



**NORTH KOREA
TODAY**



GOODFRIENDS



Weekly Newsletter

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[Hot Topics]

Military Units in Many Regions Unable To Secure 100% of Military Provisions

As of the middle of January, it has been reported that there are many military units that could not secure 100% of the planned military provisions. Even though details of the amounts have not been released, there has been word from some military units, including those in the war-frontal areas of *Kangwon*, South *Hwanghae* and North *Hwanghae* Provinces as well as North *Hamgyong* and North *Pyongan* Provinces. Failure to secure 100% of the planned military provisions has led to frequent quarrels between the military collectors and the local grain policy officials. Local officials are often angered by the demands of the collectors of military provisions. Military collectors, in response, shout back, "You people should do your job right." This sort of exchange keeps going on.

Military Provisions Apportionment Assessment Based on Fields with the Best Yields

An official in North *Hwanghae* Province complained, "Reports from outside keep claiming that this year's crop exceeds 4 million MT and that does not make sense. If it really exceeded 4 million MT, there wouldn't be any problems with the military provisions." In fact, some of those collectors of military provisions in North *Hwanghae* Province commented, "as soon as the grains are threshed, they are collected as military provisions at every farm, and many farmers are lucky to have corn meal left afterwards. Those farmers could usually enjoy some bowls of rice, if only at this time of harvest. But this year, they will be lucky if they can afford bowls of corn. As the task of securing military provisions becomes critical, farmers' allotments during the harvest have been reduced." Farm official at Baechun County, South *Hwanghae* Province added, "High ranking officials came down here one day in the fall and did calculations for military provisions based on the acreage of the land and yields. Their assessment was based on the fields with the best yields, and consequently we had a terrible time filling the military provisions. Once the assessment calculations were done for the amount of military provisions, the inspectors never showed up again. At harvest time, military collectors showed up and pressured everyone claiming, 'there's still a great deal missing from the estimated military provisions.'"

45th Division of the 9th Corps, North *Hamgyong* Province Receives 86% of Military Provisions

The support bureau of the 45th Division of the 9th Corps, stationed in North *Hamgyong* Province reported to have received 2,600 MT of grain as military provisions between December 22 of last year and January 15 of this year. This represents 86% of the total requirement of 3,000 MT. When asked by a local grain policy official how the army is going to handle the shortage of 400 MT, the support bureau official replied, 'soldiers will be fed with porridge for about three months. Also, barley is supposed to be planted in the fields, which will become a supplementary source of food.' In the meantime, soldiers have been waiting in the City of *Hoeryong* for about fifteen days. They ran out of money and had to sell about 15 MT of whole corn to prepare for the expenses of staying and also transporting the grain.

[Food]

Farmers in *Sagoo-ri* of *Chungjin* City Received 230kg of Whole Corn

The *Sagoo-ri* farm of *Chungarm* District, *Chungjin* City, North *Hamgyong* Province, gave farmers 230kg of whole corn, a year's ration. The farm did not give other food to the farmers' families or even the farmers themselves because it gave the military provisions, so only corn was obtained for the farmers' 1 year food supply. There were no other grains to give at all. Although this is usually the season that farmers can secure food as a reward for their year of hard work, they haven't received enough food for their family or even themselves, so their lives are still tough.

Residents of North *Hamgyong* Province Are Expecting Special Distributions for Lunar New Year's Day

As the lunar New Year's Day approaches, the residents of North *Hamgyong* Province are expecting special distributions to observe the holiday. Although they do not expect so much because the holiday distribution has decreased every year, anything will help, especially in these tough days when even a single handful of corn kernels will not be turned down. To celebrate this lunar New Year's Day, the government is going to give out ordinary residents 1kg of white rice, 1kg of noodle, 100g of cooking oil, 1kg of bean paste, a cake of soap, etc. However, depending on districts, factories, enterprises, or units of organization, the amount and numbers of distributions can vary. On the other hand, each dong-office has begun to make a list for the holiday distribution for *Seolnal* holiday of January 16. To gather holiday gifts for children, the office had each household contribute 5kg of an item from tofu beans, black-eyed beans, or corn. If they do not contribute, their names are to be dropped from the gift list, so poor parents are worrying that their children will be disappointed.

***Sinuiju* Imports Cooking Oil 100 MT in January**

As of January, about 100 MT of imported cooking oil, made in two shipments of fifty-tons each went from *Dandong* to *Sinuiju*. The payment was a month late. On the one hand, Jilinsheng of China permitted 20,000 MT of food and *Domun* (Tumen) permitted 7,000 MT of food so North Korea is able to import 27,000 MT of food.

