



**NORTH KOREA
TODAY**



GOODFRIENDS



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[Hot Topics]

Too Many Heart-Rending Horror Stories in Households Which Lost Loved Ones Last Year

Wife's Death Forces Entire Family to Become Kkotjebis (Homeless)

As Family Succumbs to Hunger, Survivors Driven to Madness

Tearful Mother Cared For By Her Young Children

A Traffic Accident Ends a Family's Livelihood

[Food]

Jikhari Farm in *Chungjin* Supplied 6 months Worth of Food

Gimchaek Steel Mill Solutions Division, Only Division Able To Distribute Food for February

[Economy]

"Business before the Storm Time"

Environmental Pollution from *Danchun* Refinery Cause Complaints from Residents

Sluggish Production of Car Parts at the July Sixth Car Factory

Wild Root Vegetables Are the Staple Food at the Railroad Tie Factory in *Liwon County*

[Politics]

Male Students Taller Than 168cm Trained as Honor Guards

Steel Vessel Trade Company Punished for Not Receiving Rice for Goods

[Society]

Those Who Borrowed to Buy Narcotic Drugs are referred as 'nose borrowers'

"Cause of death is Coal Gas Poisoning, Not Heart Attack."

Sixty Year-old Husband and Wife, ad 8 Family Members on the Edge of Survival

An Old Lady in Her Sixties Is Upset by Loss of a Handcart

[Women/Children/Education]

A Day of a Housewife

The *Wonsan Kkotjebi* Welfare Institution Is Conducting Education Temporarily
"I'll Take Care of My Brother"

[Accidents]

A Worker Died Crushed under Rail Ties

[Commentary]

North Korea's Food Shortage and *Jopyongtong's* Statement

[Investigative Report]

During the summer of 1997, I Kept My Mouth Shut

[Hot Topics]

Too Many Heart-Rending Horror Stories in Households Which Lost Loved Ones Last Year

During spring last year, North and South *Hwanghae* Provinces, South *Hamgyong* Province, *Kangwon* Province and part of *Jagang* Province experienced a severe shortage of food. The situation in areas like *Pyongyang*, *Hoeryong*, *Rasun*, *Hyesan* and *Kanggye* was a little better. Normally, North and South *Hwanghae* Provinces can secure enough food even after providing for the military. They could then send some food to other areas. The damage from two consecutive years of floods caused a drastic reduction in the harvest. Food shortage that started here spread to the whole nation. Areas along the national border could get along by means of illegal trades with China. However, areas such as *Hamheung* City, *Sinpo* City, *Gowon* County, *Heungwon* County, and *Liwon* County of South *Hamgyong* Province as well as *Gimchaek* City and *Gilju* County of North *Hamgyong* Province are experiencing food shortages that are worsening by the day. Low grain production per-capita in comparison with other areas makes the situation worse in these areas. Last year, many people lost their lives to starvation and disease. Residents say, "There are too many heart-rending horror stories in households which lost loved ones. We wonder if heaven tries to starve all Koreans on earth to death."

Wife's Death Forces Entire Family to Become Kkotjebis (Homeless)

Kang Jung-gil (40s) of *Heungwon* County, South *Hamgyong* Province was working at a factory last spring. He never missed work, even though he never received any rations or wages. His wife was the bread-winner for all five members of the family, including his mother and two children. When the food shortage began last spring, the family could hardly

afford daily bowls of porridge. His mother, who was over seventy, fell sick after a lengthy period of starvation. His wife, in the mean time, was trying to collect herbs in the mountains. She fell down a hill and became paralyzed. Her disability caused a disastrous hardship for the family because she was the bread-winner, earning money by peddling various items and occasionally collecting herbs. The first victim of this disaster was *Jung-gil's* mother, who passed away soon after the summer. Mr. *Kang* tried to take care of the family by collecting firewood from the mountain or selling fish at a fishing village. He tried everything, but the situation did not improve. His desperate young children cried for food, and the whole household got messier and messier. His wife was getting weaker and weaker, finally passing away at the beginning of winter. He began a wanderer's life with his two daughters, four and six years of age.

