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Reading North Korea 2008 Through “North Korea’s Nationwide Report (Public Lecture Materials for Party Leaders and General Public)”

In North Korea 2008, What Was Accomplished and What Was Not?

Part 1 Review of New Year’s Combined Editorial 2008
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[Hot Topics] 2008 Top Ten News of ‘North Korea Today’

1. The Worst Shortage of Food, Death from Hunger Is Increasing Over the Whole Granary Zone

When all’s said and done the biggest incident of this year is shortage of food and death from hunger. The food output was low due to the consecutive big floods of 2006 and 2007. External support also decreased because of missile launching and nuclear testing. Furthermore, the cease of humanitarian support from South Korean government in 2008 gave
North Korean people the biggest impact. Many farmhouses were already short of food by February. The news of death from hunger came from the end of April. Deaths from hunger happened all over the South and North Hwanghae Province in May and June. Contrary to the fact that deaths from late 1990 started among city labors first, the deaths of this year happened to farmers in the granary zone. The last flood caused major damages to farms and food distribution to them was minimal because foods from war-frontal area were first reserved for military rations. To make things worse, stored food ran out quickly because private small patch lot farming was regulated this year. Survey reports that 25 to 40 citizens of every farm in the granary zone died of hunger during this season of spring shortage.

2. Food Price for during the Spring Shortage Rose Sharply Upto 4,000 NK won
The changes of food price show how serious the difficulty of obtaining food this year was. Rice was 850 NK won per kg in April in 2007 but the price rose three times upto 2,500 to 2,800 NK won in April in 2008. As spring shortage had come in earnest in May and June, the food price sky-rocketed. It varied depending on the dates and areas, but generally rose up to 3,800 to 4,000NK won in most places. However, the rice price fell little by little from the end of June when food support from the United States came in. Prices stayed around 2,400 to 2,500 NK won as early harvest came out. From the middle of August to before Korean Thanksgiving (Chuseok), the price went up again to 3,000 NK won but dropped soon after to 2,200 to 2,400NK won as the harvest season came. Now (in December) it is about 2,000 to 2,300 NK won. Compare to the season of spring shortage, rice price has stabilized but it is still twice as high as it was the same season in 2007.

3. USA Supports North Korea with 500,000 MT of Food and Delists NK from the State Sponsor of Terrorism
This year (in 2008), the United States announced that it would support North Korea with 500 thousand MT of food for a year. 37 thousand MT of food was sent to Nampo port on June 29 and 143 thousand MT more of food will be sent by December now. The US food support to NK resumed three years after since it ceased in 2005. Separate from this, North Korea accomplished the big success of delisting from the state sponsor of terrorism. The North Korea that had been on the list of the state sponsor of terrorism since the Korean Airline explosion accident in 1987 is finally off the list after 20 years. It was not an easy process though; it is a meaningful first step for North Korea.

4. Criticism of the Lee Myung-bak Administration and Blocking of the North-South Korea Relations
For the past 10 years, North and South Korea have been developing a friendly relations but it rapidly changed its path with the new Lee Myung-bak Administration. Until last February, the North Korean government had high anticipation for the new administration but they began to draw a line after continuation of the South Korean officials’ drastic remarks against North Korea. Then, severe criticism on President Lee Myung-bak began with Rodong Shinmun’s headline article on April 1. The South Korean government is claiming that despite their effort to reform to the policy of reconciliation and cooperation policy towards the North, their relations began to deteriorate because of the North Korean government’s severe criticism of President Lee Myung-bak. There was an arrangement for a special presidential
meeting on July 11 to ease the troubled relationship but the situation worsened when a tourist was killed at Mt. Geumgang that led to the suspension of Geumgang Mountain Tourism. As a result, North Korea began to enforce worker reduction in Kaesong Industrial Complex and limitation of road passing (육류통행) starting on December 1. Throughout the year, both North and South Korea were criticized for their pitiful power struggle and ignoring the agonies of the North Korean residents rather than working together to formulate a solution during the time of unprecedented food shortage.

