“Good Friends” desires to help the North Korean people through humanistic point of view, and publishes “North Korea Today” describing the way the North Korean people live as real as possible. We at Good Friends also hope to be a bridge between the North Korean people and the world.

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[Hot Topics]
Life as a Kkotjebi after Getting Injured at the Factory
Since Kim Soon-nyu (40s) of Dukheung-dong in the City of Danchun, South Hamgyong Province lost her husband to a heart attack long ago, she has been surviving with her daughter as a Kkotjebi. Ms. Kim was not a housewife, but has been working as a laborer at a timber-processing mill. Toward the end of March last year, a work-related accident involving an industrial saw caused one of her wrists to be amputated. Even though she was awarded a small sum of money as compensation for the accident, the amount was not enough for her to maintain her standard of living. She had to quit the factory to find her way elsewhere.
Ms. Kim said, “I ended up wandering around because I could not make a living. I begged for meager meals. It was a life of bare subsistence, a struggle for survival. My clothes turned into rags. I kept begging with my five-year-old daughter, wandering around all over.” She cried when she continued, “I did not realize that the lack of a wrist would cause such a scary handicap. I am really worried about my daughter. She is not physically growing in size now. She has more days when she does not eat than days when she does. She needs all the
nutrition she can get to grow up. I am willing to donate my remaining wrist if that helps to get the care she needs.”

**Tale of a Disabled Family**

Miss *Jang Gyonghee of Naemoon-dong* in the City of *Danchun*, South *Hamgyong* Province, is ten years old, but she looks like only six or seven years old. That is because she did not physically grow in size due to long-lasting malnutrition. Attending school should be her only responsibility right now. But her main task these days is to wander around and beg for food. Her father is visually impaired. Her mother had her right arm disabled at work and cannot make a living. With no parent able to make money, the family has become homeless, moving around and begging for food to survive.

Residents are amazed that even when other healthy families have a hard time surviving, this physically challenged family of three is surviving without any help from others. Even many healthy people cannot hold families together and lose their lives to starvation. It is just amazing that this little child leads her family of three and can survive without any outside help. The sight of the little child leading her father wandering around and begging for food evokes a lot of sympathy, yet there are not that many people willing to help them. The little girl and her mother take different routes from each other while begging. In the evening, the family gets together at a predetermined place, where they must then find a place to sleep. This has been the pattern of their survival, until one day her mother did not return. While the little girl kept looking for her mother, her father collapsed and died. All these things happened together, one after the other. She got help from other village residents and could bury her father. But as she continued to wait for her mother to return, she could not leave the village. Miss *Jang Gyong-hee* is still waiting for her mother and surviving as a *Kkotjebi*.

“**My Saddest Regret: I Could Not Offer Even a Bowl of Warm Rice to My Mother and My Sister**”

*Kim Gil-soo* (40s) of *Haean 2 Dong* in the City of *Danchun*, South *Hamgyong* Province had a family of six. His mother was over seventy and his sister, a victim of polio as a little girl, could not move around and had to stay inside the house. The only way they could be outside the house was if he carried each one on his back or in his arms. His wife peddles at the market, but the business is not good, and most of the days they go hungry. During last spring when there was a severe shortage of food, worse than any other year, his mother collapsed and died. His sister followed her mother and died less than a month later. *Kim’s* eyes filled with tears as he said, “I could not offer even a bowl of warm rice.” He continued, trying to hold back tears, “I feel so sorry about my sister. She couldn’t even stand up. She could not go out and take a look at the world. Had I known that she would leave so soon, I would have borrowed some money to get a bowl of warm white rice. I feel so powerless and incapable. How can I ask for forgiveness from my late sister, my late father and my late mother? If my sister were born again, I wish she would never go hungry again, could run around as she pleases and meet a nice fellow to marry.”