As Family Succumbs to Hunger, Survivors Driven to Madness

Miss *Ryu Sung-hee* (17) of *Danchun*, South *Hamgyong* Province lived a hard life with her father, mother and two younger sisters. Her father, employed as a worker at the *Danchun* Chemical Factory, could provide little food for the family, resulting in them going days without. Her mother had a nervous disorder and had always been physically weak. Starvation made her mother's condition worse. The family could afford only a meal a day, occasionally two, and as a result, her father collapsed first. Her mother's condition got worse and last June, she committed suicide by drowning. Her youngest sister got sick with a disease that causes swelling of the body, but her family could not afford any medicine or hospital care. For lack of money, another younger sister, *Jung-hee* (15) had to quit school. Together, they wandered around to scrounge for some food. They fed their father and youngest sister with whatever they managed to find. Everyone became physically weak and visibly underfed. Last fall, the father and younger sister both passed away. The two remaining sisters spent days crying over the deaths of their mother, father and sister. Then one day, they started showing symptoms of mental derangement. They never respond to anyone's questions and often laugh without any reason. Many residents wonder if these sisters have gone mad.

Tearful Mother Cared For By Her Young Children

Suh Gil-lim (in her 30s) of *Geumbong-dong*, *Danchun*, South *Hamgyong* Province, has been taking care of her husband and two young children. Her husband was totally paralyzed during the days of the 'March to Hardship', thirteen years ago. However, life got much worse since last spring because of a severe food shortage. It was especially difficult securing medicine for her husband, sending two children to school, and preparing meals with little more than grass for porridge. She tried working as a peddler to earn some money, but never made enough. Therefore, she collected herbs and grass roots for meals of porridge whenever possible. Quite often, she went hungry after feeding her husband and children first. As a result, as soon as the 'hard' spring was over, she collapsed. After their sole supporter within the family collapsed, her two children, now barely over ten years of age, started taking care of their parents. They began to go from house to house in the neighborhood, begging for food. They kept trying to get food for their parents even though they were hungry.

Ms. *Suh* blamed herself as she lay in bed, unable to move, and often could not swallow what her young children brought in from begging. Their father, after staying in bed for thirteen years, kept saying "I'd rather die, I'd rather die," and one day he passed away. Ms. *Suh*, even

though she was deep in grief with her husband's death, could not stay remain in bed. She felt she could not depend on her young children anymore, and with the help of a cane, she attempted to get to the sea and try to collect some seaweed. However, she was so physically weak that she could not hold herself upright against the strong waves. She drowned. All of a sudden, these two young children became orphans. They cried and cried. It was hard to bear to see the young children crying. These children started wandering. Their wanderer's life began.

A Traffic Accident Ends a Family's Livelihood

Han Suk-joong (in his 40s) of *Geumbong-dong, Danchun, South Hamgyong Province* became head of a household of seven after his father's death in 2005. He took his widowed mother and his unmarried younger brother into his household. As the food shortage situation got worse in 2007, feeding the large household became very difficult. He and his wife bought seafood, such as squid, whiting fish, abalone and sea cucumber at the fishing villages and sold them at places like *Sinuiju* and *Hyesan*. Last summer, on the way home from *Pyongsung*, he had a traffic accident and got severely injured. He lost both legs and his wife lost one foot and a hand. Both of the bread-winners of the household became disabled all at once. The shock from the disaster caused his mother to have a heart attack and she passed away shortly afterwards. His unmarried brother left home trying to find a way to make money and save his young nieces. Two young daughters aged twelve and fifteen, tried to get food for their parents. They walked more than 10 *Li* (approximately 4 km) to collect firewood, carried it on their backs and sold it at the market. They fed their parents with porridge made of grass roots and herbs. Mr. *Han* and his wife felt so bad because they could not help their daughters with anything. They just kept advising their daughters "Don't ever peddle from cars. There are so many who die in the traffic accidents or become invalid." Mr. *Han* passed away first, and the following January 6 his wife followed him. These two daughters became orphans and have nobody to depend on.

[Food]

***Jikhari* Farm in *Chungjin* Supplied 6 months Worth of Food**

At the end of last year, the *Jikhari* farm at *Chungarm* district in *Chungjin* City, North *Hamgyong* Province distributed 11 months worth of food. However, because much of it went to support the military and other social duties, the actual distributed amount was only 6 months worth of food. In some areas, increasing number of household is using usury because they are already running short on food in early March. The households, which borrow corns with an agreement to pay back twice as much in the fall, typically have big families. So, the food is still not nearly enough.