5. Elimination of General Market and Reformation of Farmers Market Starting Next Year
“A marketplace is habitat of anti-socialism”, this quote illustrates how the North Korean Leadership views the marketplace. The North Korean Authorities believe that the infiltration of the US and South Korean ideology carry out through the marketplace. They created logic and argued that the marketplace has to be controlled because it has weakened and infected the Socialist mindset of the North Korean people. The market patrol has increasingly intensified with every passing year, and now they’ve implemented a policy to prohibit women under the age of 40 from operating business last year and this year (2008). They are even in discussion to dissolve all general markets. The North Korean Authorities ordered reformation of current Farmers Markets starting January in 2009. This includes trading food from the distribution center (배급소) under the Local Grain Policy Enterprise (량정사업소), manufactured goods from the State-run Store (국영수매점) and all other produce from the Farmers Market. Daily opened public establishments of current market place changes to ‘1st Day Market (1일장)’ which opens only on the 1st, 11th and 21st of each month. All residents who depend on the current market system show skepticism and doubt about the newly implemented system from the government.

6. Chungjin Women Complain about the Market Patrol
From March 3 through 5 over 10,000 women gathered at the each district marketplace including Soonam Market in Chungjin City, North Hamgyong Province to complain strongly about the government’s market business patrol in the marketplace. Following up with the new policy that prohibit women under the age of 40 from doing business, the Chungjin City pulled out display stand from each district marketplace on March 3 which led to strong resistance from these women. Ultimately, these women gathered up next day at 1:00 pm in their district marketplace and insisted that the market management center “give us rice or supply us goods or let us stay in business”. The Safety Bureau was surprised with the incident but did not enforce any armed suppression in fear of massive revolt. As a temporary solution, the Chungjin City Authority allowed them to do business from March 5th without proper confirmation from the Central Party. A week after the incident on March 11, the Central Party ordered, “All women under the age must work at a factory or an enterprise” and reinstated the new policy. This incident illustrated the North Korean women’s desperate attempt to support their lives. This also showed that by enforcing “passing the word to the people style” (내리먹이기식) implication of the new policy can lead to resistance.

7. Waterways Construction in Miroo Plain, Goksan County, Is Delayed Due To Food Shortage on Workers
The *Miroo* Plain construction in *Goksan* County, North *Hwanghae* Province, was selected as an area of food crisis due to its symbolic representation. During the 2007 New Year’s message, North Korean government emphasized on focusing on the waterway construction in *Miroo* Plain. The *Miroo* Plain, a place where *Kim Il-Song* directed in 1957, seems to have been addressed from the New Year’s message because of the severe flood damage despite the fact that *Miroo* is not a well known granary. Construction in the *Miroo* Plain was emphasized as one of the biggest agendas in 2007, however, has not progressed well due to the food crisis in 2008. 15,000 workers involved in the construction were eating only a handful of whole corn and some salt per day. As people starved to death, Central Party has been also very surprised, sending out inspections to the scene. Furthermore, there have been reports that 5,000–6,000 female workers suffered due to lack of sanitary napkins.

8. **Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations Inspects Entire North Korea**
   
   June 5th of this year, a group of food inspectors comprised of four different NGO relief agencies from the U.S. began an inspection in *Sinuiju*, North *Pyongan* Province. At the same time, WFP decided to increase the number of food recipients in North Korea to 5,000,000 people in 128 different counties and increased the number of agents from 10 to 59. WFP has decided to be responsible for the 400,000 out of 500,000 MT of promised food aid to North Korea by the U.S. By the end of July, WFP agents visited each county in order to monitor the food distribution. Unlike in the past, North Korean government tried to show the real situation. “In the past, the government showed only the good places and things, but this time they showed the places with problems,” some people were puzzled.

9. **Kim Jong-Il misses DPRK’s 60th-anniversary ceremony**
   
   A story that received most of the attention from the international society this year (2008) was probably the one on *Kim Jong-Il’s* illness. Speculation on Kim’s bad health condition got stronger as Kim disappeared for about two months since his last visit to the military camp. Good Friends, however, focused more on Kim’s absence on September 9th ceremony rather than the speculations on Kim’s bad health condition. This year (2008), Kim Jong-Il has personally created a campaign phrase “Let’s make this 60th-anniversary year for DPRK a turning point that is historically meaningful.” Furthermore, he also emphasized on the importance of people’s lives and urged people to work hard for a ‘happy year.’ This ambitious pledge has disappeared due to the food shortages during the spring hardship and subsequent deaths from starvation. There were not many achievements in North Korea to make its 60th-anniversary year shine and even the removal from the list of states sponsoring terrorism, which North Korea could use as a victory on the war with the U.S., was being delayed. Some claim that it would not have been easy for *Kim Jong-Il* to appear at the 60th-anniversary ceremony without any noticeable achievements. In any case, Kim’s absence strengthened the speculation on his bad health and such speculation turned into rumors amongst North Korean residents.

