

North Korea

## Pyongyang 'Succumbs to Panic Buying'

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Panic buying is rife in Pyongyang amid rumors about North Korean leader Kim Jong-un's health, the Washington Post claimed Sunday.

"There's been panic buying in [Pyongyang], where locals are stocking up on everything from laundry detergent and rice to electronics to liquor," wrote Anna Fifield, the bureau chief in Beijing.

"They started snapping up all imported products first, but in the past few days there's been a run on domestically produced items too such as canned fish and cigars."

The North denied the report in a video titled "True or False?" on a YouTube channel named Echo DPRK on Monday. A reporter in the video asks shoppers at the Dae Department Store, a shopping mall for the Pyongyang elite, if she thinks prices have gone up recently. The shoppers all say they have seen no effect on prices.



North Koreans shop in a mall in Pyongyang, in this photo from North Korean propaganda website Voice of Korea on April 21. /Yonhap

Meanwhile, more than a half of Pyongyang residents are so economically strapped that they cannot even pay their cellphone and utility bills, a source said quoting a Korean official visiting the border with China.

The source said many are pawning their phones to buy food.

"An increasing number of families in Pyongyang eat cereal gruel instead of rice due to a food shortage," the source added. "It's getting harder to buy food because prices are rising as there has been no food aid from abroad amid international sanctions and the protracted coronavirus lockdown."

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