***Gimchaek* Steel Mill Solutions Division, Only Division Able To Distribute Food for February**

The *Gimchaek* Steel Mill in *Chungjin* City, North *Hamgyong* Province has been unable to distribute food to its employees with the exception of the solutions division, which gave 14kg of corn last month, a full month's worth of food. No other division has been able to distribute food yet still. The most important work for *Gimchaek* Steel Mill in February other than

production regular steel was to make 200 MT of special steel. However, a growing number of workers has been missing work due to the lack of food supply. As the number of absentees' increase, the hit on steel production is becoming a problem. Support bureau workers of *Gimchaek* Steel Mill made a proposal of exporting steel to increase the amount of food supply but it got rejected by the Central Party. As there is no improvement on the food supply condition, the productivity of worker continues to go down.

[Economy]

“Business before the Storm Time”

There are three markets in *Sinuiju*. With an exception of a few people, residents of *Sinuiju* purchase good from the market. However, market is not the only place to buy or sell. There are several people selling goods near the marketplace and at the village entrance. Their business usually takes place between 12pm and 2pm. During this time, there are not many officers patrolling the area and the residents call this “Before the Storm Time”.

A business women in the alley, *Jung Yoon-geum* (40), said, “It is a mess when these people fight to acquire more selling space and try to sell more goods. And when the mobile patrol surrounds the street sellers with their motorcycle, these people escape the patrol with a flash in the blink of an eye. I do not think even military patrol can speed that much. At the Storm Time, experienced sellers hide in village storage areas or low-level houses. They pay in advance for storage fee and escape to their hideaway during patrol.

The mobile patrol who is in charge of the marketplace disperse all street sellers and lie hidden even after dismissing everyone. They collect all goods from the street sellers who slowly show up after a while. The street seller who had their goods taken waits at the police station or at the sub-station for hours to take their items back. If this does not work, they give them a carton of cigarettes as bribery and get their stuff back.

Jang Man-young (50) witnessed the incident that happened on the 25th of last month on his way to the market to get some goods at the street market:

The marketplace is too far and the stores are always closed even if a customer shows up. I have to change into a skirt to go to the marketplace. I do not want to go into the overcrowded marketplace to buy one ingredient for a side dish. This is good for everyone; these elders get their things from vegetable farms and sell at the local street corner. Elders make some money for themselves and their young ones and grandchildren will appreciate this.

It was only this morning, when police officers drove around on their motorcycles and yelled at everyone to dismiss their street sales. They kept yelling and screaming but nobody listened to them. They kicked boxes around them when they came back from inspecting all nearby districts and found that nobody moved. A deaf elder over the age of 80 years was caught while others ran away after they saw the motorcycles. It was freezing cold with the north wind. She struggled to get up from sitting down in cold weather and protested against the police officer.

She screamed, “Are you telling me to stop the street sales and starve to death?” and he responded, “Go to the marketplace. It is anti-socialistic to sell here.” She added “If doing this for a living is an anti-social activity, then what is socialism?” They argued in harsh language. When the elderly did not submit, the angry police officer yelled, ‘Get the Head of the Neighborhoods Units. Where is the Head of the Neighborhood Units?’ Nevertheless, the elderly woman was actually the mother in law of the Head of the Neighborhood Units. The Head of the Neighborhood Units ran out and begged for forgiveness. ‘I asked her to stop but she kept insisting on going outside to sell the goods so I had no way to stop her’ In reality, police officers are working closely with the Head of the Neighborhood Units since they report any suspicious behaviors in the neighborhood. The situation eased because she was over 80 years old and the Head of the Neighborhood Units pleaded for forgiveness. The elderly woman was still upset and sat outside in resistance. There are many incidents like this during the Storm Time.