10. **A Census of the Population Supported by United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA)**
North Korea has just begun to take a census of the population supported by UNFPA. The census took place for two weeks from October 1 to October 15. 35,200 people for the investigation and 7,500 people for the instruction participated in this census. North Korea government informed people of the census and requested residents to cooperate through the mass media such as Chosun Central TV (조선중앙방송). The central party ordered 56 cities and counties selected as sample regions to cooperate with the census for the completion of an accurate survey and statistical data. Survey personnel looked into sex, age, education, party member, Sarocheung (Socialist working Youth League: SWYL), occupation, and job title. Final reports are expected to be released the end of 2009.

[Food]

**Onsung, Additional Provision Requested by Hamheung Military**

Military units in Hamheung City of South Hamgyong Province have received 40 MT of beans from Onsung County in North Hamgyong Province. They requested more beans because the amount provided was not enough to make bean paste, bean sprout and tofu. Onsung County delegated to collect 4 MT of beans from each farm. Each farm was shocked when received notice of the order for the additional provision because they already distributed the remaining food to farmers after submitting provision for the military. Some of the farms used the seed or feed grains for the additional military provisions or traded 1 kg of rice in with 4kg of beans.

**Hoeryong Distributed Corn and Beans in December**

Hoeryong, North Hamgyong Province distributed 15 kg of corn to each worker. They provided 18 kg of corn for households with children or the elderly. Some areas distributed 18 kg of beans instead of corns. Farmers received food, however Hoeryong also collected additional food for military and for Onsung. Farmers traded corn for rice, and then they dried up the rice. When they got the order of additional food collection, they responded 'as if they were deceived again'.

[Economics]

**The Democratic Woman’s Union Advertises, “Provisions Will Be Provided for All the Family Members If an Individual Becomes a Member of the Farm”**

In the North Pyongan Province, the Democratic Woman’s Union advertises that anyone who voluntarily becomes a member of the farm will be given a year’s supply of food for all her family including the 360 kg of grain for her. The Union also advertises that for those who move to the farm, various accommodations for the convenient farm life will be provided. The advertisement has attracted many women who want to work at the farm. After suffering from a severe food shortage during the spring hardship period, many women are volunteering to go to the farm because they do not want to experience poverty again. Although the current farm workers say that this advertisement is “nonsense,” many women still volunteer with a small hope.

**A Big Catch of Atka Mackerel, But People are Not Even Buying**
Since October, despite the good catch of Atka mackerel in Chungjin City of the North Hamgyong Province, the mackerel has not been selling well. The Soonam Market, which is the wholesale market in the country, sells the mackerel only at 600 NK won per two. Kim Ok-hwa (46 years), who sells the mackerel, says, “People don’t even think about buying the mackerel because they barely lived through the food shortage. Their biggest concern is to harvest as many crops as they can.” She almost has a tearful face, telling, “Compared to last year’s price of 500 NK won per two, this year (2008)’s price does not differ much. However, people still do not buy the mackerel.” Jung Jae-gyong (31 years) says, “It’s not just the matter of purchasing the mackerel or not. People aren’t buying even the winter clothes during this cold season. Their only concern is buying even just a kilogram of corn for next year (2009) such that they don’t think about buying anything else.”

Goats Are Sacrificed Due to the Food Shortage in the Northern Pyongan Province
In every city and county of the North Pyongan Province, the majority of the goats at the Youth Goat Farm did not survive through this spring’s food shortage. The farmers, whose food supply has been running out since March, even ate pregnant goats. The number of farm goats decreased because the farmers have eaten them and the thefts and losses have increased. When the Youth Farm was first built in Onchun County in 2002, there were 8 pens with 90 goats per pen. However, the number of goats decreased every year and the number has almost decreased to zero due to this year’s food shortage. The reasons for this situation are 1) the farmers have eaten the goats because of lack of food and 2) the goats also died of starvation because the lack of good grass to eat.

