

## **DPRK RICE CAPPED AT 1,000 WON PER KG**

According to the latest news from Good Friends, a South Korean human rights group focusing on North Korea, rice prices in the North remains at approximately 1,000 won per kilogram throughout the country's markets due to difficulties faced by North Koreans with no money to purchase food. While prices on fuel and manufactured goods continue to rise, due to a lack of funds for food purchases, there has been no climb in the price of rice.

Throughout North Korea's key cities during the month of December, the highest prices were found in North Hamkyung Province's Chungjin, and Yangkang Province's Hyesan cities, where rice was being sold for 1,100 won per kilogram, while the lowest price was found in South Hwanghae Province's Haeju, where rice was going for 730 won per kilogram.

Because the majority of North Koreans have turned to corn and other grains as their staple grain, prices on corn have not fallen despite the completion of last year's harvest. Hamheung, North Hamkyung Province, recorded the highest price, where corn was being sold for 480 won per kilogram, while the lowest price was found in Sariwon, North Hwanghae Province, where corn cost 300 won per kilogram.

In Songwha, South Hwanghae Province, several soldiers were dishonorably discharged after stealing and eating cattle from a local village, while soldiers in Hyeryung, North Hamkyung Province were arrested for stealing corn off the threshing floor of a local collective farm. In Wonsan, Kangwon Province, seventeen ex-soldiers were running an organized criminal group

employing strong-arm tactics to gather bus passengers to whom they would offer goods and tout services, until the operation was shut down by local law enforcement. North Korean authorities label these groups 'anti-establishment' or 'subversive anti-government' groups. Good Friends pointed out that it is the chronic food shortages that have caused such severe conditions.

It was also noted that many North Koreans are also becoming more superstitious and seeking out the services of fortune tellers. It is becoming so widespread that even officers of the law, district authorities, and others who are responsible for cracking down on fortune tellers are turning to astrologists and card readers in an effort to find solutions to their problems.