Environmental Pollution from *Danchun* Refinery Cause Complaints from Residents

Neighbors of the *Danchun* refinery in South *Hamgyong* Province are complaining more and more about the environmental pollution caused by the refinery. This factory, which employees eight thousand people, produces lead, zinc and bronze. The smoke from its funnel is the same as poisonous gas. Smoke inhalation causes severe coughing or eyes to water. The residents who have been suffering from these bad conditions for a long time request the government for a counter plan saying, “Why is the government not taking any countermeasures? It should send out someone to check for environmental pollution and if they find out it is harmful then they should make a counter plan.” The problem is that even if the factory is caught polluting the environment, it can easily get out of it by paying the fines so nothing changes. Residents’ request to the government is to change the penalty from just a simple fine to something more severe like firing the floor managers and party secretaries or cutting their salaries. Some are even insisting that the factory needs to be completely obliterated. People also say, “Factory workers steal and sell the products that they made and make profits. They do not provide us with any benefits, only damage.” There are many long term-patients among neighbors who live close to the factory but there is no measure planned to take care of them.

Sluggish Production of Car Parts at the July Sixth Car Factory

The production of car parts at the ‘July Sixth Car Factory,’ *Liwon* County, the South *Hamgyong* Province, has been slow. Productivity has been decreasing due to the high employee absentee rate. There are 7,000 workers at the factory. All of them say that they have not received any food rations since last year. It has even become normal for them to skip lunch. They no longer depend on the food distribution from the factory, but make their living by themselves. Women usually support their families by cooking porridge with grass roots, wild vegetables, and corn powder. Last year, people began to die from malnutrition and dozens of factory workers had died from lack of food.

Wild Root Vegetables Are the Staple Food at the Railroad Tie Factory in *Liwon* County

The workers at the *Raheung* Rail Tie Factory, in *Liwon* County, South *Hamgyong* Province, are badly off, just like the employees in other factories. This factory manufactures concrete

ties that go under the railroad. However, the workers have not received food distributions. The factory has around 2,000 workers, approximately 90% of which eat grass roots for lunch. In the past, they could eat grass porridge with corn, beans, or grain, however, they could not get grain since last year. *Jo Woon-cheol* (40s), a factory worker, said, “Even if I try to get some grain from others, I cannot even think of getting them because their situations are the same as mine. Many people died last year. The authorities say they died of disease, but they actually died from malnutrition. You cannot imagine how much people are furious at the lack of food distribution.” With tears in her eyes, *Jo’s* wife added “My husband still works. I cannot keep starving him like this. I wish food distributions would come so that I could feed him even just one grain of rice when he goes out to work.”

[Politics]

Male Students Taller Than 168cm Trained as Honor Guards

The People’s Defense Ministry announced that starting this year, they will automatically choose male middle-school graduates who are at least 168cm tall to be enlisted, and will train them to be honor guards. Also, students who have graduated from each district’s military academies will be in a lower rank for one year, but will be enrolled in the military academy the second year. When attending the military academy, each student will be in the class ranked third, with basic training and education, as well as combat skills. One official of Defense Ministry said, “Training these men to be great leaders so they will be capable of successfully managing their units is one of the basic ideas of our military-first politics.”

Steel Vessel Trade Company Punished for Not Receiving Rice for Goods

A steel vessel export and import company in *Ryanggang* Province was punished for not obeying the commands of a trading bureau. The rules state that when goods are exported, they must be paid for in grain. However, the steel vessel company failed to comply with this rule, and received other products in return because the product was worth much more than rice. Because the company did not obey orders, a portion of its employees were dismissed and/or punished for their actions.

[Society]

Those Who Borrowed to Buy Narcotic Drugs are referred as ‘nose borrowers’

As the number of people using narcotics has increased in *Hamheung*, *Chungjin*, *Pyongsung*, *Pyongyang*, and many other major cities, many households are going broke as a result. Those who borrow money to buy narcotic drugs are usually called ‘nose borrowers.’ This name originated from the fact that people use their noses to inhale narcotics. Due to the difficulty of buying in bunches, many people buy small bags that cost 10,000 NK won at a ‘nose seller house.’ ‘Nose seller house’ refers to any house that sells small-sized narcotic bags. The addicts use 2-3 bags at a time. “We use 2-3 bags because we can’t feel anything with one bag,” say the addicts. It is very normal for these people to squander at least 100,000 NK won up to several million won in a month. When they run out of money, they pay with their belongings.