[Politics]
Border–Crosser in Jurisdiction of National Security Agency
North Korea Authority said that according to a new policy as of 28 November, border-crossers are handled by National Security Agency. Border-crossers are charged with having illusion about South Korea and China, and the National Security Agency intends to clamp down on legal control. The main content of the new policy is to, “reinforce regal control of National Security and increase efficiency of criminal trial about a criminal.” From now, it seems that National Security carry out concentrated control to catch border-crosser in cities and Counties of the National Border Area.

[Society]
Jeongurri Re–education Center, This Year Only 20 Amnesty People
At Jeongurri re-education center, Hoeryong City, North Hamgyong Province, it is known that as of October of this year, there are about twenty people with amnesty. Absolved person is the smallest number ever while imprisoned people who are new to the facility are increasing so that accommodations are cramped. As of December 5th, female criminals numbered more than 1,400 and male criminal numbered over 1,800. Except for 20 formally absolved people, there is only about 100 people who paid huge sum of money to be paroled. Since space is cramped, people cannot lie down on their backs and there are those who lie on
top of each other or on their sides to sleep. There are even those who try to sleep while
drawing up the knees and crouching.

[Women/Children/Education]
The Department of Education of North Hamgyong Province, “Watch Only North Korean Dramas”
The Department of Education of North Hamgyong Province emphasized to students, “You
must watch only North Korean dramas and movies.” Last December as well as November of
this year, they threatened that if students drink, smoke, or imitate foreign songs and dances,
they will be sent to Discipline Centers no matter their age. The Central Party also announced
another measure that girl students should have bobbed hair and should not wear high heels.
Boy students are required to cut their hair as short as possible and must not drink or smoke.
These measures have caused schools to intensify cultural lectures for their students.

Members of Democratic Women’s Union of Kangsuh County, “We Cannot Donate
Patriot Rice.”
The members of Democratic Women’s Union (DWU) of the 43rd unit household in the 3rd
district of Kangsuh-town, Kangsuh County, South Pyongan Province complained that they
could not donate patriotic rice. The chairperson of DWU in the same section strongly
criticized women that did not sincerely donate rice in front of members of Neighborhood
Unit, DWU, and primary units. During the ‘Fight for Ideology,’ Kim Jeong-ran (41) accepted
the criticism at first, but she abruptly began to argue with the chairperson. As some women
began to feel sympathy and agree with Ms. Kim, the argument began to worsen. A secretary
of the Primary Party stopped the meeting in a great hurry and sent members of DWU home.
When the secretary of the Primary Party accompanied Ms. Kim to her home and saw her
living condition, the secretary did not raise questions about the incident anymore.

[Accidents]
A Military Car Accident at Yeechunryong Hill Caused Casualties
On November 6th, 2008, a platoon car of the first Corps of the Kangwon Province fell over a
precipice while it was climbing one of the hills of Yeechunryong. This platoon hit a bad patch
on the way back from Cheolwon County where it was preparing for the winter training of the
chemistry regiment. As a result, three out of twenty-nine soldiers were sent to the hospital
with serious wounds and the rest were pronounced dead.

A Chicken Farm in Soonchun, Facing Losses of Twenty Thousand Chicks
On November 9th, 2008, there was an accident that resulted in the death of 420 chickens and
twenty thousand baby chicks in a chicken farm of Soonchun in the South Pyongan Province.
The security bureau took up the investigation of a feed worker, assuming that the
carelessness of a feed worker was the cause. This farm underwent a huge loss of 55% of its
chickens.
[Commentary]

New Year’s Farming, As Important As Defense Industry

“Food problem: self-reliance of food is emerging as an issue that is becoming more important than the nation’s defense industry.”

Within the food related material released for officials and the public in July, the North Korean authorities said that the food problem is becoming an issue. As a solution to the food problem, they suggested developing “revolutionary seeds,” “revolutionary potato farming,” a “two-crop farming policy,” and the guaranteement of “farming materials.”

As the food problem has gradually become an important issue, it is quite notable seeing the changes in North Korean authorities’ attitudes. Nevertheless, there has been no change in the way they are approaching the problem. Of course, they need to develop revolutionary seeds. Potato farming and two-crop farming will be a big help in food production, and guaranteeing farming material is a very basic issue in farming. The problem is that they do not have enough funding to suffice all four policies. Once they perceive it as an issue comparable to the defense industry, they must follow up with actions to achieve their goal.

