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Reading North Korea 2008 Through “North Korea’s Nationwide Report (Public Lecture Materials for Party Leaders and General Public)”
In North Korea 2008, What Was Accomplished and What Was Not?

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[Hot Topics]
Residents File Grievances against Severe Tortures Occurring at Beopdong County Police Station in Kangwon Province
Residents including the family of suspects have been complaining so much about severe tortures to suspects occurring at the police station of Beopdong County, Kangwon Province. A man in his thirties who wanted to be anonymous said, “At a preliminary hearing, if you do not answer right away or if you just say you do not know, you get kicked and punched immediately.” He also said that he witnessed suspects were beaten with an electric baton. Suspects died of frequent tortures during interrogation. On November 12, a resident of Geumpyong-ri was caught when robbing a laboratory at a middle school. During a preliminary hearing, he could not bear severe torture and hurt himself by pounding his head against the wall. Consequently, he died from excessive bleeding. His family went to the police station and made an objection that he died from severe torture and threat. Before he died, his family had a chance to see him at the police station. They said that during their visit
he looked terrible, abnormal, and psychologically insecure. As the family continuously protested against the police, the Safety Bureau forced the family out of the police station and prohibited the family of other suspects seeing them as well.

[Economy]

Hamheung Paper Factory Was Decided To Close
The Cabinet decided to close a paper factory in Hamheung City, South Hamgyong Province. The factory machines imported from foreign countries are still working well but have not been operational for over eight years due to lack of raw materials. According to the Cabinet, about 600 factory workers will be relocated to other factories and enterprises. The Housing Enterprise (살림주택사업소) will take over and convert it into residential houses.

Production in Gohgeonwon Coal Mine Slows Down by High Number of Absent Workers
Gohgeonwon Coal Mine in Saebyul County, North Hamgyong, is experiencing difficulty in coal productions due to absent workers. Since Saebyul County became a model area for a farmer’s market and the general market was closed, it became difficult for coal mine workers to sell coals and their lives worsened. Since they could not trade coal for food, the number of people who did go to work and either ran away with their family or committed various crimes increased. Coal mine workers say the reason they do not go to work is that they cannot endure hard labor without eating. They also complain how they can survive without a market. By the end of November, less than half the workers go to work at Gohgeonwon Coal Mine. The manager and Party officials including the secretary immediately reported the names of absent workers to the police station. On November 28th, twelve people were arrested in just one day and sent to the Labor Discipline Center (노동단련대). Despite strict disciplines, attendance rate is not increasing and only complaints about party officials are increasing.

North Hamgyong Province Party says, “Onsung County should take care of the problem with Gohgeonwon Coal Mine Workers”
The secretary of the Saebyul County Party in North Hamgyong Province reported to the Province Party that the normal operation of the coal mine is difficult due to lack of labor. As a response, the Province Party ordered the Onsung County party to take care of the problem with Gohgeonwon coal mine workers. The Onsung County Party started adjusting the number of workers at each of enterprises and placing them at the Gohgeonwon Coal Mine. On December 1, party officials gathered at the playground of a middle school in Saebyul County to encourage their active voluntary participation and take initiative actions during hard times. At the same time, members of Youth Union (청년동맹) of Saebyul County is encouraging its members by saying, “We must become leaders in hard work of coal mining.” They are also promising that workers with three years of coal mining labor would be granted a party membership.
[Food]

_Gwail_ County’s Apple Farm Distributing Apples for Food_

An apple farm in the Fruit-Tree General Bureau (과수총국) of _Gwail_ (Fruit) County in South _Hwanghae_ Province, distributed apples as food due to insufficient food rations. The farm provided 200 kg of apple per farmer for food as stored rations only consisted of 4-months worth of food. This was the first year to ration apples as food. Many farmers are already moving away from farming to retailing apples in anticipation of next year’s food shortage. The Fruit Farm police station said, “We are going to send those farmers who resist working to the Farm Discipline Center (농장단련대).”