Since narcotic buyers are not allowed to buy on credit, they bring anything that has monetary value, such as electronics, clothes, and CDs. These goods then get passed on to the merchants. For that reason, merchants are also frequent guests to the house. Last month, when one of the houses in *Ranam* district, *Chungjin* city of North *Hamgyong* Province, was inspected, so many goods were found in that house that an extra truck had to be brought to take all the goods away. One official said, "Many people are suffering from hunger, but it is also problematic that we are seeing an increasing number of people using 'Ice (Amphetamine)'. There seems to be no solution because the number of users just keeps increasing despite continued inspections." One 40-year-old narcotic seller in *Pyongsung* said, "Government limits many of our market activities. We do not have many goods we can sell besides this. It's almost like the government is encouraging us to sell narcotics. "

"Cause of death is Coal Gas Poisoning, Not Heart Attack."

The coal gas poisoning accident has been transformed into heart attack. At the end of December last year, in North *Pyongan* Province, a woman in her forties died from coal gas poisoning. She has been living by herself since her two sons were currently doing military services and her husband was sent to *Baekdoo* Mountain construction site in *Rygang* Province a long time ago. Her dead body was found one day after her death. Neighborhood Unit had waited for her husband more than five days, but when they did not hear anything, they carried out the funeral service. Her husband showed up a few days after her funeral, then dug open the grave with his bare hands. People wondered whether he might be going crazy due to sadness for losing his wife.

The husband said that, "my wife would not have died if the Neighborhood Unit conducted neighborhood patrol regularly. The Neighborhood Unit head should be responsible for the lousy patrol. (He knew the circumstances) very well but lied that (my wife) died of heart attack. This was to avoid any responsibility. I swear I will make him responsible."

In fact, all over North Korea, there are frequent accidents in winter due to coal gas and each unit forms a patrol unit. The patrol unit patrols houses that burn coal everyday from 12 midnight to dawn. Many of them patrol twice a night, and some even 3 times. They wake up the sleeping residents. When the residents answer, they go to the next house to check. If there is no answer, they go inside to verify (whether everything is all right).

Jo Yeon-gyong (43) said, "Every house that burns coal has to be patrolled. If someone dies of coal gas poisoning, the head of the Neighborhood Unit would be punished. That's why he made up the story that his wife died of heart attack. Ordinary people without power might not be able to do anything, however, her husband is a security agent who has power. He wants to punish (the head) and so he is pushing for investigation. By having (an autopsy,) it would be easy to know whether the cause of death was heart attack or gas poisoning and that's why he had opened the grave. The punishment would not be heavy because it is not a political mistake."

Most neighbors said, "It is true that the patrol units bother us a lot. Once awakened (by them) it is very difficult to get back to sleep, but they wake us up twice, and we feel so terrible. My one wish is to sleep through a night. Since they patrol to save lives of people, we reluctantly

endure it. If they did their job well, (the woman) might not have died. What the husband said is absolutely right.” The head of the Neighborhood Unit charged with the case has been under a preliminary hearing. While the head was trying to fake the cause of death as a heart attack, he allegedly handed money to the relatives of (dead woman) and it was also under investigation.

Sixty Year-old Husband and Wife, ad 8 Family Members on the Edge of Survival

In South *Pyongan* Province, there is a household where 8 family members live together. They include the parents, who are over 60 years old, 2 daughters, who were married but came back to rely on their parents, the daughters’ children, and one recently discharged son and his wife. The parents repair shoes for a living. They sit outside and wait for customers even during the cold winter. They survive the cold from a vinyl house, which they made, that fits 2 people, and by having a small charcoal brazier. They wait for customers from 8 am until dusk. They only make 2,000~3,000 NK won from this job. They survived until now from the money the husband earned after 3 years of logging trees in Russia, before his retirement.

The eldest daughter, who returned home with her 5-year-old daughter, is too ill to work. The second daughter, who is still under 40 was a good merchant, but came back home with her son when she divorced her husband. The only son of the family married a woman from the outer region, but still lives at the parent’s house because he has no money. He has not even started working yet because he is still a college student. The mother is getting weaker as she continuously worries about her children. The neighbors think their grown up children are being a big burden to the parents, considering they should at least be supporting themselves. A neighbor *Jang Kyong-hwa* (60s) said, “Who expects support from their children these days? Parents will be happy if their children can at least take care of themselves, which is very rare these days.” *Kim Cheol* (60s), the parent in this story, said, “At least our children are alive, not dead. I am thankful just for that.”