The North Korean authorities gave higher priority in investing fund to the munitions factories for the development of the defense industry. As a result, the workers receive higher salary and ration compared to other ordinary workers. Of course, some of the workers in munitions factories also had difficulties. However, it is true that they have received more rations compared to other workers. They will have to invest more funding in farming if they want to resolve the food problem like the defense industry. In order to avoid farmers not showing up to work because of hunger like at the beginning of this year, they should provide food to farmers first.

They will have to make every effort to secure farming materials like fertilizer and vinyl. It is fortunate that the Heungnam fertilizer factory, which was out of production for almost 10 years started to produce fertilizers even though it is only a small quantity. The production quantity is far from enough as demonstrated by the order, except for a few farms in North and South Hwanghae Provinces, all other farms will have to resolve the fertilizer problem on their own because they will not be able to receive fertilizer from Heungnam. There are only two ways to secure enough fertilizer. The first is to bring changes in the relationship between the North and South Korea from the present rigid state to a reconciliatory one and receive fertilizer from the South. The other is to increase the import of fertilizer by investing funds or building more fertilizer factories.

The preparation for New Year’s faming has already begun. The members of Democratic Women’s Union are being mobilized to field cultivation doing hard labor from the early morning to late at night. Again, everyone including the children and the elderly from each household will be mobilized to create fertilizer from feces and other things in the New Year. Those with money will give feces that are being prepared by other people, and those without money will suffer. Those working in the commerce will struggle to figure out what to sell to secure fertilizer. Since they do not have money, they will have to sell whatever they can. However, they can become subject to investigation if they sell something that belongs to the
government by mistake. The North Korean authorities will have to follow up with investing instead of mere talks if they perceive the food problem as something that is as important as the defense industry.

[Planning a Series]

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Long Journey toward “Powerful Nation” Status

North Korea’s long journey toward powerful nation status, planned to be established in the year 2012, continued during the last hours of the year 2008. With the year 2008 coming to an end, it would be useful to briefly review movement.

Since the death of Great Leader Kim Il-Song in 1994, when the North Korean government declared its aim to “establish a powerful nation,” the process has been described annually in the following way:

“Establishment of a powerful socialist nation based on Juche ideology will bring a close to a period of reactionary and anti-national history stained with exploitation and oppression, poverty and ignorance, invasions and theft, domination and subordination. It will also initiate an ideal nation which embraces the requests and desires of its people wholeheartedly.”¹

The idea of “a powerful nation” by Chairman Kim Jong-Il of the National Defense Committee started in 1994. However, “the great idea” faced from the very beginning severe confusion and difficulty. The March of Hardship, (a.k.a. Arduous March) a long period of starvation in the mid-1990s, was an obstacle to continuing toward “powerful nation” status. North Korea could not afford to pay any serious attention to “establishing a powerful nation” in the middle of mass starvation and the systemic collapse of the nation. Nevertheless, in

¹ Rodong Shinmun (Sep. 5, 2008) “Democratic People’s Republic of Korea is a socialist nation with undefeatable power based on Juche ideology.”
1999, the New Year’s Combined Editorial declared, “Let this year shine as the year of great transformation.” This declaration formally placed “the establishment of a powerful nation” on the national scene, as the March of Hardship ended. The declaration can be understood as saying, “now that we have overcome the March of Hardship, it is time to start the year of great transformation.”

The Declaration in 2005 was, “Let the ideal of Military First flourish with the unity of the whole party, the whole military and the whole people.” In order to spread the ideology of Military First throughout the whole nation that year, the ideology of Military First was interpreted to represent the ideology of Juche, the core ideology of the Great Leader Kim Il-Song. The declaration in 2006 was “Let’s fly high with far-reaching aspirations and faiths.” The implication was that because the whole nation became equipped with the ideology of Military First in 2005, the nation could leap forward to establishing a powerful socialist nation. In other words, because the nation still remained below the top of the hill, the whole nation should pull all of its efforts together to reach the summit, powerful nation status. The Combined Editorial declares, “Let’s reach the height of the ideology of Military First with confidence in victory.”