“As Crushed Corn Becomes a Luxury, People Use Corn Powder to Make Watery Soup”

An official of _Sepo_ County, _Kangwon_ Province said that grain production has increased this year as compared to last year. On the contrary, workers at a grain-milling factory revealed that this was hard to believe despite an increase in cereal production this year. This is because they witness fewer people coming to the grain-milling factory as compared to last year. It is normal for this time of year to see bags and bags of processed corn, but this year we are lucky to see even a few in a day. In addition, many people are requesting powdered corn instead of crushed corn. A woman in her forties came to a grain-milling factory at _Bookchung-ri_ for corn powder and said, “Eating crushed corn for a meal is a waste. Pulverizing the corn into flour will help to make the rations last longer. Watery corn soup is much better for digestion, and by adding some vegetables into the soup we can also increase the quantity.” Old people do not come to the grain-milling factory. Instead, they grind the corn into flour themselves. They believe grinding grains of corn at home is much more efficient than sending them to the mill.

[Politics]

_Moonchun_ County Is In a State Of Emergency Due To Stolen School Uniforms

On November 27, the Safety Bureau issued a state of emergency after more than 80 sets of school uniforms and 60 pairs of shoes were stolen from the distribution warehouse at _Geumchun_ Commercial Management Center (금천상업관리소) in _Moonchun_ County, _Kangwon_ Province. After investigation, the Safety Bureau announced that a group of military soldiers were responsible for the theft. It asked residents not to let any military personnel in their house and to report if stolen goods are brought to them. In the meantime, it mobilized all patrol officers, including the police officers regulating bicycle riders and pants wearing women, to catch the thieves. The reason is to search for any signs of thieves who might come to the market to trade the stolen goods. During its concentration on catching the thieves its regulation on general residents loosened relatively, residents in the area commented, “It is so much better to live our lives now.” They also said, “It is unfortunate that things were stolen, but our lives are so much better without harsh regulations”. _Lee Jeong-soon_ (age 42) commented, “I hope the police officers no longer care to harass the residents anymore.” She also said laughing, “I heard women are freely riding bicycles and wearing pants in other counties. I don’t understand why they are enforcing such strict and harsh regulations in our county. I know the thieves must be caught, but I hope they won’t be caught any time soon.”
Two Additional Border Guard Divisions Deployed To the National Border Area
Starting mid-November, two additional board guard divisions were being deployed to the national border area including North Pyongan Province, Jagang Province, Ryanggang Province, and North Hwanghae Province. According to an officer of National Border Guard in Hyesan City, Ryanggang Province, this was due to the increasing number of river crossing and illegal trading as, after autumn harvest, the winter started and the river froze.

Park Hyong-cheol Brother's New House Confiscated
In Dukchun city, South Pyongan Province, newly built luxury houses have been under investigation by the Anti-Socialist Activities group. Chief Manager of Party Member Registry Department, Park Hyong-cheol was also investigated about how he funded the construction of one of the biggest and most luxurious homes in Dukchun City; which was reported to have cost at least $26,000 to build. He asserted to have borrowed the money from his younger brother who is working for the Pyongyang Rakwon Trade Company (평양락원총국). Led on by Park's testimony, his younger brother, Park Geum-cheol, was immediately called in for further interrogation by the police. According to the investigation, Park Geum-cheol accepted three bribes of 300,000 Yuan for helping a Chinese shipping company acquire trade concessions. The house has been confiscated while a final decision is pending.

[Society]
Military Personnel Charged With Engaging In Business
In Danchun city in South Hamgyong Province, an artillery corp. was ordered to procure military provision from Hyesan City, Ryanggang Province. The price of corn in Hyesan city was 750 NK Won per kg, while it cost only 570 NK Won per kg in Bookchung and Leewon Counties in the same province. The battalion commander realized the large price difference and decided to buy the cheaper corn. He shared the profit of about 8,000,000 NK Won* with some high-ranking officials, which became a problem at the military unit. The military officer stated that, "They didn't carry through orders from the higher ranking officers and engaged in business as military personnel". As a result, they were punished severely. The battalion commander of Support Bureau was ordered to face a military trial and all soldiers who shared the profit were discharged from the military.

