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“Research Institute for North Korean Society of Good Friends, in order to bring news of the food crisis in North Korea more accurately and quickly, will increase its e-newsletter frequency to more than one issue per week. As such, the release dates might shift. Thank you for your understanding and attention to this looming crisis. We at Good Friends hope to be a bridge between the North Korean people and the world.”

The Party, Government, and Military, Going All-Out For Alternative Food

The Party has been continuously issuing guidelines about alternative food while deaths by starvation are increasing. All foreign trade agencies in the Party, military, administration (정무원), and local governments, are encouraging everyone to utilize alternative sources of food. Accordingly, principals of each agency is summoning relevant meetings and pleading to spend all their assets on getting alternative food.

Eunryul County - Due to Continued Death by Starvation, Emergency Food Distributed with Rice Purchased from Traders

In the collective farm in Eunryul County (은륜군), South Hwanghae Province, except rationing of two months' food supply there had been no food rationing this year. At first, there were one or two residents dying from starvation, but by the end of May, there are 2-3 deaths per day at each Ri (village level). Even though farmer mobilization has started, officers of the committee of collective farm management cannot call farmers to work because they understand farmers' suffering from starvation. As no actions has been taken by the County and the situation has gotten worse, the County borrowed food from wealthy traders and distributed it last May 24th. Son Kwang-hyek (52) said “We couldn't distribute food to all in the village (Ri). We collected food from individual traders in advance and distributed 4kg of whole corn and 2kg of rice (입쌀) per household to the family almost at the death's door. Then we gave 2kg of whole corn and 1kg of rice to households in second worst condition and we did not give any food to the households who are not likely to starve to death.” The food distributed at this time is supposed to be repaid in 3kg per 1 kg after the harvest. Even though the interest rate is pretty high because it should be paid in the three times amount of the borrowed foods, officers in farms said there was no other option. The farmers will eventually carry the burden as they will have to repay three times more food from their rationed amount. However, even such (high interest) food is scarce because of too high demand.

An official said: “Other areas will be in the same situation. Currently the regions suffering from the starvation are Ahnak County (안악군), Gwail County (과일군), Jangyeon County(장연군), Ryongyeon County (룡연군) and Ongjin County(웅진군) in South Hwanghae province including our Eunryul County. The food crisis is at the apex right now so people don’t care what they must repay later on.”

A Chief of a Collective Farm at Hamju County Was Fired for Distributing Rice

A Chief of a collective farm management committee at Hamju County acquired some rice on emergency basis as the members of the farm did not report for work. A resident said “The farmers are dying of hunger, and they do not have the strength to instruct other people that reported to work, so the Chief was searching everywhere for food.” This Chief went to his friend in some could not instruct other people cannot report for work, and the Chief director seems to ask around foods in various ways as farmers started to starve to die and could not give any instruction about how to work to volunteers who work instead. The director borrowed 5 MT of rice from his friend in Pyongsung and distributed it to the farmers. The public prosecutor office in the County and the County Party learned of this incident and fired the Chief. They pointed out that due to his mistake the State will have to pay back 10 MT for 5 MT borrowed food, caused a loss of 5 ton. The farmers in this area were enraged: “We could have died without the food. How can the government fire him? The government does not care about the people starving to death.”

Farmers' Death Toll Caused By Starvation Increased Dramatically

The number of farmers dying from starvation at Hamju County and in agricultural areas around Hamhung City in South Hamkyong Province has been increased dramatically. The residents usually kept quiet upon other villagers’ death but now say that people are dying not from illness but from hunger. Although it is a nationwide farming mobilization period, the farmers barely go to work like farmers in Hwanghae Province. Many farmers have difficulty moving their bodies while lying down and say that they cannot move their fingers.

Han Tae-ok (43) said “there is a big difference between a pure grass porridge and grass porridge with a few ears of corn. When we eat the first one we cannot have any strength to move. It is like drinking water. It is almost like washing the mouth so that we are very hungry. We don’t have any vitality and feel dizzy. Even lying down is difficult; how can we farm?”

