

# 'Children's cafeterias' combat poverty, neglect in Japan

By Satoshi Sugiyama  
The Associated Press

**T**OKYO — Laughter and lively chatter filled a room at a modest apartment in Tokyo one recent Thursday night as more than two dozen kids and volunteers gathered around tables laden with curry, rice, salad, and fruits.

Misako Omura's weekly dinner is one of a growing number of *kodomo shokudo*, or "children's cafeterias," that are springing up across Japan. The mostly grassroots efforts seek to address a range of child-related issues, from poverty to ensuring that those with late-working parents get a proper dinner. A tally by the national *Asahi* newspaper found 319 such places serving free or low-cost meals across Japan as of May, up from 21 in 2013.

Over the past 70 years, Japan's rising affluence has banished most of the penury of the lean years during and after World War II, when children sometimes starved and many families went hungry. But despite its ultra-modern conveniences, Japan had the 10th-highest child poverty rate among 31 relatively well-off countries in a 2013 UNICEF report.

Poverty in Japan is largely hidden, as it can lead to public shame and discrimination. Families often skimp on food and other necessities to ensure children are dressed well enough to avoid being seen as disadvantaged. Such children might have smartphones but not the money to buy a 100-yen (\$1) box of juice or participate in a school field trip, said Setsuko Ito, who heads the child-rearing-support division



in Tokyo's working-class Arakawa district.

Omura started her weekly dinner in Arakawa in 2014 to create a space to welcome area children who might not get enough support from their families, schools, and communities. Her initiative, supported by donations and a grant from the district office, is meant to counter a void left as communities hollow out and family ties unravel, leaving many parents and children isolated and struggling to cope. The kids and volunteers pay 300 yen (\$3) for dinner.

"I hope everyone can develop a sense that each child is our child and understand that we are raising the children who will be supporting us as the next generation," she said.

Omura emphasized that the children

who come to her weekly dinners are not necessarily living in poverty. In some cases, they just have to dine alone because their parents are working late. She asked The Associated Press not to interview the children, out of concern that public exposure might lead to harassment at school and in their neighborhood, or even when applying for jobs in the future.

Just over half of all Japanese single-parent households are considered to be under the poverty line. Single mothers, who make on average 150,000 yen (\$1,490) per month, receive limited support from welfare programs.

Though a 2013 law aims to coordinate national and local government efforts to provide educational, living, and economic support, many local officials are struggling

**KODOMO SHOKUDO.** Visitors and volunteers eat a meal at *kodomo shokudo*, or "children's cafeterias," in Tokyo. Many people in Japan are helping kids facing hardships by setting up the cafeterias, where students can dine and relax with their neighbors. Poverty in Japan is largely hidden. Families often skimp on food and other necessities to ensure children are dressed well enough to avoid being seen as disadvantaged. (AP Photo/Shizuo Kambayashi)

with the issue, said Kaori Suetomi, a professor specializing in education administration and finance at Nihon University in Tokyo.

"Until now, Japan hasn't really dealt with child poverty, and officials are not sure what to do," said Suetomi, co-author of a recent report on policies devised by local governments across Japan to address the issue.

The problem, she said, is budgets for those programs are not guaranteed, so some local governments have had to abandon programs. In addition, Suetomi said that child poverty issues overlap between the education and welfare ministries. That makes securing funds difficult as the ministries shuffle the responsibility of which should bear the cost, she said.

The "children's cafeterias" are an attempt to fill that void.

Kazuma Omoto, a former participant and aspiring teacher who volunteers at Omura's dinners, said he attends to find himself and learn how to interact with younger children.

"It's a wonderful place for that," the high school junior said. "I come here every week. Going forward I hope I can study and learn many different things myself."

## Attendees at North Korean air show wowed by model F-16

By Eric Talmadge  
The Associated Press

**W**ONSAN, North Korea — Now here's something you don't see every day: an F-16 fighter jet buzzing through the skies of North Korea and launching — fireworks.

The plane roaring over people's heads at the country's first air show was actually a remote-controlled mockup of the fabled U.S. Air Force fighter.