The beginning of the Editorial states, “the breaking dawn embroiders the year as the year of victory and the year of upheaval.” This can be interpreted as meaning that the top of the hill is not far away and the dawn of a powerful nation could be seen with a little more patience. In 2007, The National Conference of Intellectuals (Nov. 30-Dec.1) was reconvened in Pyongyang for the first time in fifteen years. At this Conference, the year 2012, the 100th anniversary of Chairman Kim Il-Song’s birth, was proposed to be the welcoming year for a powerful nation. This was the first time a specific date was mentioned. And in 2008, the Editorial suggested that “on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the founding of The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, let’s show this year as the year of transformation that will be carved colorfully in the nation’s history.” The momentum that was to bring the nation to the top of the hill soon disappeared. Nevertheless, the continuing declarations and planning demonstrate that the long journey toward establishment of a powerful nation continues.

Two Policies and Three Strategies for Establishment of a Powerful Nation

The nation’s consistent goal of powerful nation status is being carried out along the lines of two policies and three strategies. Two policies refer to the last instructions of the Great Leader Kim Il-Song: a self-sustaining economic structure must be maintained in order to be able to continue the tasks of revolution, and secondly, that ideological undertakings should precede any other efforts. With these two policies solidly in place, three strategies are being practiced. What are those three strategies? They are the “strategy of science and technology,” “strategy of strengthening foreign relationships” and “strategy of improving the relationship with The United States.” Establishing an economically powerful nation requires money and technology more than anything else (the strategy of science and technology). More political support and economic investments should be lured from the neighboring nations by improving relationships with them (the strategy of strengthening foreign relationships).

Lastly, securing the nation’s governing system is considered critical to establishing a powerful nation (aided by the strategy of improving relationships with The United States).

**If 2008 Was Supposed To Be The ‘Year of Historical Transformation’, What Was Accomplished And What Was Not?**

What are considered to be the accomplishments of the North Korean government this year? The most important factor for establishing a powerful nation is its economic sector. An increase of 17% in comparison to the previous year’s grain production could be considered an important accomplishment. North Korea’s Ministry of Agriculture announced last October 29 that this year’s total grain production is 4.68 million MT. It is said to be the largest crop since 1987. Recall that the New Year’s Combined Editorial declared, “at this point in time, there is no other task more desperate and important than the task of feeding the people.” If the 17% increase in food production is true, it would indeed be a huge accomplishment. However, this year’s amount of food production is subject to debate and a detailed discussion of the topic will come later.

What are the accomplishments in the basic industrial areas of electricity, coal production, metal industry and transportation by rail, all fundamental to essential economic developments? Construction of electric plants was encouraged in order to increase production of electricity. A greater emphasis was also placed on coal production. As for the area of transportation by rail, auditors were dispatched to every region to check the status of ongoing improvements. Chairman Kim’s deep concerns about basic industrial accomplishments can be shown by simply reviewing his scheduled visits to different regions during July.

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<Chairman Kim’s 2008 journal of site counsels in the area of economy>

Jan. 6 - Visit to construction site of Yesung River Electric Plant, North Hwanghae Province  
Jan. 26 - Visit to Chicken Factory, Pigs Factory, Bus Factory, Food Processing Factory, Rabbits Breeding Farm, City of Kanggye, Jagang Province  
Jan. 30 – Visit to ‘March 5 Youth’ Mine  
May 29 – Site counsel at 2.8 Vinalon United Enterprise, City of Soonchun, South Pyongan Province  
May 30-31 – Visit to Heungnam United Enterprise (Heungnam Fertilizer Plant, Heungnam Chemical Plant, and etc) in South Hamgyong Province

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3) New Year’s Combined Editorial (2008) ‘On the occasion of the 60th DPRK foundation’s anniversary, let’s shine this year as the year of transformation that will be carved colorfully in the nation’s history.’
Wherever Chairman Kim was to visit, rations for fifteen days as well as other favors were provided in advance. According to the Rodong Shinmun, the site visits encouraged workers to accomplish numerous feats during the first quarter.

A shoe factory in Sinuiju accomplished 120% of its daily planned production. Other shoe factories under the Ministry of Light Industry also completed their planned quota. On April 2, it was reported that all of the electric plants under the Ministry of Electric Industry accomplished their assigned quota during the first quarter. Considering the suspension of fertilizer donations from South Korea, fertilizer production at Heungnam Fertilizer Plant played an important role. The Ministry of Electric Industry reported that 103% of planned production was accomplished during the first half of the year. All these reports indicate that planned production was accomplished timely as “People’s Life First” was promoted by the New Year’s Combined Editorial.