[Food]
Central Party Repeats, “Hang in There with Patience.”
The lime fertilizer factory of Soonchun, in the South Pyongan Province, has announced the planned resumption of food rations in April. Factory authorities that had suspended food rations thus far said that, beginning in April, they would supply a fifteen-day portion of whole corn and wheat. The Central Party has kept dispatching workers to guide the fertilizer production and has shown great interest in the increased production of fertilizer. However, even its extreme concern does not help solve the problem. According to one worker at the factory, “Leaders from the Ministry of Agriculture visit the factory often and have discussions with the factory workers. The factory workers repeat that the situation at the factory is in such dire shape that factory management is so difficult. The visiting leaders do not seem to care about the living conditions of the factory laborers, but insist that the state cannot help the situation due to the poor conditions in the nation. They simply repeat, ‘Hang in there with patience.’ How could you expect to improve the living conditions of the laborers, then?” Presently, there are about five people per unit absent from work because of the food shortage.

Monthly Food Rations of Gangdong County Mining Enterprise Cover Only Fifteen Days
Between January and March, monthly food rations of the Gangdong County Mining Enterprise covered only fifteen days. This obviously is not enough, so more miners have been absent from work. In comparison with February, this March saw three to five more absenteees in each platoon. Platoon leaders say, “Work assignment is difficult because of absenteeism, and consequently absenteeism affects the production of coal.” Mine staff workers once again passed a resolution to carry out the New Year’s Combined Editorial. They also had a discussion on how to expand the production pits in the new section of the mine. Accordingly, new technical platoons were to be assigned, but higher absenteeism caused by the food shortage has substantially affected the production level.

[Economy]
Shortage of Applicants for The Shock Troop Brigade at Urang Hydropower Plant
Urang hydropower plant has been advertising nationwide for applicants for the shock troop brigade but the shortage of applicants is a problem to every local enterprise. Some factories and enterprises in Chungjin, North Hamgyong Province have raised up the brigade under the condition of 100,000 NK won of payment for three months of service but some of them do not complete the service. Eight people ran away in March from the managing troop and platoon of Chungjin shock troop brigade. Four of them went back home without permission of a manager because no successor came for the rotation. Choi Myung-duk (alias, age 40s) who came back from construction site said, “The work (of the construction site) was too busy for the workers to endure. They make us work like inmate laborers at the Training Center.” As this news spread out, increasing number of people do not want to go to work for the powerhouse site mobilization. The workers of the labor mobilization department strongly encourage people to participate at the mobilization, saying applying for the construction site means making 300,000 NK won.
None of the workers at Chungam revolution-historic site managing office wanted to go for the mobilization. So, they decided to assign the lower lever workers first. They will rotate for the shock troop brigade every two month and will collect 150,000 NK won paid to the workers who are dispatched to the troop brigade. Similar to this case, many places gather the applicants with the collected money but it does not work well. The female troop brigade of Hyesan, Ryanggang Province, who had planed to leave for Urang hydropower plant did not leave on time because the supporting money was not collected even up to one third of what it is supposed to be. The members of the Democratic Women’s Union resisted giving money, saying that when they do not have money for food, how can they raise money for supporting.

Manure Collection, a Struggle Every Morning in the Northern Pyongan Province
As one of the agricultural support projects, the People’s Provincial Committee in the Northern Pyongan Province has instructed each city and county to collect farmyard manure. Thus, the Neighborhood Units in Jungju, Yumju County, Sakju County, and other cities and counties in each Province are hustling to collect manure every morning. The heads of the Units use loudspeakers to pester the households that don’t collect manure. In addition, since factories, Public Enterprises, schools, and hospitals also request manure, each household has to provide manure two or three times. In Dukchun, Southern Pyongan Province, the City Party and City People Committee has commanded each factory, public enterprise, and unit to collect manure on a large scale. Each worker is required to provide almost 700 kilograms of manure. In each city, the manure collectors collect manure after measuring the weight of it and then issue a proof for it.