[Economy]

Agriculture Department Gives Notice of Extensive Induction of High-Yield Variety

The Agriculture Department of North Korea decided to induce high-yield varieties fit to characteristics of farm areas and soil conditions extensively this year. Its intention is that they accept advanced agriculture techniques positively, while new corn and a variety of rice are planted to increase grain crops per unit of area. This spring, collective farms of *Mangyungdae*, *Pyongyang City* will plant new varieties of vegetables first, *Pyongsung City* and *Soonchun City* of South *Pyongan* Province decided to plant new varieties of corn and rice. If results of harvest are good this autumn, it will spread from South *Pyongan* Province to South and North *Hwanghae* Provinces and North *Pyongan* Province.

Can't Work Despite Enough Ships

There is little work available on sea even though many ships are still floating in the east coast of *Kangwon* Province and *Hamgyong* Province. Oil price is too expensive; ship facilities are outdated creating lots of wasted oil. Large Fisheries Enterprise repair ships selling fish on time but small incomings and outgoings are not profitable enough to provide income for all the necessary accessories and oil. Small boat fishermen catch squid, anchovies, billfishes, and Atka mackerel. Catches are not plenty because the size of their ships. So instead residents of fishing villages are attempting to make a living selling brown seaweed (미역), tangle (다시마), and shrimp.

[Politics]

Soonchun, Worried over Low Turn out at Lectures

The low number of participants at lecture classes held every Saturday troubles some Neighborhood Units (인민반) in *Soonchun City*, South *Pyongan* Province. Due to low participation rates, one head of the Neighborhood Units received signatures from people pretending to have attended the lectures. The lectures these days are titled, "Let's support the generation with food deficiency" and "Regarding our Party and nation's policy." Lectures to Democratic Women's Union are no different. During one of the lectures in the middle of last January, there was discussion on how to achieve the goals emphasized in the New Year's Combined Editorial. There were discussions on buying a scrap iron, the manured soil making project, preservation of environmental health, destroying of anti-socialist practices such as bystreet trade and street vending business. There was much laughter after all the women who attended answered "Yes" following the statements. Since nobody paid attention while just waiting for the lecture to end, it is almost impossible to have any meaningful discussions. All the participants thought that simply answering yes to all the questions would be the fastest way to end the lecture. One of the participants *Kwak Soon-young* (41) said, "Discussions are boring because we hear the same things over and over again. I pity those lecturers who give lectures to the bunch of housewives who want to leave as soon as they check-in."

Jungju City, 200 kg of Humus Soil Assignment Gets Half Accomplished

Ryongpo-ri in *Jungju City*, North *Pyongan* Province, gave residents assignments to collect 200 kg of humus soil every day. Those successful in collecting 200 kg would receive 400 g

of rice or 800 g of corn. Less than half of the people who went up to the mountains to find the humus soil are said to be capable of managing the job. Digging snow-covered and frozen land is difficult and sorting out the leaves from the soil is very time-consuming. Working all day without any rest would only give about 80-90kg. Among the people who went up to the mountain in search of the humus soil, the person with the most amounts had 90 kg. He received 400 g of corn in return for his labor that day.

Labor Discipline Center Guards Secretly Hoard Prisoners' Private Food

Some prison guards of the Labor Discipline Center (*Nodongdalnyundae*) are receiving complaints by prisoners' families for hoarding prisoner's private food in *Jungju* City, North *Pyongan* Province. It has been two months since *Choi Sang-cheol's* (42) younger brother *Sang-hak* (40) was imprisoned at the Labor Discipline Center called '*Kkangpan*' (깡판). Daily meal plan at this place is only about 30 corn kernels. *Choi* commented, "I saw a man who stayed at the facility for 9 months and he was just a bag of bones. It was a desperate scene to witness. We are trying our best give them some prisoner's private food but it is costing too much." It costs at least 10,000 NK Won every time we visit to deliver corn with some other food and service money for the guards to make sure these foods goes to the right person. Because the prison guards keep good food and distributes only portion, the food sometimes never gets delivered. *Choi* said, "I gave more than enough last time I visited but he cried that he did not receive anything. It broke my heart seeing that. According to some elders, the current situation is worse than the Japanese colonial period because things sent to the prisoner actually were delivered then." Then he added, "How desperately hungry are these prison guards when they are stealing prisoners' food?" pitying the situation.