*AUS$1.00 is approximately 3,400 NK Won

A Masked Robber Sent Back Home
On November 22, around 6:00 pm, at Gwangjooryong Hill in Chungarm District of Chungjin City in North Hamgyong Province, a woman in her forties ran into a masked robber while she was delivering bags of corn by bike. The masked robber said to her, "Turn around, sit down and stay put". She was afraid of getting hurt in the middle of nowhere so she just did everything that she was told to do. A while later, she turned around to see the robber stumbling away with her bike and at that time two men in their thirties were walking towards her from the other side. She shouted at the two men, "Get the robber there!" The men hurried over to where the woman was and caught the masked robber surprisingly easily. When they
uncovered the mask, an emaciated man in his seventies was squinting from the pain of being hit on the forehead.

The old man pulled himself together and gave excuses as tears swelled up in his eyes, “My children cannot support me. Nobody feeds me. I have been barely surviving by selling sunflower seeds until they were confiscated by a sheriff who kicked me in public, yet nobody stopped to help me....” The woman got her bike back and decided not to report the old man to law enforcers. “He was abandoned by his own children. I pity him. His life must be tough. I got my bike and corns back, so there is no need for me to press charges.” She thanked the two men who helped her and left the scene. The two men also said that they felt pity for the old man. Even young people have a hard time surviving and continued on their way.

Head of Household Commits’ Suicide after Wife and Son Gets Arrested
Last November 27, Moon Gwan-pil (58), a railroad worker of Seoheung County, North Hwanghae Province, committed suicide by jumping in front of a train while working on the rail. He was depressed and discouraged by the arrest and sentencing of 12 and 8 years of reeducation received by his wife and son respectively. According to statements from his co-workers, Mr. Moon has mentioned that he did not have any courage to take care of his remaining two children after his son got arrested. On the other hand, his co-workers who were on site with Mr. Moon were criticized for not doing enough to stop the suicide.

Bike Delivered from Pyongsung to Rajin by Rail Was Stripped of Everything but the Frame
Recently, an outlandish thing has happened to Kim Seong-ho (35) at Rasun in North Hamgyong Province. He waited for a bike that his eldest brother living in Pyongsung sent him to help him transport goods to trade in the market. Before the train arrived, he went to the station and anxiously waited for the bike, but he received a skeleton with no chain, wheels, and other useful parts. Kim Seong-ho immediately went to the freight office to complain about the bike, but the staff turned it down and said, “Sending a bike by rail is a stupid thing to do.” There was no one to take responsibility for the bike, so he could not complain anymore. Lee Young-sun (38) said, “When people send packages by rail, many items get stolen. Maybe nine packages out of ten are not delivered properly by rail, so it is impossible to trust the system to send any parcel. Although it may cost a little bit more, but it’s much better to ask a person you know to deliver the item rather than rely on the freight system.” Kim Seong-ho said, “My brother did not think of sending the bike by rail in these days. We are not idiots and we understand the situation. We asked a friend working at the station to insure that the bike arrived in one peace and gave him some money, hence this was unexpected.”

Due To Power Shortages, Jungpyong County Has Trouble Processing Grain
Since November of this year, electric power shortages have become a worsening problem in Jungpyong County in South Hamgyong Province. Districts in Jungpyong County such as Goochang-ri, Dogsan-ri, Bongdae-ri, Hyangdong-ri, and Jangheung-ri have received power only once a week. Residents are also affected by these shortages. Above all, farmers are tremendously concerned about not being able to process the newly harvested grains. Due to this situation, mortars for grinding the grain have been selling well in the market.
The Homeless (*Kkotjebi*) Gather Following Rumors of Good Harvest in *Gohwon* County

