

Inside No



Students at Rasin Primary School perform drills before classes begin. *Inset:* Girls and boys sit on separate sides of the room.

Birth Korea

Few foreigners are allowed into Communist North Korea. On a rare visit by a Westerner, our JS reporter found a land in which many people are quietly suffering.

By C. Howerton in Najin, Democratic People's Republic of Korea

At 7 a.m. sharp, the day begins with a crackling noise from the city's loudspeakers. Patriotic speeches and war songs, with titles like "Little Tank Rushes Forward," fill the streets. Such **propaganda** provides the daily wake-up call for the citizens of Najin, North Korea. At 7:15, the city's electricity is turned on, if there is enough fuel that day.

Gu, 13, says she likes the morning music. "It gives me energy and a sense of purpose, and reminds me of what I need to do to help make my country great."

Gu is in the fifth grade at Rasin Primary School, one of the best schools in the city. To attend Rasin, kids must earn top grades; 700 hard-working students are enrolled there.

"Every month we must take an exam and then are ranked in our class according to the exam scores," says Gu. "There is a big board where the results of the exam are posted, and we have our pictures posted with our rank for everyone to see. I am in the highest level."

School begins at 8 a.m. Students line up in the front yard to exercise and parade in uni-

son. After these morning drills, the kids march single file into class. The building's halls are lined with murals depicting the military history of North Korea. Many paintings show Korean soldiers smashing the heads of their enemies, most of whom are American and Japanese soldiers.

In class, the students study math, science, languages, history, citizenship, and literature until noon. From 2 to 6 p.m., they take part in mandatory school activities, such as sports and the performing arts. Soccer and chorus are the most popular activities among the kids.

"When I grow up, I want to be a professional soccer player," says 12-year-old Rhee, echoing the wish of many boys here. "But in case I do not qualify, I am studying hard to be an engineer, like my father."

At Rasin, students perform well and the image of North Korea they

Words to Know

- **Communist:** a type of government in which the state plans and controls the economy and a single party holds power.
- **propaganda:** the communication of information to large numbers of people, especially by constant repetition and by withholding certain facts, in order to promote a cause or influence beliefs.



portray is a pleasant one. However, this is just one picture of life inside North Korea.

Food Shortages

In this **Communist** country, where the government tightly controls all aspects of life, conditions are extremely difficult. An estimated 2 million North Koreans have died of starvation since the early 1990s. A combination of natural disasters, including floods and drought, **economic sanctions** (trade restrictions) by the United States and other countries, and disastrous government policies have led to this deprivation.

Most North Koreans, who consume very little protein or fat, suffer from dietary deficiencies. Fresh vegetables and fruit are scarce, and meat, fish, and eggs are luxuries. According to the United Nations World Food Programme, the average 7-year-old North Korean boy is 8 inches shorter and about 22 pounds lighter than a boy of the same age in South Korea.

The Korean War

From 1910 until the end of World War II, the Korean Peninsula was a Japanese colony. After Japan's defeat in 1945, Korea was divided. The Soviet Union controlled the North, and the U.S. occupied the South. Separate governments were formed in 1948. Since then, North Korea has had only two leaders, Kim Il Sung, who died in 1994, and his son, Kim Jong Il, the current leader.

In 1950, North Korean troops invaded South Korea. U.S. and United Nations forces defended South Korea against the North and its Communist allies—the Soviet Union and China. After three years of fighting, a **truce** (cease-fire) was declared. No permanent peace treaty has ever been signed.

Today, the U.S. is concerned about North Korea's development of nuclear weapons. In 2003, the Bush administration opened a dialogue with North Korea and its neighbors in an effort to pressure the country to halt its weapons program. Since then, North Korean officials have sent mixed signals about their willingness to participate in the talks.

