

## **DPRK ECONOMIC WOES STRETCH BACK TO THE 1960s**

Faced with military unrest, fuel shortages, and natural disasters, North Korea has faced economic hardships ever since 1968. This all according to recently released East German documents. The (South) Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU) has published a collection of secret German documents and pictures regarding North Korea that were gathered from a number of East German political and public institutions.

It is generally known that the North Korean economy was primarily focusing on 'building an independent economy' as the leader of the third world during the 1960s, but in the latter 1970s, was faced with South Korea's economic overtaking as it suffered a widespread slowdown.

This time, among papers released was a document from the North Korean embassy in East Germany dated February 6, 1969. The document, titled, "Information Regarding North Korea's 1968 Economic Growth" reported that "through the seizure of the USS Pueblo and the sneak attack on [South Korea's] Blue House, the military environment became very tense. Steel, cement, and other supplies were prioritized for the construction of additional defensive facilities and artillery positions, and everyone, or nearly everyone, was mobilized," worsening already existing manpower shortages.

In addition, electrical production fell off due to drought conditions, forcing ironworks and chemical factories to operate at only 50~60% of capacity. The document pointed out that coke and charcoal was not available from China on a steady basis, forcing the implementation of strict electrical-use restrictions on the general population. "There was practically no development in production for the entire year of 1968," the report evaluated.

This publication also holds many 'information reports' on China-Soviet relations, diplomatic shifts, economic policies, and a wide range of first-hand political materials from a number of

North Korea-East German joint enterprises, including the joint reconstruction project in Hamheung.

A report published by the embassy on June 24 1965 recorded, “within one week, four men from Nampo were sentenced to death for theft, adultery, or murder, and were publicly executed.” A report on October 28 revealed that “people are complaining of a never-ending rise in prices, and engineers and scientists are no longer able to make money by writing books as a side-job.”

On December 3, “One North Korean said, ‘Every year it gets more difficult to ration out necessary goods, and unification is necessary to solve the food problems.’ KINU pointed out, “These historical documents are important for understanding North Korean socialist system’s creation and development.”