The scale models of the F-16 and a Chinese J-10 fighter were featured on the second day of the Wonsan International Friendship Air Festival.

The choice of flying a one-sixth scale F-16 at the show was an odd one considering the outrage North Korea regularly expresses over the presence of U.S. troops and Air Force bases in South Korea.

The North was particularly outraged over recent flights by B-1B Lancer bombers, which are capable of dropping nuclear weapons, near the Demilitarized Zone that divides the Koreas in a display of power after the North's fifth nuclear test, conducted September 9.

The model fighters did, however, appear to please the crowd watching the air displays at Wonsan's newly renovated Kalma Airport.

Thousands of North Koreans and hundreds of foreign tourists and journalists invited to the event — which was intended to showcase Wonsan's tourism appeal — were given a rare glimpse of North Korea's own air force fighters, including a MiG-29 and SU-25 ground attack fighter, acquired from Russia.

"This plane is faster than other airplanes and can maneuver quickly, so there is little time to think, you must make fast decisions," Rim Sol, a MiG-21 pilot said, standing beside her fighter on the tarmac.

The Wonsan airport was long used by the North's military but was upgraded and rebuilt to handle commercial flights, though it is unclear how it would fit into national flag-carrier Air Koryo's very limited international flight schedule.

The final day also included a demonstration of military parachuting, with the first two skydivers descending with huge North Korean and ruling party flags.

Officials refused to comment on the origin of the model F-16.

The air show's first day opened with an aerobatic



**SCHOOLS TARGETED.** A Nepalese person watches members of the bomb squad dispose of a pressure-cooker bomb at a school in Kathmandu, Nepal. Police in Nepal say small bombs exploded outside two schools in the capital, but no injuries and only minor damage were reported. Unexploded bombs were also found at five other schools in the city. (AP Photo/Niranjan Shrestha)

## Small bombs go off outside two Nepal schools

**KATHMANDU, Nepal (AP)** — Small bombs exploded outside two schools in Nepal's capital, but no injuries and only minor damage were reported, according to officials. Unexploded bombs were found at five other schools in the city.

The explosions took place outside the gates of two schools for students from grades 1 to 10, said police official Bikram Singh Thapa. The unexploded devices found in front of five other schools in Kathmandu were either detonated or removed.

Police arrested two people suspected of being behind the blasts, Thapa said. Police found pamphlets near the blast sites and attached to the unexploded devices from a little-known group demanding free education for all Nepalese children.

Thapa said no injuries were reported and that the explosions caused minor damage to the schools' gates.

Security and police surveillance were stepped up around schools in Kathmandu. School officials were to meet later with government education officials to discuss the attacks.

While education is mostly free in Nepal's public schools, the teachers are poorly paid and the infrastructure is substandard, leading most children in the cities to attend private schools.



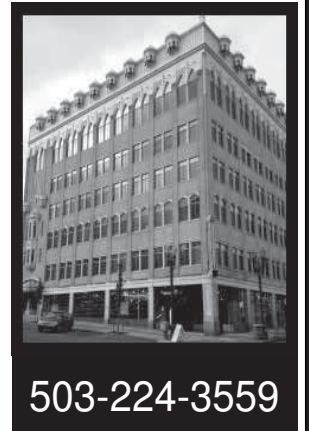
**WONSAN AIR SHOW.** A remote-controlled F-16 fighter jet lands in front of an Air Koryo commercial airplane at Kalma Airport after a flight demonstration in Wonsan, North Korea. Thousands of Koreans and hundreds of foreign tourists and journalists invited to Wonsan for the Wonsan International Friendship Air Festival were given a glimpse of North Korea's own Air Force fighters, remote-controlled scale mockup planes including an F-16 fighter jet, and demonstrations of military parachuting, with the first two skydivers descending with huge North Korean and ruling party flags. (AP Photo/Wong Maye-E)

display by U.S.-made Hughes MD 500 military-use helicopters, the origin of which has raised questions of whether international sanctions against North Korea were violated.

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