter of life and death than simple discomfort since residents were unable to turn on the heat in freezing weather. The residents expressed discontent and complained, demanding "Why is the electricity condition becoming worse year by year when it is said that the Strong and Prosperous Nation is so near? This year was the worst." The officials that visited Pyongyang also recalled that "Everywhere we visited, the residents were extremely vocal when complaining on the issue of electricity shortage" and clearly remembered their anxiety. There was one place that was unaffected by the worst electricity crisis: Joong District. Joong District is often referred to as the "Pyongyang within Pyongyang" and is home to high ranking officials and artists. Regular citizens are not happy about the newly built apartment for artists next to the Dae-Dong River in Joong District. "With electricity and hot water provided 24/7, it is heaven on earth." Apartments which are merely tens of meters away turn into darkness at night, but the newly built apartment glows like the sun. Artist apartments regulated by the Central Party have completely different electricity policies compared to the normal

apartments regulated by the City Party. Provided as a kind of gift by the Central Party, the apartment receives the same privileges as the apartments for officials which are on Changgwang street.

There are, however, harshly critical voices, saying that: “Even within Pyongyang, conditions in different part of the city are at opposite extremes. It does not make sense for electricity to be available 24/7 when the nation is in the midst of an electricity crisis. Even looking at the apartment makes my eyes light on fire. Joong District is a ‘Pyongyang within Pyongyang’, and the rest is not Pyongyang.” On the issue of stricter crackdowns on recordings, publications, and clothing, people have remarked, “people become discontent with the national policies, and there are more crackdowns in order to distract people from complaining about national and party policies. If the electricity and food situation improves, there would be no reason to have such thing as crackdown.”

However, there is no guarantee that the artists’ apartment will continue having its privileges. There have been many apartments built as a favor of the Central Party, but 2-3 years later, they were transferred to the jurisdiction of the Pyongyang City. As soon as that happens, they will no longer have much electricity available. It is impossible to know when the artists’ apartment will be transferred to the City.

On the other hand, though it is not in Joong District, the Kim Il Sung University (referred to as Kim University) is one of the few places gifted with electricity provision. The electricity supply to Kim University also attracted animosity from residents. This was because the electricity that could go to the residents was instead planned to be provided to the university. The overall opinion of the residents was, “We don’t understand why these decisions are made in times of extreme electricity shortages.” Children of elementary and middle schools sing songs such as “Coal sellers only earned 10 won because his coal melted in the rain” and “I wonder what electricity company officials are doing. There is no power” to mock the situation of the power shortage, which expresses how the residents feel about the situation.

Factories Devoting all Energy to Preparing for Chairman Kim’s on-site Guidance Visit

Food processing plants that the Chairman of the National Defense Commission Kim Jong-il visited for the on-site guidance are not free from the electronic power shortage. Chairman Kim Jong-il supervised plants that are intimately linked to people’s livelihoods, such as Hoeryong Food Processing Plant and Musan Food Plant in North Hamgyong Province; Baekwoonsan General Food Plant in Hamgeung, South Hamgyong Province; Changsung Food Plant in North Pyongan Province; and Ryongsung Food Plant, Pyongyang Confectionary Plant, and Pyongyang Flour Plant in Pyongyang in last November through December. North Korean media all together covered the news of the Chairman’s visits to the factories. This news gave North Korean people an ample impression that their top leader was taking care of the people’s food situation. In the media, all plants were seen to be in their normal modes of operation. However, those plants were put into operation only for the onsite

guidance. Once the inspectors leave, they cannot continue the daily operations because of the shortage of raw material and electricity. Unsurprisingly, workers in plants put forth critical voices, stating that “almost all heavy and light industry factories in our country cannot produce products anymore. The national economy is worsening and prospects are looking very gloomy. The government has put up a slogan pushing the idea of “improvement in the people’s lives” in order to calm down public discontent; however, the reality is such that the government has been investing in the national defense. In this kind of situation, how could the plants on earth manage well?”