In *Gohwon* County, the border area of South *Hamgyong* Province and *Kangwon* Province, the homeless (*kkotjebies*) are remarkably growing in numbers caused by rumors spread that farmers in *Gohwon* County succeeded in a good harvest this year. It is easy to commit a theft because there are many places where grain is left to dry along the roadside or around fields. Ordinarily, about 40-50 homeless (*kkotjebies*) reside near *Gohwon* station but on many occasions; this number can jump to over 150. These people, loafing around in groups and committing random thefts gathering up even laundry hanging out on clotheslines, are becoming a growing problem for residents in the area. The homeless (*kkotjebies*) exchange information at the station, which is their base, about places that are more abundant to steal from than others are. A teenage *kkotjebi* who is new to *Gohwon* County said, “I moved after hearing rumors that farming went well this year at *Gohwon* at *Wonsan* station.”

**Paying to Use Private Restrooms to Avoid *Kkotjebies* in Public Stalls**

Passengers at *Pyongsung* station in South *Pyongan* Province pay 100 NK Won to use the restrooms in nearby private homes instead of public toilets at the station. As the weather continues to get colder, the *kkotjebies* loitering in *Pyongsung* station are swarming, even in the restrooms. The homeless (*kkotjebies*) have set up their spots in restrooms, despite the bad smell to stand the cold and keep out the wind. As nature calls, passengers have been forced to resort to nearby restrooms at private residences to avoid the *kkotjebies*. Due to the frequency of demand, many residents have started to charge 100 NK Won per use.

**Fellow *Kkotjebies* Take Shoes from a Dead *Kkotjebi***

On December 2, a 10-year-old *kkotjebi* boy was found frozen to death at *Wonsan* station in *Kangwon* Province. According to station employees, a few days earlier a child was rolling on the floor, complaining of stomach pain after eating raw tofu beans from his pocket. There was a foul odor on his pants, which were contaminated with excrement and urine because he was unable to move around. He could not eat the beans due to stomach pain and ended up freezing to death because he could not bear hunger and cold. There were some leftover beans and kernels of corn in the pocket of the dead child. As their friend died, fellow *kkotjebies* gathered to scavenge food from inside his clothes. Some of the children strived to remove the shoes from the frozen feet of the dead child. Another child took the corpse's jacket off, as all the beans were gone.

**[Accidents]**

**Soldiers Killed in a Fistfight over Stolen Potatoes**

One of the soldiers from *Ranam* Automobile factory in *Chungjin* City, North *Hamgyong* Province, was killed in a fight that broke out while he was stealing potatoes in the *Daehongdan* County of *Ryanggang* Province. The soldiers were on their way back to *Chungjin* after working at a potato farm in *Daehongdan* County. The fight broke out when the potato farm patrol stopped 3 vehicles that had been loaded with potatoes. One of them ended up dying, and the police officers from the potato farm who arrived later arrested 14
soldiers at the scene. The soldiers were charged with the crime of severely damaging military-civilian relations and were turned over to the 9th Corps Security Bureau (9 군단보위부).

[Commentary]
Torturing at Law Enforcement Agencies Must Be Eradicated
It has been reported that a crime suspect killed himself because he could not endure torturing during interrogation in Beopdong County. The family of the dead man protested against torture, but they were kicked out of the police station and other family visits to the station were denied as well. This case adds to the serious nature of this issue as it demonstrates that the authorities in Beopdong County have no consideration for human rights in the treatment of suspects and their families. The protests against torture by the police also demonstrates the human rights abuses people have to endure all the time.

Among the human rights treaties of the United Nations, North Korea has already joined the 1981 International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, which was also embraced by approximately 2/3 of all UN members. As such, in order to uphold the universal value of human rights, they must adhere to the principle of a ‘torture ban’ that they have promised to the people of the world, and they have the duty to guarantee the right to a fair trial as well. In addition, the Criminal Law and Criminal Procedure Law amended in 2004 also contains a ban on the torture of citizens by government agencies and the right to receive a fair trial. Nevertheless, it appears that the use of torturing during interrogation is widespread and blatant among law enforcement agencies and their agents.