How are the foreign relationships? On the one hand, North Korea’s relationships with Japan and Korea have hardened. On the other hand, its relationships with China and Russia, which have been slightly cold and distant thus far, are turning friendly. Strengthened relationships with Middle Eastern countries and a restoration of diplomatic relationship with Myanmar are as considered to be accomplishments. More than anything else, one of the three strategies, the strategy of improving the relationship with The United States, can be considered as a success. The success, while it exists only relative to other, poorer, relationships, is concerned with the “assurance of the security of a nation’s governing system.” Of course, removal from the list of countries of state-sponsored terrorism was delayed during August in conjunction with the nuclear verification issues and the six-party conference collapsed recently during December. These have been somewhat burdensome. However, North Korea was eventually removed from the list of countries of state-sponsored terrorism during October. In addition, the new Obama administration seems committed to positive expectations for North Korea. In the year 2009, North Korea will try all efforts to speed up the “opening of the gate to a powerful nation,” due to be completed by 2012.

With all the accomplishments cited so far, what was not accomplished? Naturally, that would depend on what criteria is used to measure results. This statement implies that what North Korea counts as accomplishments may not be “accomplishments” in fact. For example, if the actual “lives of the residents” are used as criteria, the whole assessment might turn out quite differently.

“On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the founding of the DPRK, we must make this year the year of real transformation in people’s lives, a year of worthiness and joy.”

The North Korean government paid a lot of attention this year to the Principle of People’s Lives First” and a “Year of Joy.” Severe food shortages this spring and

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4) People’s Party Publication (2008), ‘Let’s Join The Combative Struggle Together To Thoroughly Carry Out The Tasks Suggested In This Year’s Combined Editorial’, p.11, Public Lecture Material For Party Leaders and General Public
deaths due to starvation turned pale the rosy reports of fulfilling production goals. Painful cries all over the nation replaced the laughter of the “year of joy.” Even the increased food production was low, compared to average yearly production. It simply represents a better crop in comparison with the last year when production was the lowest since 2000 because of severe flooding. No resident in North Korea seems to believe the production figure of 4.68 million MT of grain, as announced by the North Korean government. The residents are accustomed to misleading reports from their government. Whatever the production might have been, it was possible because of good weather. Experiences tell the residents that this year’s crop cannot handle the total demand for food. For example, even at this time of the year, when the price of grain should be the lowest after harvest, grain sells for between 2,000 and 2,300 NKW. This is the same price as in the spring when the price jumped three-fold from the more typical previous year. According to “Crop Prospects and the Food Situation Report,” published in December by The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) of The United Nations, North Korea is estimated to require imports of 1.80 million MT of grain from outside next year.

North Korean control of agriculture on a small patch of fields and commercial activities generates a vicious side effect, which is driving residents into painful misery. In the area of electricity, the Pyongyang Electric Plant went through repair projects and the use of diesel as fuel has brought a higher quality of electricity. However, the maintenance repair projects at the other plants did not go well. Those electric plants where Chairman Kim did site counsels received food rations for fifteen days in advance and the project went smoothly. Most of the other electric plants, however, could not feed the workers well and things did not go well. Managers of these electric plants suffered many problems as they tried to acquire workers from other factories and enterprises, but could not find any volunteers. In addition to the problem of supplying manpower, a huge amount of the funds needed for repair projects were hard to obtain. In the area of coal production, the situation was not any different. Mining workers did not receive any food rations for most of the year. They received a ration for fifteen days during October. Mining is hard work and miners’ rewards were far below what was sufficient. Control of commercial activities caused a blow to struggling miners and their families in their everyday struggle to survive. Every mine has problems due to their deteriorating facilities, which means they fail to meet production schedules, which can be seen all over the region.

How is the real situation inside the Heungnam Fertilizer Plant, “this year’s success story?” It has not been in operation since the period of the third seven-year plan (1987-1993) during which a large scale overhaul project was a complete failure. Therefore, the fact that the plant has been in operation since last year can be counted as a success. However, only four compressors were restored out of sixteen. These are not new equipment but rather archaic Japanese parts installed before the end of World War II. It is not that hard to figure that next year’s supply of fertilizer will not be sufficient. In fact, North Korean authorities warned in advance that no other region, other than North and South Hwanghae Provinces, should expect a supply of fertilizer from the Heungnam plant.