Deaths by Starvation in Kangwon Province, Too

People are starving to death in Pyongkang County(평강군) and Sudong mine area in Kangwon Province. It is common that people die of hunger easily in mountainous and isolated areas like Kangwon because it is hard for them to travel for food.

People in Agricultural Areas Who Could Not Even Borrow Rice Are Desperate

People are lucky who can borrow foods even at high interest. Farms located at Nammin-dong (남민동) and Ryucho-ri (류초리) in the suburbs of Sinuiju who could not even

borrow anything are jumping up and down, wringing their hands. Even in the last year they can borrow foods at the rate of 1.2kg repayment per 1 kg when farmers cannot report to work due to food shortage. It was a kind of informal practice to make farmers work in farming season. However, even this has been difficult this year because other organizations also do not have any food available to lend. Although workers, officers and students have set out to support farmers, they lament, clutching their empty stomach that they have no strength left to work.

Eunduk County, Starving Workers Absent From Work at a Munitions Factory

Many workers have been absent from a munitions factory in Eunduk County due to the lack of food. The factory has also been unable to supply food and because the workers have no other income than from the factory, this has severely affected the factory. Workers who skip breakfast are often not able to focus on their responsibilities. Kang Sung-in (57) said, “Workers often just sit or lie at workplaces because of their low energy. Even after they go back home, they just lie all day long. I have heard that for every place of work, 5-6 workers are on the verge of death due to starvation.”

Pyongyang’s Distress Incomparable to Those Outside of the Capital

Pyongyang’s residents are also suffering from starvation these days, however, they do not know how miserable it is in the rural areas. Hwang Byoung-sik (47) testified that there is a significant difference in the degree of starvation between Pyongyang and other areas, “...though some die from starvation here, the deaths are only known to those who witness them. News of these deaths are kept silent, especially those outside of Pyongyang. However difficult times are for those in Pyongyang, they do not compare to those outside the capital city. In the outer regions, people are dying at an alarming rate. In Sariwon, people are very concerned that all the residents will die without food in June.”

Residents of Pyongyang Distrusts in the Party after Witnessing Life outside Pyongyang

Kim Pan-suk (76) introduced himself as a decorated war veteran, with many victories in battle. After the war, he settled down in Pyongyang and never left. However, sometime ago, he left the city to attend the funeral of his youngest brother in Jungpyong, South Hamkyong Province. “I finally visited them only after his death, for his funeral. I did not realize that they lived so desperately. This year, we are in hardship, too. But, when I went to Jungpyong, I saw houses, people, I could not believe what I saw. Are they really houses and people? My youngest brother’s house and family was the worst of what I saw. I wish he had had money, then, he would have not died. If he had had food, he would not have died.” He could not continue when mentioning his dead brother. He was regretting that he had not visited his brother earlier. His dead brother has three daughters, but none could afford to take care of their father because they themselves were in distress. His daughters did not have enough money to buy a casket, so they buried him covered with some cloth. They cried over their father’s death lamenting their father suffered a lot when alive and even in death, being buried without a casket.

Mr. Kim said, “The government is advertising that in 2012, our country will become strong, and all residents will live in apartments eating meat stew and rice. But, look at

the reality. Our industries and agriculture have been paralyzed for a long time, and our living conditions are getting worse and worse. Our trust in the Party is dissipating more and more.” He lamented, “How good will it be if we are able to live without worrying about food!”

“Would Rather Die Than Live”

As June has begun with food depleted, everyone is moaning painfully. Many people are even saying that they would rather die than live like this. Their pains fuel their growing distrust in the Party as well. One high official in Pyongyang said, “Unless food is imported from abroad, by July and August, there will be an unprecedented amount of deaths, much more than those of the Arduous March(고난의 행군). If we starve people to death again, Ideological warfare won’t work on our people however hard we try to emphasize it. People are already turning their backs against us. However, still, people are naïve and do not disclose their feelings, but they will change soon.” Mr. Koh Chang-hyun (49) said, “As time goes by, more and more people will not believe in the Party’s directions or policies because of their continued deception. Some people say that they are curious what the Party will say as 2012 comes while it is telling us our country we will become a strong country. They are laughing away at speeches to this effect at every lecture or public meeting.”



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