An Old Lady in Her Sixties Is Upset by Loss of a Handcart

In *Sinuiju*, North *Pyongan* Province, *Han Jung-Geum* (in her sixties) makes ends meet by operating a handcart. Her husband is a social beneficiaries and works for a public enterprise as a night guard. Her younger son is serving the military service. Another son, born to her after she turned 30 years old, is a mentally retarded child. According to Ms *Han*, the son knows only how to sleep, eat, and make a bowel movement. However, she said that it was reassuring to have her older son around because he does most of work when she does delivery business using her handcart. They did not even have a handcart before. They saved every penny and were able to buy a handcart end of the last year for 100,000 NK Won. However, only a few days after 2.16 national holiday the crack down of street trading began and her handcart was confiscated. All of sudden she lost the very means of her survival. She was completely exhausted and angry. "It feels like that I would die from the anger. There is nobody that I could complain to. How could our family survive from now on?" she cried while beating her chest.

[Women/Children/Education]

A Day of a Housewife

Jo Jeong-hee (in her 40s) gives up going to bed when it is her turn to patrol her neighborhood. She has to do first patrol at midnight, and her second at 3 am, then she must report to the *dong* (district) office for confirmation. Her Neighborhood Unit has 24 households which means that her turn comes up every 23 days because the head of the Unit is exempt. *Jo* said, “When it is a windy night, a clever person just knocks on the door and leaves, but a stubborn person continuously knocks on the door until someone responds. When awoken like this, it is really hard to get back to sleep.”

Because at 5 a.m., the electric power comes on for a little while, she uses a water pump to get water. Then she cooks breakfast and wakes up her family and sends them to work. Sometimes she needs to attend an early morning cleaning and work for her community. Since around seven in the morning, peddlers of rice and eggs from countryside cry out “cheap” to sell their products. They usually leave their hometown at midnight and walk about 6-8 miles. A little bit later, traders of grains, noodles, or popping corns come swarming about. She has a general meeting every week and spends all day or morning studying literature through movies and observing other classes before national holidays.

After begging *Kkotjebis* (homeless) pass by, she goes to a market to trade at 2 pm. *Jo* said, “A person is not a machine, so one could be sick and miss one’s duty. However, too many people miss their duty, sometimes intentionally, and thus they have made a regulation that a person should pay 2,000 NK Won each time they miss their classes or community work such as collecting compost. As a person can barely make 2,000-3,000 NK won for a day’s trade at a market, people grumble about the 2,000 NK won fine but they cannot avoid it, so they pay.”

Because there are 20 people in a unit, the fines collected could be 30,000-40,000 NK won. “When they have the End of Year Recapitulation, they usually dine together or have a tea party. Since January of this year we have paid fines for manure, playground construction, and other contributions, we were unable to contribute for the dinner. We should invite the Headperson of Democratic Women’s Union and the Chief of the Management Committee for a dinner, but we just gave each person 20,000 NK won. We used the collected fine in this way. Although the Headperson of Democratic Women’s Union works all day in a cold office, she does not receive any money or ration, and therefore we need to support her in this way.”

From dawn she has to participate in common activities as well as trading for her living without any rest, but when she comes home, she has to do her domestic chores. *Jo* said that she could endure the lack of sleep and fatigue. She just wishes that she could live even one day without worrying about food, and sighs wondering whether that day would ever come.

The *Wonsan Kkotjebi* Welfare Institution Is Conducting Education Temporarily

This year, *Wonsan Kkotjebi* (homeless) Welfare Institution in *Kangwon* Province began teaching its children how to write. Until December 25 of last year, this organization dispatched some children to the Stepmother’s Institution or elementary school nearby, but they had 60 more *Kkotjebi* this year. The schools informed the Institution that they could not accept any more children. The Stepmother’s Institution usually did not want to teach these children because these children frequently ran away. Last year, the Party politically forced

them to receive *Kkotjebis*, but now they refused accepting them this year because of the excessive number of students. In this context, the Welfare Institution is teaching children temporarily. Specifically, they hope to graduate those middle school age children and send them as the shock troop brigades to other provinces.

