

## Tighter welfare driving starvation deaths: Times

NEW YORK (Kyodo) There has been a series of starvation deaths in Japan as struggling regional cities are being forced to tighten welfare eligibility standards, the New York Times reported Friday.

The report cited a case in Kitakyushu, Fukuoka Prefecture, where one man has died in each of the last three years apparently of starvation.

The report said regional cities like Kitakyushu are under intense pressure to tighten welfare eligibility as the widening income gap pushes up welfare rolls.

It said the issue has been drawing nationwide attention ever since the diary of a local man who apparently starved to death surfaced.

" '3 a.m. This human being hasn't eaten in 10 days but is still alive,' the man wrote. 'I want to eat rice. I want to eat a rice ball,' " the story quotes the man as writing, adding that the common snack sells for about \$1 in convenience stores across the country.

"These were not the last words of a hiker lost in the wilderness, but those of a 52-year-old urban welfare recipient whose benefits had been cut off. And his case was not the first here," it said.

"In a way that the words of no living person could, the diary has shown the human costs of the economic transformation in Japan . . . The fallout from the most recent death has shown just how far the authorities in Kitakyushu went to achieve a flat welfare rate," the report said.

The Japan Times: Sunday, Oct. 14, 2007  
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