We don’t know the details of the investigation that provoked the protest at the police station, or what interrogation might have been needed. However, the use of torture was obviously too cruel. Now, the majority of people are facing a food shortage problem. Under the current circumstances, many of the crimes are related to the issue of physical survival. There is an old saying that ‘a starving tiger never cares about the prey.’ In a situation where people die of starvation, we cannot force people to unconditionally obey the societal and legal order.

Therefore, the law enforcement agencies of North Korea ought to use discretion and leniency. This is not the time to use torture for the sake of investigation. Moreover, the North Korean government should make efforts to inform front-line law enforcement agents about the country's Criminal Law and Criminal Procedure Code and strengthen their education about human rights. In order to prevent other unnecessary deaths like this, they should punish the responsible parties and provide compensation to the victim’s family so as to resolve the grievance of the people.

[Planning a Series]
Reading North Korea 2008 Through “North Korea’s Nationwide Report (Public Lecture Materials for Party Leaders and General Public)”
In North Korea 2008, What Was Accomplished and What Was Not?
Part 5 Food Crisis, To Break Through? Or To Persuade?

“Confronting the Worldwide Problem of Food Shortage, Let’s Initiate A Struggle with Our Utmost Efforts to Resolve the Food Crisis among Ourselves” - Public Lecture Materials for Party Leaders and General Public, July Juche 97 (2008)

Cause and the Current State of Food Crisis

The tragic reports of deaths due to starvation, which started last April, seem to have finally started to become less common, with the start of the harvest season. 2008 reminded people of returning to the days of the March of Hardship as consecutive years of huge floods damage in 2006 and 2007 on top of the reduction and suspension of food aids from outside world. The new year has not brought any improvement in food crisis. Instead, a worsening situation has brought more fear for survival and pains in everyday life as well as more social unrest. It became necessary for the North Korean government to explain to its residents why the food crisis lingers. To the North Korean government, the food crisis is a not an obstacle to overcome, but an issue to persuade its residents about. The worldwide food shortage has given the North Korean government a rather persuasive excuse: it is not only the residents of North Korea, but also people all over the world who suffer from the same problem.

“Many nations in the world are trying to escape from the food shortage that is getting more severe. They ask for help from different countries as well as international organizations. However, the current situation is that food cannot be purchased even with money.”

The Lecture Material states: “Worldwide, eight hundred million people suffer from chronic hunger. Seventy three million people in Africa, including Congo, Sudan and Kenya, struggle to survive. Seven and a half million people in central America are suffering from malnutrition.”

They cite two causes for the food crisis threatening the world. Firstly, global warming causing a reduction in crops. Secondly, steep increases in crude oil prices and demands in bio-fuel are the culprits. Therefore, “People all over the world facing food crisis are shouting for help, and of course they are trying their best to find the solution.”

North Korean Food Crisis 2008

Last March, the Labor Bureau of the City of Chungjin, North Hamgyong Province announced that there are about sixty thousand families of various enterprises and factories, including the Gimchaek Steel Mill, who are suffering from hunger. This figure amounts to
around two hundred thousand people, considering each employee represents a family of three to four. Supposing the population of Chungjin to be around eight hundred thousand, a quarter of the population is suffering from hunger officially. The situation is more severe in the areas of Haeju, South Hwanghae Province and Sariwon, North Hwanghae Province, which can be considered to represent agricultural silos. Those farmers who work in the fields were physically unable to do so because of hunger. All they could do was roam around the plains and mountains to find any plant that could serve as food.

How about grain prices? Rice that used to cost 800 to 850 North Korean Won (NKW) per kg in 2007 jumped to 2,500 NKW in April, an increase of almost 300%. Corn used to cost 300 to 350 NKW per kg and now costs 1500 to 1700 per kg NKW, which was the highest price in 2007.

