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DPRK: Food Supply Precarious (U)

Recent western visitors to the DPRK report North Koreans appear reasonably well-fed and in better physical condition than last year, according to Embassy Seoul. Nonetheless, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Food Program (WFP) in a recent joint report concluded the North's food crisis persists and will worsen before the fall harvest. The report said the government distribution system is nearly out of grain and that rations--which were even smaller than last year--have been largely discontinued since mid-March. (C)

Comment: Food aid and commodities produced outside the state farming system, such as vegetable cultivation on small private plots, are helping North Koreans cope. But the population (some 23 million) is under stress.

_____ compared the shortages to the most serious African famines, but with a difference: in North Korea, the regime has organized the food distribution system to "spread the misery"--staving off pockets of starvation but consequently putting big parts of the population at risk. (C)

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