[Society]

70 Workers Diagnosed with Tuberculosis Patients Isolated at the *Chollima* Iron Works United Enterprise.

Last January 8, the 3rd prevention tuberculosis hospital in *Pyongyang* City performed complete physical exam on workers of the *Chollima* Iron Works United Enterprise under the order by the North Korean Health Department. The medical official announced that 70 tuberculosis patients were being isolated due to hemoptysis after the physical examination. They also reported that an additional 90 patients were found to have the same diagnosis. The medical crew had shortages in supplies and returned to *Pyongyang* after giving 100 tablets of isoniazid to patients.

Most Illegal Computer Users Are the Children of Government Officials

Although internet is not available in North Korea, the number of computer users has been on the increase among the children of government officials who use the computer to play games or watch movies. Other than some domestic games, Tetris is about the only game from abroad that is available in North Korea. At first Tetris was banned, but later when it was found harmless, it was allowed to be used. Other games are strictly under control because they have illegally come in from abroad. As more than 90% of movies were produced overseas, in countries such as South Korea or China, they are on the banned list. Security agencies and schools have cracked down on illegal trade but it does not seem to be effective.

A teacher in a junior high school, *Jeong Hee-jin* (28), in *Pyongsung* city, *South Pyongan* Province, said that "the junior school students are teenagers and they become more rebellious when we apply controls. Teachers and parents ask them not to watch the movies or play the games, they don't listen." She also revealed that "when we investigate the source of these illegal games or movies, in most cases it is the children of high-ranking officials or law enforcement staff. So it is hard to tell who is cracking down on whom."

"Go Away, We Have No Change."

Park Kwang-hyuk (35) in *Chungjin* City, *North Hamgyong* Province, was upset because he had undergone two outrageous experiences recently. On the day he took a trolley bus, he paid 500 NK Won because he did not have any small change. Since the bus fare is only 5 NK Won he expected to receive his change, but the bus driver told him to go away because he had no change. "You must give me my change. What the heck is going on?" he shouted, but the driver did not want to be bothered with and told him to get off the bus quickly. He was going to confront the driver but other passengers stared at him and some of them got mad at him for delaying the bus, he got off without his change. Park said, "I felt absolutely vexed, it took me a long time to swallow my anger."

A few days later, he went to the post office to send something to *Pyongyang* by registered mail. He was told that his envelope was the wrong size and that he cannot mail it. Park said, "I asked how much does it cost to buy an envelope with registered mail stamp. They told me it is 10 NK Won but it was sold out. I gave them 100 NK Won and pleaded them to sell me one; even though they said the quota for that day was all gone, they gave me one very discreetly. They took 100 NK Won for a 10 NK Won envelope. Very sharp businessmen! What kind of socialism is this? It is (a society of) lawlessness. Nobody observe the rules of official sticker price that is determined by the government."

[Women/Children/Education]

[Letter from *Sinuiju*] We Are Proud of the Section Chief at My Younger Brother's Factory

My name is *Kim Soon-hee* (alias) of *Sinuiju*. I have a 55-year old mother, a widow, and a 28-year old unmarried younger brother. My mother peddles fruits, I work at a shoe factory and my younger brother works at a small factory. Living in a small old house, we can barely afford food. My mother is more concerned with my brother getting married than she is for me. My brother does not seem to be trying to find a girl to marry because our family cannot afford the marriage ceremony financially. The New Year has brought good news concerning my brother.

A section chief at my brother, *Hyuk's*, factory offered to help him gets married. That news made my mother's face shine brightly. My brother's factory produces lime powder and blocks. The City of *Sinuiju* is considered the dirtiest city in the nation even though it is the gate at the border. The city gets submerged under water in flood season because of poor drainage. During winter, wind spreads coal dusts all over the city. In response, all the

apartments and public buildings are painted with white lime. This is the beautification project by the city. Painting is done many times annually. My brother's factory produces this powder.

The section chief at this factory is the one I want to thank. He is respected by many as a person who really love and cares about his own people. *Hyuk* says the work is hard and physically demanding. They bring lime stones from the *Dukhyun* Mine at *Uiju* County, located 80 *Li* (32 Km) away. The amount the factory produces cannot meet the demands. A bucket of lime water costs 1,000 NK Won. Those who buy it, such as cosmetic factories, iron ware factories, chicken farm and duck factories, all pay in kind, with their own products.

This section chief distributes these products received as payments to employees evenly and fairly. Not only that, coal is supplied during spring and fall. Each employee, not the other family members, gets rations of rice grain and corn annually. Consider that there are many places where the employees do not receive wages, not to mention the rations of grain. On national holidays, he makes arrangements for each employee to receive some meat and soap.

