



**NORTH KOREA
TODAY**



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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Even well-off families Can Only Add a Handful of Rice to Their Corn Meal Porridge

Corn (maize) long ago replaced rice as North Korea's staple food. North Koreans call corn meal "corn 'rice'". The well-to-do eat steamed rice; for others, corn is their staple food. Depending on a family's economic status, the rice-to-corn ratio varies. Well-off families don't use more than 50% corn; as the household budget becomes more strained, corn's share grows.

Mrs. Kang Un-hui (alias) of Pyongsung city in South Pyongan Province has not so far had to worry about food thanks to her husband, who is a police officer. However, now only her husband gets a food ration. It has been several months since the food ration ended for the three other family members. Even so, they are not starving, but the quality of their meals has fallen sharply. Long ago, they only ate steamed rice. Last year, their meals were half corn and half rice. This year they struggle to be able to mix a handful of rice into the corn meal.

Says Mrs. Kang: "These days, if you're not pretty rich, the quality of your meals worsens. Now, a family that can afford corn meal is doing well. It's gotten to the point that it's hard to have corn meal with even one handful of rice. If our family is like this, other families will be even worse-off. Apart from North Koreans of Chinese origins, everybody is like this. Even so, that does not mean we should complain. My husband has steady work, and I'm just grateful that he can keep his position. I hope that the country's food situation will improve quickly and we can receive our food rations in the usual way."

Chungdan County Residents Can't Even Get a Bowl of Porridge

A long and severe drought has so completely dried-out all farmland in Hwanghaedo, that the fields' deep cracks make them look like a tortoise's shell. At end-July 2011, the collective farm at Shimpyeongri, Chungdangun, South Hwanghae Province suffered severe erosion from a sudden downpour: a large amount of produce was lost. Farmers tried hard to prevent the loss by lifting grain stalks stuck in the mud. In the end, farmers got no food rations in the autumn. Chul Kim, a farm worker at Chungdan County said in despair, "Needless to say, all the rice and corn drooped because of the drought. If you pull hard on a corn stalk, it comes right out of the ground. A few households live on last year's corn. Most families cannot even afford just one porridge meal. Farm households are in that miserable condition. Technically, if a man wants to put-in a full year's work, he needs to be at work on 290 days. That man will get 800g of food (raw grain) per day; a woman farm-worker will get 700g per day. If there were food to be distributed, those who are not members of labor force, e.g., the elderly and children in elementary school, get 300g. A ration of 400g is given to 3rd grade (middle school) students; the ration is 500g for 5th graders. Two years ago, the ration system collapsed: farmers don't get any rations, if everything is taken away to supply the army. Last year we survived thanks to wild vegetables and a little bit of rice. Now, we starve. As you can see, conditions are desperate. One cannot tell the difference between pig swill and humans' food. If things do not change, we cannot prevent massive deaths from starvation."

Summer Comes Again When Last Year's Flood Damage Has Not Been Even Repaired

Hwanghae and Pyongan provinces are fearful of the torrential downpours which repeatedly hit the areas every year. Areas which suffered severe flood damages last year, such as Chungdan County and Baechun County in South Hwanghae Province and Kangseo County in South Pyongan Province, are not even repaired yet. The spring hardship season became even more difficult to endure this year because not just the farm fields but also the individual small land patches were swept by the water last summer. Also, damaged houses have not been repaired so many people are still living in tents.

One official in Kangseo County, South Pyongan Province, heaves a sigh, "All the collective farmsteads are collapsed and residential houses are destroyed. Many schools, day care centers and kindergartens have been destroyed, either partially or completely. After the

roads were blocked and the means of communication were cut, some of them have been repaired and the buildings were rebuilt, but they are not finished yet due to the lack of cement and a shortage of lumber. Those who were forced out into the street without any money did not have any means to survive, so many have died. Even though not every case has been reported to the Party, the most miserable people are the flood victims. The farm has helped some people, but even these people barely ended up taking care of room and board collectively in the farm because the reconstruction of houses is unfinished. If we suffer another flood damages this year, we are simply helpless.”

Kangryung County in South Hwanghae Province suffered a landslide as a result of the torrential five-hour downpour on July 30 of last year, and dozens of people lost their lives. For every farm, many family members could not find the body of the deceased, and some flood victims could not find a proper place to live, so they ended up living like kkotjebies (the homeless). The landslide occurred so fast that they could not react, and the damage was too much. Many areas have not been repaired yet since all the river banks, railroads, and roads were destroyed, not to mention the inundated farmland and the destruction of residential houses.

