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DPRK: Famine Nears (C)

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WFP assessment

Grain supplies in the public rationing system are dwindling--with distribution cut to less than 10 ounces per capita per day, roughly half the level of previous years, according to a recent WFP report. Even this level cannot be sustained. Food aid is down to a trickle--only 2,500 tons of food are scheduled for delivery next month. WFP officials report large numbers of people foraging for wild roots and grasses. Border regions are being deforested and some factories dismantled to barter lumber and scrap for Chinese flour. Some North Koreans describe their situation as the worst since the days of extreme privation during the Korean War. The WFP estimates the North is in urgent need of 470,000 tons to get the population through the autumn harvest and plans a new food alert. (SBU)

Grim outlook

The food outlook is no better for next year--this year's planting season was late, the weather has been cool and dry, some fields are unplantable, and many are still sand covered from last year's floods. Some of the international food aid is being directed to these flood-ravaged areas, expressly to feed those who are working to repair the fields. In a preliminary estimate, the FAO judges that grain yields this fall could be 10 percent below last year's poor harvest. (SBU)

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