Depending on the criteria, many alleged accomplishments in the economy are not accurate and at the very least come with some drawbacks.
How about the strategy of improving relations with United States? This year’s removal from the list of countries with state-sponsored terrorism made the strategy look successful. However, North Korea showed distrust toward the United States after items agreed upon at the Singapore meeting failed to be carried out smoothly. North Korea handed to United States 18,000 pages of operations records from the Youngbyon reactor as promised. The United States did not remove North Korea from the list of countries of state-sponsored terrorism, but asked for more thorough nuclear verification procedures, including collection of more samples. This delayed removal from the list until October. This placed the North Korean government in an awkward position because, anticipating the removal from the list in August, they advertised this development in the Public Lecture Material. On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the foundation of the DPRK, the North Korean government could use removal from the list as proof of victory against United States. Their triumph was about to slip from their grasp, and this placed the North Korean government in deep agony.

It was about this time that rumors started about Chairman Kim’s health problems. Chairman Kim did not appear anywhere since his last site visit to a military base on August 14.

Even though he promised a splendid ceremony to honor the 60th anniversary of the DPRK’s foundation, he failed to show up, leading to wide-spread rumors of illness. Regardless of why he did not show up to any official events, rumor has it that his illness was caused by the shock of not being able to resolve the problem of removal from the United States’ list. It is not that non-removal from the list of countries of state-sponsored terrorism itself is a problem. It is just that after the North Korean government focused on that victory over the United States, being unable to secure their goal caused deep disappointment.

On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the founding of the DPRK, North Korea’s goal was to turn the year 2008 into the year of historical transformation. How has the goal turned out? The official answer to this question will be found in the 2009 New Year’s Combined Editorial. There are about four years left until the opening of the gate to a powerful nation. To speed up establishing a powerful nation, North Korean authorities should not be complacent with their accomplishments in domestic propaganda. Rather, they should recognize their failures and limitations and prepare realistic measures. They should present specific constructive economic indices rather than displaying some abstract slogans. The relationship between South and North Korea should not be a variable dependent on the U.S.-North Korea relationship. Any problems with the relationship between South and North Korea should be resolved as the U.S. and North Korea relationship also improves. It is our sincere hope that the year 2009 will add to the successes of 2008 and will bring the North Korean people to “a year of real joys,” having learned from their failures.

Good Friends: Center for Peace, Human Rights and Refugees

Good Friends USA
(DC) 734 15th Street N.W. Suite # 500B, Washington, DC 20005
(MD) 4605 Powder Mill Rd., Beltsville, MD 20705
Phone: 202-824-0788(DC); 301-455-9196(Cell)
FAX: 301-937-0748
E-mail: goodfriendsusa@yahoo.co.kr
http://www.goodfriendsusa.blogspot.com

Good Friends Korea
E-mail: intnetwork@jungto.org
Tel: 82-2-587-8996; Fax: 82-2-587-8998
http://www.goodfriends.or.kr
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Good Friends– An International NGO for Peace, Human Rights and Refugees

Good Friends provides relief works for international refugees to become all lives’ friend, peace movement to fundamentally resolve disputes and conflicts that human beings face, and human rights movement to protect human rights.

Good Friends has been providing information on food shortages in North Korea, raising funds for humanitarian assistance, dispatching activists to national border areas between China and DPRK and having them investigate local situations, and publishing reports on food shortages in North Korea.

Now Good Friends USA intends to improve humanitarian and human rights situation of North Korean residents and to inform this situation to the international community by

1) collecting information on severe food shortages and bad situations in health, education, and transportation and providing them to other humanitarian aids organizations so that they can support North Korean people effectively.

2) investigating current situations of North Korean refugees in China, and providing protections and aids for them.

3) assessing human rights violations occurring in North Korea, informing them to the international societies, and requesting the North Korean government for improvement on human rights and living conditions.

Also, Good Friends USA publishes the newsletter North Korea Today (English edition) to inform the international public.

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Good Friends USA
(DC) 734 15th Street N.W. Suite # 500B, Washington, DC 20010
(MD) 4605 Powder Mill Rd., Beltsville, MD 20705
Phone: 202-824-0788(DC); 301-455-9196(Cell)
FAX: 301-937-0748
E-mail: goodfriendsusa@yahoo.co.kr
http://www.goodfriendsusa.blogspot.com
http://www.goodfriends.or.kr