

Food Distribution to Resume for the First Time in Seven Years

A month into Kim Jong-un's ascension to power, it is reported that food distribution is likely to resume nationwide in North Korea.

Many experts evaluate this as a symbolic measure to propagate the construction of a powerful economy and improve the lives of the people. For the North Koreans, the most apparent and obvious economic accomplishment is the improvement of the food situation. Thus, North Korea is most likely to take action to normalize food rations as its top priority.

According to a statement made by a South Korean government official on January 20, "Kim Jong-un and his leadership will begin the food distribution as a way to prove to its people about changes forthcoming in the new regime." He also added, "After years of propagation for the building of a strong and prosperous nation, they must demonstrate it to the people with noticeable results."

The amount of rations to be provided is still unclear. However, the source emphasized that it was very likely for rice rations to resume, especially with the approaching national holidays, such as the Lunar New Year and Kim Jong-il's birthday (February 16).

He also commented that "the food distribution will be a nationwide movement and the food ration system will go into effect based on the distribution network of available food supply."

According to the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP), North Korea's food production in 2011 compared to the previous year rose by 8.5 percent, sitting at about 5.48 million tons (of rough grains or 4.66 million tons of milled grains).

The minimum amount of food consumption in North Korea is 5.4 million tons, but a shortage of about 400,000 tons is expected, including the international food aid and industrial food imports. Among the recent years, this marks the largest deficiency in food supply.

However, such shortages can be overcome with additional food imports and distributing mainly rice reserves.

The last national food distribution in North Korea was in 2005, seven years ago.

North Korea is also likely to exert more effort in food processing production to improve the distribution of daily necessities. With relatively little dependence on raw material imports, North Korea is planning to improve the food situation through expanding the food processing production in agricultural, fishery, and livestock industries, with less competition with Chinese products.