The challenges facing factories that prepare for the on-site guidance visit are huge. After having been given notice of an on-the-spot inspection, a flour factory in Pyongyang purchased flour and materials for one to two hours worth of operation, and joined the flats with the electricity distributor. However, the schedule was cancelled, and the raw materials were all used up. A couple of days later, the plant managers were again notified of an on-site visit, and they rushed to secure a supply of raw material. The visit got cancelled once again despite the fact that they had all finished the preparations. After 3 or 4 times of repeating this notice, and subsequently cancelling it, the result was this loop exhausted the plant’s purchasing power and the electricity distributor became critical of the provision of electricity.

At the fifth notice, the factory workers struggled themselves and barely managed to obtain raw materials, believing that “we will not be able to purchase raw materials any more if the General does not come and visit this time.” The workers pleaded with the electricity distributor to provide the necessary electricity. The on-the-spot guidance visit finally happened, after four vain attempts. Fortunately, the quality of the flour produced on that day was good, and breads were well baked. The workers breathed a sigh of relief.

2.8 Vinalon United Enterprises is also currently in a similar case. In this enterprise, 74 people were awarded of the title of hero last year, and about 2,500 people were conferred upon an assortment of titles and medals, which was unprecedented consideration. At the time of the on-the-spot guidance, this enterprise was highly anticipated as “an epoch-making event, comparable to a launch of a new atomic bomb and a great victory of socialism.” However, production frequently came to a halt in this vinalon factory. Enterprises that need vinalon fiber were baffled. One worker who went to the plant to get vinalon fiber last March stated that “the vinalon plant had come to a complete stop. Everyone who went to the factory had to return with their hands empty since there were no goods to take back.”

**vinalon: a synthetic fiber, produced from polyvinyl alcohol, using anthracite and limestone as raw materials*

Gimchaek Steel Mill is Not Faring Well, Either

The Gimchaek Steel Mill, which Kim Jong-Il pays special attention to and has visited numerous times, is not faring any better. “We are getting neither the coal nor the electricity that is needed to produce Juche Steel. We have scarcely received coal and the electricity supply hasn’t been consistent either, so it is growing more difficult to produce the amount

of commissioned steel in time. It is an embarrassment that a steel mill which receives national attention isn't producing very well," said an official. The plan to sell Juche Steel in return for food supply has gone awry, so the number of absentees has been increasing. The worker added that party officials and the chief engineer were taken to the Ministry of Metal Industry to be criticized for the drop in steel production. "It is not just us. Every plant tries their hardest when an order falls from the leader, from purchasing the material to production, but that only lasts for a short while. The lack of resources and excessive amount of work make it nearly impossible to finish production on time, even by selling out the entire factory," argued some officials, who retorted that it is not entirely their fault for the plunging of production. "Just give us material and food, and we will get everything done. But simply making orders won't do", they added.

The officials of the Ministry of Power Industry are in the same boat. Although 2011 has been advertised as the year in which the Juche Steel Production system will be completed, the future seems bleak. "It is not cokes but the oxygen injection method as well as anthracite addition that are used for Juche Steel production. Whereas the coke injection method requires very little electricity, the oxygen injection method requires much electricity in order to create the oxygen in the first place. There never was much electricity to begin with, so the oxygen injection method is proving to be troublesome. Some say that the electric supply will increase once the Heechun Power Plant is completed, but they are too naïve. Steel Mills are not the only place that needs electric supply. Additionally, the electricity is needed in Juche fertilizer and Juche fiber sectors. The electric supply will hardly sustain those industries that are based on the Self-Sustained National Economy Line. Of course, we can't guarantee they will be supplied to those industries. The electricity supply would have to be used first and foremost for the munitions economy, that's the reality" voiced concerned experts.

Electricity Shortage in North Korea is "Beyond Outsiders' Imagination"

A National Planning Committee officer responsible for electricity generation made a recent assessment that the current electricity shortage in North Korea is extremely serious, so much so that it is beyond any outsiders' imagination. There is no guaranteed coal supply, and most power plants in the nation are old; therefore losing lots of heat with the result that their productivity is thus decreasing year after year. The productivity of Pyongyang Thermolectric Power Plant is falling as well in comparison to previous years. It is thus easy to understand why Pyongyang City is suffering from a lack of electricity.