Even in the allegedly repaired areas, they merely stomped down the soil without the aid of any proper equipment. People suffer from flood damages every summer, but there is nothing they can do. A farm worker in Kangryung County expressed his desperation: “The Central Party dispatches officers and the Provincial Party also dispatches its duty officers only after the flood hits the area. What good is it when they are unable to fight against the flood? If there are machines and heavy equipment, they can drain off water quickly from the inundated areas, but they scoop up water by mobilizing the hungry and feeble farmers, so it is no wonder that restoration work is not going well. There are not any plans which will prevent the flood damages, either. There are no trees planted in the mountain, the river banks which were destroyed last year have not been reconstructed properly, and the drainage channels have not been reorganized. Those who know these things can do nothing but to heave a sigh. Farmers are dying these days because they have nothing to eat, but in addition to that, they have to worry about not having enough water as well as having too much water; everything is something to be worried about.”

Tearful Faces of the Squid Fishermen

It is the season for catching Squid and squid in the East Sea villages. However, these villages are now filled with woes as a prohibition on exporting seafood, high gas prices, and shrinking schools of squids are all causing the fishermen’s worry. North Korean fishermen can not compete against Chinese fishermen because they must deal not only with complex processes to acquire permissions to go out to the sea, but must also use old boats and equipment. Meanwhile, Chinese fishing boats have even been overfishing the marine life, including the younger catch. Fishermen in the East Sea villages have been making their annual income from squid catching between June and October. During this season, not only would traders come to the villages, but also out-of-town workers who come to find a

job. Catching squids requires many men, and drying the caught squids for sale is labor intensive work for women. The men would usually head out to Sea around 2 or 3 o'clock in the afternoon and come back to the port between 9 and 10 o'clock in the morning the following day. However, due to changes in climate, squids in the East Sea have been dwindling. These days, fishermen more often than not catch fewer than 20 Squides after spending the whole night at sea. Almost all of the fishing boats are rented, so 6 out of 10 caught squids are offered as a rental fee to the boat owner, and the remaining 4 squids are shared among the fishermen. Some boat owners take 7 of 10 caught squids as a rental fee. Fishermen are becoming de-motivated because of the dwindling quantities of squids in Sea than the prohibition on exporting seafood.

Pollock has traditionally been the most well known fish in North Korea, and has become a popular export item. However, it is now a fish that is imported from China. Sinpo Port, South Hamgyong Province, has many warehouses to keep caught Pollock, but now those warehouses are empty. A worker in Sinpo Port said, "not much Pollock catching was done due to a lack of gas for fishing boats." He continued, even if the Pollock were kept in a cold warehouse, the electricity supply to the warehouses is unreliable so the Pollack could not be kept fresh. Storing the caught seafood has been as much a burden as catching seafood. Unless a company has strong finances, it is difficult to survive in the seafood trade and companies that export seafood can do nothing about the prohibition on trading seafood. He concluded that companies were exporting seafood behind the government's back, but this is risky since goods would be confiscated if the government found out about the violations.

Hospital Officials Say, "Tuberculosis Drugs are in Urgent Need"

In spite of increasing number of patients at local hospitals, medical drugs are in short supply. A medical doctor in Hamheung City, South Hamgyong Province, said, "Many patients die of malnutrition everyday. We, as doctors, issue medical certificates for the cause of death, but in most cases people just die without even getting a drug prescription, which is useless since there is no drug at hospitals. Patients should seek drugs on their own. If they were in position to get drugs, they wouldn't have died from starvation. Even if they luckily get it, medicines are not effective because of their weak immune system."

Most local hospitals are in the same situation. A worker at the hospital attached to a manufacturing facility in Hamheung City said "Many accidents occur since it's a factory, but even a simple antiseptic is not available. We really need antibiotics and anti-inflammatory drugs, especially for tuberculosis. TB spreads very fast among children, so we desperately need drugs for meningitis and TB. I would not ask for your help with the malnutrition problem since it cannot be resolved without food. But I will never forget your kindness if you urgently provide with antibiotics and TB drugs for our children." She asked this favor over and over. 🙏



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.

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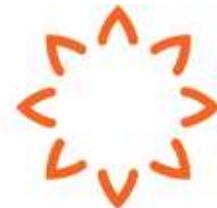
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