In June, the price of rice in North and South Hwanghae Provinces went above 4,000 NKW. Even though the price fell between 2,500 to 2,700 NKW in July, it is still difficult for ordinary people to pay such prices. Suicides, disintegration of families, and the number of Kkotjebies (homeless) and deaths from starvation noticeably increased and consequently social unrest as well has become more severe. During May, under these circumstances, improvement in U.S.-North Korea relations has brought U.S. food aid of 500,000 MT. In response, the central party sent the following unprecedented cabinet directions to all the provincial parties;

“Under the influences of our Beloved Leader and powerful People’s Army, the United States has provided a food supply of 500,000 MT of grain, starting at the end of June in Pyongyang. Everyone should do their utmost to prevent any unexpected incidents until the end of June. Spread the word of U.S. food aid as wide as possible so as to calm down the sentiments of people.” In fact, even though the initial shipment of U.S. food supply provided some breathing room to some areas, it was only a level of ‘blood in a bird’s feet.’

When the North Korean authorities did not know where to turn, the lecture material on the worldwide food crisis started to come out in July. North Korean government received the U.N. Food Inspection Team in July with a welcoming attitude. An unprecedented nationwide visit was allowed and even the poor residents were exposed, which surprised many North Korean residents.

This proves that international aid was so critical under the hardened relationship between North and South Koreas. Nevertheless, North Korean authorities kept ascribing the causes of the food crisis to external conditions; “the food shortage problem is not only with us but also many people in the world, causing deaths from starvation. The price of grain keeps increasing daily.”

The Problem of Food Shortage Is Ours to Solve

“At the present time, a worldwide shortage of food has become a serious problem. To find the solution is a critical task for us. Under any circumstances, the problem is ours to solve and no one else’s.”
Our only solution is to follow Chairman Kim Jong-Il’s guidance as above and find a solution that will feed ourselves through improved farming. Here again, North Korean authorities come back to ‘ideology.’ They claim, “Finding a solution to feed people is a ‘life or death’ request to maintain our socialism.” Feeding the population has become vital to maintaining socialism, a territory in ideology.

“Our Beloved Leader has taught us that finding a solution to feed people is as important as defending the nation. He has taught us that the breakthrough in establishing a strong nation starts with finding solutions for the problems in electricity and food.” He places the problem of food and the problem of national defense side by side. This is hardly imaginable in a nation where national security is considered the utmost. This shows how serious the food shortage was in July.

Solution by self-reliance, but business as usual

As they keep saying that finding a solution by self-reliance is as important as industry of national defense, their means of achieving it is business as usual. Specific alternatives are only for the workers assigned to the task. A big picture is presented to the workers and they are to set up the policies and execute them. Carrying out thoroughly the “seed revolution,” “agricultural revolution of potato,” and “two-crop policy” is the fundamental direction in our style solution for feeding people.

The problem is that the presentation of fundamental directions is not realistic. The current situation prohibits small-plot agriculture and lacks fertilizer, vinyl sheets and other agricultural material. There is not a thing that might motivate people to increase agricultural products. Of course, there exists a direction for this particular aspect, too.

“Leaders and workers assigned to importing and producing agricultural materials are responsible for establishing revolutionary policies so as to be able to provide the farms with electricity, oil, chemical fertilizer, pesticides, agricultural machinery and other equipment and material. They should also guarantee a timely supply of agricultural equipments and material in cooperation with other political organizations and production facilities.” This statement may sound sensible. Guaranteeing a supply of agricultural equipments and material is important enough for enhancing agricultural production, important enough to attach ‘revolutionary’ as part of the task. However, it is not realistic. The North Korean government may believe that ‘ideology’ may work as a magic wand to create ‘something’ from ‘nothing.’ The truth is that no matter what revolution may be invoked and what political organizations might be organized, no agricultural equipments could be produced out of thin air.

The North Korean government is trying to persuade its residents to calm down in the midst of a food crisis, providing the excuse of a worldwide food shortage. But it can only be a patchwork solution. It is true that food shortage is a problem worldwide. However, it appears that North Korea’s food crisis is the result of its failed policies in agriculture. North Korea should recognize that the food crisis is of the utmost importance and that the solution can be found only through combining the wisdom of both North and South Korea together.
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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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