My brother says he feels so fortunate. Even with hard work, my brother is sure it is worthwhile as he works faithfully. *Hyuk* spoke well of his section chief so often that all of us in the family ended up being fond of him. Now that such a respectful section chief made a promise to help my brother in getting married, how can my mother and I not be assured and rejoice ourselves? He promised that he will get enough blocks to remodel our house. We are grateful that he spoke those encouraging words. We wanted to convey the news that our republic still has people like him.

[Accidents]

***Onsung* County Family Murder Case Re-opened**

Onsung County police authorities in North *Hamgyong* Province recently started to re-investigate a family murder case. On July 10 last year, a man and his wife died on the scene. The couple's 12-year-old daughter was transported to the hospital immediately, but she died two days later. The residents who witnessed the case said that they still tremble when they think of the case because the family was murdered in such brutal manner. The autopsy was performed at the North *Hamgyong* Province level, and an order was handed down asking to resolve the case at any cost. However, there was not much of a lead to solve the case. The investigation had difficulties making progress because the daughter who was the only witness had died. The police authorities investigating the case formed a special unit dedicated to this case and continued to interview the residents. In October of last year, they finally apprehended the suspect. Youth Union leader Choi (27 years old) was found in possession of 80 paper bills tainted in blood. Thirty of the paper bills were smeared with a lot of blood, and the blood was of the same type of the victims. Mr. Choi was arrested immediately. However, he denied his involvement in the crime. As such, the police authorities are actively investigating the crime in order to build the case by questioning Mr. Choi and others involved. The residents of *Onsung* County remember the brutal nature of the family murder case and wished in unison that the case be solved as soon as possible and that the killer pays the price for his crime.

[Commentary]

A Story of a Section Chief Re-affirms Korean Custom of Helping Each Other

A story of a section chief at a factory in *Sinuiju* is really heart-warming and touching. The section head is neither an official nor a party member. He is just a section head of a small factory that produces lime powder and blocks. He takes care of a dozen workers under his supervision although he is not self-sufficient financially. Perhaps it is because he himself is a worker who can relate to the situation the workers are in. The workers and their family members are showing respect and gratitude for his character.

The North Korean authorities have been educating people to develop communist moral character for a long time. Even though they are strengthening the ideological education frequently each year, it is difficult to encounter those with communist moral characters as people go through Arduous March. The realization that there will be only death if you cannot take care of yourself in the face of hardships taught people how to outsmart others and strive for survival at any cost. The reality of today and yesterday is to ignore the dying *Kkotjebis* (homeless) because people have to worry about feeding themselves as well everyday. However, what of the officials who are in better situations? They are barely taking care of themselves and their families, not to mention looking after ordinary people.

We live in a world where caring for others is not a virtue anymore. Today's society is a place where it seems quite natural for officers and people in higher positions to use their power and position to get what they want. One has to know how to use private connections, how to flatter, and how to do backdoor dealings in order to be perceived as somebody who knows how to take care of himself. Otherwise, it is hard to survive and that is the reality. The story of the section head in *Sinuiju* who takes care of others instead of minding only himself gives very touching feelings. No one will blame him even if he cares only about himself and ignores others. Nevertheless, like the old saying, "one can only appreciate the green of the pine trees only when all the leaves fall in the cold winter." His warm-heartedness shines even more because he cares for others like his own family in these difficult times.

We see a ray of hope in him. We believe that there are still many people who have this type of great moral character. This coincides with the nature of Korean people who did not mind sharing a bowl of barley with neighbors during the spring hardship period. The story of North Korean people caring for each other gives us a chance to look at ourselves. It is no doubt that South Korean society is experiencing a difficult time with economic crisis. However, no matter how difficult the situation is we have the ability to help North Korean people. Perhaps it is about time to revive the beautiful custom of our ancestors who helped each other even during the toughest times. 🌸



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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' friend, 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.

Now Good Friends USA intends to improve humanitarian and human rights situation of North Korean residents and to inform this situation to the international community by

- 1) collecting information on severe food shortages and bad situations in health, education, and transportation and providing them to other humanitarian aids organizations so that they can support North Korean people effectively.
- 2) investigating current situations of North Korean refugees in China, and providing protections and aids for them.
- 3) assessing human rights violations occurring in North Korea, informing them to the international societies, and requesting the North Korean government for improvement on human rights and living conditions.

Also, Good Friends USA publishes the newsletter [North Korea Today \(English edition\)](#) to inform the international public.

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