Few Cars

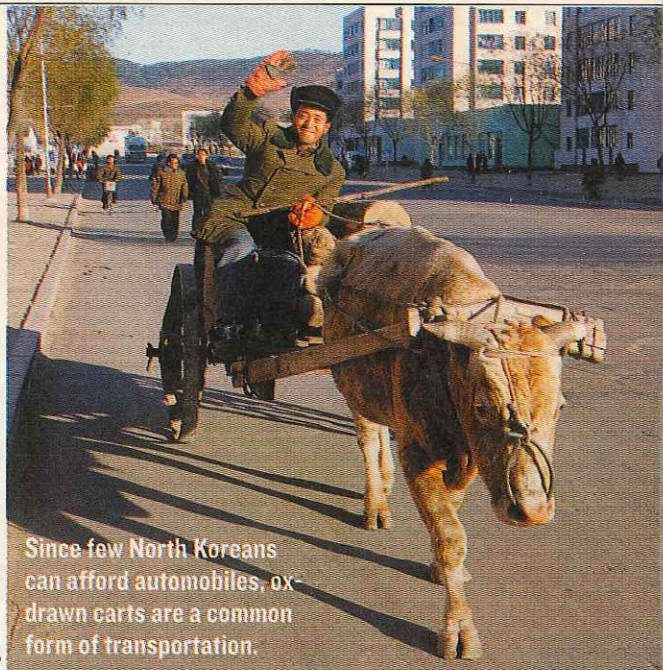
On the streets of Najin, the feeling is one of desolation. When government loudspeakers are not broadcasting speeches and patriotic music, an eerie silence falls over the city. Since few people can afford cars, goods are typically transported on carts pulled by oxen or by people.

Electricity is available only from 7:15 a.m. until 6:30 p.m. The rest of the time, darkness envelops the city, and almost no one goes outside. Winters are long and very cold, with no fuel for heating except wood.

Many young teens, forced to help support their families, cannot attend school. At a factory in Sunbong, an industrial zone just north of Najin, girls spend long days stitching garments. Most make \$2 to \$3 (U.S.) a month. The legal working age is 15, but some girls in the factory appear to be much younger.

Limited Freedom

It is difficult to know how most North Korean teens feel about their lives. Foreign visitors to the country must have government escorts with them at all times, and are allowed to visit only areas that the government wants them to see.



Since few North Koreans can afford automobiles, ox-drawn carts are a common form of transportation.

Foreigners are not permitted to talk with ordinary North Koreans.

Speaking against the government is strictly forbidden. According to many human-rights organizations, the North Korean government is holding about 200,000 political prisoners in camps, where forced labor practices and torture are common.

At Rasin, students routinely perform for foreign visitors and government officials. Their voices are sweet as they sing songs about Kim Jong Il. And their smiles are enhanced by bright lipstick. Yet a visitor can't help but notice how tiny and frail they seem when compared with kids in the U.S.

Despite the patriotism these young people display, it seems clear that many North Koreans are barely surviving. **JS**

Your Turn

THINK ABOUT IT

1. Describe life in the city of Najin.
2. Why doesn't the North Korean government allow citizens to speak freely? What might they say about their lives?

NORTH KOREA



The Korean Peninsula is divided into two countries: North Korea and South Korea.

The Communist North invaded the South in 1950, starting the Korean War. The U.S. and other United Nations member nations sent troops to push back North Korean military forces. A truce ended the fighting in 1953 and created a Demilitarized Zone separating the two Koreas (see map).

The U.S. has accused North Korea of possessing nuclear weapons. This map shows suspected weapons sites.

FACTS TO KNOW

OFFICIAL NAME: Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

AREA: 46,541 sq mi, slightly smaller than Mississippi.

POPULATION: 22,800,000; 60% urban.

GOVERNMENT: Communist dictatorship, headed by General Secretary Kim Jong Il. Citizens are not allowed to oppose the rule of the Communist Party, which is called the Korean Workers' Party.

ECONOMY: North Korea's economy is dependent on heavy industry, including iron, steel, and machinery. The government owns nearly all factories and farms. Rice is the chief crop. Minerals include coal, iron ore, lead, and magnesium.

PER-CAPITA GDP*: \$1,300 (compared with \$17,800 in South Korea).

RELIGION: North Korea's government discourages religion.

LITERACY: Males, 99%; females, 99%.

LIFE EXPECTANCY: Males, 61 years; females, 66 years.



*The value of all products produced by a country in a year, divided by the population. (GDP stands for gross domestic product; per capita means per person.)

QUESTIONS

1. North Korea borders which three countries?

2. What is North Korea's capital city? _____
3. What is the approximate latitude and longitude of its capital city? _____°N, _____°E
4. What body of water separates Japan and the tip of South Korea? _____
5. What river forms most of North Korea's northern boundary? _____
6. San Francisco, California, is located at 38°N latitude. Which

North Korean city is just south of that latitude?

7. What mountain range is in the central part of North Korea? _____
8. What is the distance in miles between Pyongyang, North Korea, and Seoul, South Korea? _____
9. How many nuclear facilities are located west of 126°E longitude? _____
10. South Korea's per-capita GDP is almost how many times larger than that of North Korea? _____