"I'll Take Care of My Brother"

Ryang Jeong-hak (12) and *Jeong-hyeok* (9) lived a happy life with the love of a mother and father until last year. The sound of laughter and singing never ended in their home even without enough food for everyone. Although their father could not work at the factory due to chronic sickness, he took care of the housework, cleaning and organizing in the house. Fixing the broken door and sharpening knives was part of the father's share of work. In an effort to earn money for her husband's medicine and food for family, the mother owned a traveling pre-owned clothes business. It usually took a week to ten days for her to return home once she left, but they children considered it fun to wait for their mother to come back home. Their mother always came back with something to eat whether it was flour or corn. On days when their mother made dinner after her return home, the whole family would have a song contest in the living room. The elder brother sang while his father clapped and his younger brother danced. Their mother clapped with a smile on her face. There was no electricity in their home, but one candle brightened up the entire house.

Their happy days did not last long. On November 7th of last year, the children's mother died in a car accident during a business trip. There was not enough time for the children to grieve because they had to beg for food once it began to run out. Their father's chronic disease deteriorated rapidly. Finally, his condition worsened to the point where he could not use his hands to eat. He could not swallow a loaf of bread that his sons brought him to eat while repressing the desire to eat. One month after their mother's death, their father died. Two children who lost their parents had nobody to count on and no place to go. The two brothers left their home, wandered around railroad stations and market places and started the life of a *Kkotjebi*. *Jeong-hak* said, "We are not going to live like this forever. I will send my brother *Hyeokyi* to school. On behalf of my mother and father, I will look after my brother. "Today, *Jeong-hak* is buying bread for his younger brother with the money he has earned by singing the songs he once sang with his mother and father in front of *Danchun* station.

[Accidents]

A Worker Died Crushed under Rail Ties

Last January 21, in *Daeheung* district of *Danchun* City, South *Hamgyong* Province, a worker who was carrying railroad track and rail tie together was killed in an accident. *Kang young-cheol* (51) who worked on the trains for passengers and merchandise in *Danchun* branch, *Hamheung* Railroad Headquarters, lost his life because he was not able to bear the weight of railroad track. *Jeong Pil-gyue* who had worked with *Kang* at the same place said that, "Starting on the New Year's Day, we had meeting everyday, shouting 'Strive hard for normal railway operations.' However, labors like us are miserable – we have nothing to eat or we die crushed under rail. He said that *Kang* didn't eat several days so it was difficult for him to even stand-up, but he was almost pushed out for the production of rail ties."

Shim Young-hwan (40s) said that, “I feel the accidental death of *Kang* as if it were my own. He would not have died so helplessly if he had any strength. People quickly tried to save him but he soon ceased breathing.” *Shim* said that, “everyday we say let’s do normal railroad operation for a thousand *Li*, but I hope we first take care of a few inches of esophagus. Last year, many people died because it was not possible to care for this short esophagus. How could anyone expect enthusiasm from our laborers?” Those laborers in *Danchun* branch considered the safety accidents as caused by hunger. This branch has about 50 passenger cars but operates about 20, and the rest of them are idle because they could not repair them due to lack of material. There are about 100 cargo cars idling in the *Danchun* Station because they were not repaired in time, causing some problem.

[Commentary]

North Korea's Food Shortage and *Jopyongtong's* Statement

North Korea's Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland (*Jopyongtong*; 조평통) made it clear in a statement that they cannot guarantee the safety of civil aviation in the East Sea. The statement baffles many people that are eager to have peace, exchanges, and cooperation between North and South Korea. For the past year, North Korea has criticized South Korea's North Korean policy as “Crude negation of national reconciliation and unity,” “An open challenge to peace and prosperity,” “Unjustifiable regression away from unification.” Now, they are creating a volatile and heightened state of tension.

In 1949, the international community adopted an agreement that civilians should not be harmed and be protected even during wartime. Having spoken to the safety of civilian aircrafts as a means to pressuring South Korea means that North Korea gives up its international cause. North Korea should withdraw the statement immediately and guarantee the safety of civilian aircrafts and vessels operating on the East Sea.

Recently, North Korea has been strengthening their internal social control while maintaining an offensive diplomatic stance at the same time. This is not much of a reaction to the United States and South Korea for their North Korean policies. Rather, it appears to be coming from North Korea’s internal anxiety. The rumor regarding *Kim Jong-Il's* health problem and the issue of the heir, which the majority of South Korean media is interested in, are not the key. So far, the results of tracing the changes in North Korean society indicate that it is just energy and food shortage problems, which is swaying the foundation of North Korean society. With their material resources being drained out, the North Korean government is trying to strengthen the internal control by diverting the attention to the hostile forces outside North Korea and creating the system of wartime readiness.