An officer in charge of electricity generation for Pyongyang City expressed his pessimistic view of this year's supply of electricity, saying that the shortage of coal is a more serious factor than the outdated facilities. After last year's great floods, many coal mines were inundated with water, which reduced productivity. Moreover, the unstable food supply for miners affected human labor resources. One needs a water pump to drain the mines, but that is not feasible due to lack of electricity needed to run the pump, and hence a vicious circle is created. This is not the only reason for low coal production. An expert from Industry Department for Coal said, "There are two types of tunnels in a coal mines. One is the

product of digging out the coal deposits; and the other is the passage by which one arrives at the deposits. While you are making the passage, no coal is produced and therefore you do not get any food supply. The mining company has to balance the work combination in these two tunnels to make sure you get continuous coal production, but that is not easy. There might be many geological reasons for this, but it negatively affects the productivity of coal mines.

Following the directive issued by the Industry Department for Electricity, Pyongyang City announced that it would guarantee electricity supply from 6PM to 11PM. However, residents in Pyongyang seem to be skeptical, saying, "We will know when it arrives."

Con-artists Widespread in Effort to Curb Electricity Use

The effort to regulate electricity in North Korea is becoming more rigorous, reflecting the serious shortage of electricity throughout the country. Increasing efforts to curb electricity use include government officials conducting random checks in residential areas, confiscating prohibited items and imposing fines while cutting the supply of electricity in houses nearby the offenders. For example, in the event a family living in an apartment is caught using electronic appliances like rice-cookers or a heater, the electricity supply of the entire apartment complex concerned is cut for one day. Electricity supply cuts increase with the number of families caught using prohibited appliances: two families caught means two days without electricity, and if three families are caught the entire apartment complex must go without electricity for three days. A great amount of discontent has been caused among residents by these random inspections. Further, there are a large number of con-artists impersonating inspection officers. These con-artists enter houses under false pretenses and use threats to steal money or other items of value.

There are also rigorous efforts by electricity distribution officials to regulate electricity use in Nampo City, South Pyongan Province. These officials forcibly enter houses in a similar fashion to security or police officers and turn them upside down in their search for prohibited items. Not only do they inspect kitchen areas but also open clothing dressers and even places for storing blankets. Rice-cookers or electric pans are confiscated without question and offenders are forced to pay substantial penalties. One Nampo City resident expressed their discontent with the inspections saying, "If they provided us with electricity and did these inspections I wouldn't have any reason to complain. But electricity is only provided from seven to nine p.m., and there are many times when even this isn't provided." Nampo City has also seen many cases of con-artists pretending to be inspection officials and use threats to take items of value including money and "cat tobaccos" (Craven-A) as a bribe. Faced with rising reports of criminal activity, the city's police and security departments have told citizens to 'require all persons claiming to be inspection agents to first confirm their identity before allowing them to carry out an inspection'. They have also told residents to either report or chase away those who fail to confirm their identity or are suspected of being con-artists. Some local governments guided the residents to accept an inspection only when the Neighborhood Unit head accompanies the inspection agents.

It's Dinner Time When There's Electricity

The city of Sariwon, North Hwanghae Province, is also suffering from a very poor supply of electricity. Electricity is provided for only about one hour a day, and even that is not guaranteed. Residents are using this short time frame to use electric appliances to cook their meals. As a result of this situation, the phrase 'It's Dinner Time When There's Electricity' is used commonly by residents in the area. Many residents complain, "They say that our country is supposed to be a strong and prosperous nation by next year, but why is the electricity situation here so bad? The government has built hundreds of power plants all over the country. Where is all that electricity going to?" In fact, North Korea built more than 5000 small and medium sized power plants up until 1998 and has since continued to build small, medium and large scale power plants across the country. Despite this track record, the electricity situation in the country is becoming worse and worse. 🌸



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



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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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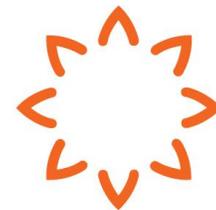
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