Given that the supply of oil from the United States and China has stopped, the only support they can rely on is from Japan and South Korea. However, the support from these countries is uncertain due to the abduction issue in the case of Japan and North Korea’s offensive attitude towards South Korea. The same goes for food. The United States has stopped the food aid through WFP since September of last year because of the differences between North Korea and the U.S. over the issue of the number of Korean speaking WFP personnel available to

WFP. No one in the international community is taking the initiative no matter how strong the pleas being made are regarding the urgency of food situation in North Korea.

The North Korean energy and food shortage that is directly related to the survival of the people of North Korea cannot be solved by itself. Above all, the accelerating dissolution of family demonstrates how serious repercussions of the food shortage can be as a social problem. In cases of the vulnerable class where the person who feeds the family, mainly the mother, is injured or dies in accident during the last farm hardship period almost automatically suffers family dissolution. Deepening family dissolutions and the increase in the number of drifters naturally weakens societal control, which leads to social unrest. Stabilizing the vulnerable class is the way to improve the stability of North Korean society. It is deplorable that North Korean authorities only focus on external offensive despite the need of national measures that can help these people.

Now the frozen land is going to thaw out and it is time to hurry to get ready for farming. Still there is lack of fertilizer and workforce in the rural areas where many people died during the spring hardship period. Therefore, it will not be easy to prepare for the coming spring. The stronger the tension between North and South Korea, and the more South and North Korean governments ignore the difficulties of people and concentrate on the political offensive, the bigger the suffering will be for North Korean people. The spring has come. However, the situation on the Korean Peninsula is being ignored.

[Investigative Report]

During the summer of 1997, I Kept My Mouth Shut

August 1997 was a time when many people died and the public sentiment became confused and full of fear. Behind the scenes, party leaders talked about more than a million deaths. During this time, I was busy traveling to areas such as the Ports of Chungjin, Heungnam and *Nampo*, trying to get some supply of food. One day, I went to *Nampo* Port in *Nampo* City, South Pyongan Province to receive 15 MT of long-grain rice. Aware that many laborers of our company were dying, I kept working throughout the night to receive it. When I got back, the Party Secretary asked me to release it to the high ranking party leaders. I was stunned and said, "I can't do it." He then pulled his party rank and told me to do it without asking any questions. I raised my voice, "I cannot do it." Many laborers were watching us.

"This grain is meant for laborers. Why should we give it up to our superiors? Can't you see the dying laborers of this company?"

"Do whatever the party tells you to do. Why do you make so much noise?"

"After we subtract so much for the Party leaders, what will be left for the laborers?"

"Send it to Party leaders without any further arguments."

However hard I shouted, it did not seem to make any difference. Eventually, I was demoted to the status of an ordinary laborer and had to endure a hard life. I felt so wronged that I started a rumor that all the food supply meant for the laborers was being taken by the high ranking party leaders. This rumor spread so widely that the families of those who starved to death began to raise their voices in protest. Public sentiment became heated and many other

people joined in. Finally, complaints reached the Central Party and they started an investigation. This forced my superiors to transfer me to a higher rank, but they asked me to keep my mouth shut.

I kept my mouth shut during the investigation. Until I retired, I was rewarded with an easier life than many other people. I sold my soul and the souls of many who starved to death to save my family and myself.

Ten years passed. Another food crisis started last year. Whenever I watch people collapse because of starvation, what I did in the past really bothers me. I am reaching the age of seventy, what do I have to fear? The thought that I caused some people to lose their lives due to starvation continues to upset me.

Wielding power and treating lives with as much respect as a piece of dried grass. This is the reality today of the *Rodong* Party, founded by our Great Leader, *Kim Il-Song*, for the poor and helpless people. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea has turned into a country where those in power wield such power however they like. How many lives could I have saved if I had not been blinded by power those many years ago? What if I had helped to distribute that long-grain rice to those laborers? There are not that many days left for me to live. I will not be able to close my eyes when I die, fearful of what I would see. How could I ask for forgiveness from those perished souls? 



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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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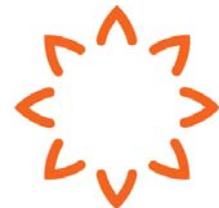
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