Yeonan County of South Hwanghae Province Devoted to Securing Heukbosan Fertilizer
Yeonan County of South Hwanghae Province concentrates extensively on securing Haukbosan fertilizer. Workers of the County Party, the Executive, and the farming administration let DWU (Democratic Women’s Union) and labors go out to ‘peat production-war’ according to the production plan of Heukbosan fertilizer, saying, “My County, cultivate the soil well this year in order to resolve our food shortage problem so that we can continue in our self-sufficiency. The biggest issue this year is the need for fertilizer.” As a result, peat production reached about three million ton. On the one hand, in the Poongchun Collective Farm, an accident happened in which farmers digging peat were crushed to death under a heap of earth.

[Politics]
500,000 NK Won Bribed to Avoid Punishment for Watching Illegal Media
A wealthy official (40s) in Chungjin, North Hamgyong Province got caught possessing illegal videotapes, but got away after bribing with a big money to avoid jail. In these days, some of the Chinese movies are classified as illegal media. He gave the inspector 100,000 NK won in order not to get into trouble. Then, the inspector responded, “Are you kidding me? It’s not
Kaechun City, Six Economic Criminals Sent to Public Trial
Six people committed property crime were sent to the public trial in mid-March in Kaechun City, South Pyongan Province. Most of them were accused of theft, robbery, and homicide. For example, one shoplifted at market display space and at state-run stores for two years. One murdered a clerk at a state-run store while stealing from the store. Another one stole export goods at trade companies. Murderers and their accomplices were sentenced to life in prison and the others were sentenced to re-education for 12 years. In the meantime, five people were arrested for the crime of espionage in Kangye, Jagang Province. These were accused of selling domestic information to abroad on March 8th, which was the day before the election. A few days after they were arrested, nine additional people implicated in the crime were arrested on March 11th. As a result of preliminary investigation four of them were released later on and the rest were sentenced to life in prison.

[Society]
Chicken Factory Workers in Kusung City Pressured to Sacrifice All Corn in Advance of the 4.15 Holiday
A Chicken Factory in Kusung City, North Pyongan Province, made great efforts to significantly increase egg output in advance of April 15th’s ‘The Solar Day’ (The Birthday of Kim Il-Sung). Each resident was required to contribute one egg, but circumstances made this nearly impossible. At that time, the local egg-producing chickens were laying fewer eggs due to malnutrition. So, the factory workers held an emergency meeting and decided that each entry-level worker must contribute 20kg of corn to supplement the chicken’s diets. The intention was that these entry-level workers would serve as role models and inspire others to contribute chicken feed. Some of these workers voiced their concerns saying, “Now I am hungry. It’s amazing that I haven’t slaughtered and eaten these chickens yet. I do not have enough food to feed myself, so how am I supposed to contribute to these chickens?”

Unrest Caused by Soldiers Unable to Pay Off Their Debts
A military Unit (Goobonndaes) stationed in Soonchun City, South Pyongan Province, held a hearing to discuss the growing number of complaints filed by civilians against soldiers who continue to buy food on credit, but are unable to pay down their debt. Formerly, the unit had the ability to hold soldiers accountable by punishing them and forcing them to pay down their debt with significant interest, but they have since lost the ability to enforce this protocol. Due to ongoing shortages, soldiers have been unable to obtain enough food for themselves through legitimate means. Between June and August of last year, the unit saw a significant decline in available rations. At that time, military officials were receiving a daily ration of 300g of crushed maize, 100g of potatoes, 30g of beans, 1500g of dried radish leaves and 3 spoons of oil. Meanwhile, enlisted soldiers received 100g of corn, 30g of
potatoes, 10g of beans, 500g of dried radish leaves and one spoon of oil. The significantly reduced rations made it difficult for troops to maintain basic military readiness; so many of these soldiers resorted to visiting the local market to obtain bread and crackers on credit. As a result, many soldiers ended up with more than 50,000 NK won in cumulative debt. This forced restaurant owners to petition the local military unit and ask that the soldiers be forced to pay off their debts. Unit officials reported the request to the Department of Battalion Politics, which then reported it to the Department of Regiment Politics. After adjourning, the Department of Regiment Politics concluded that nothing could be done to force the soldiers to pay off their debts and that local civilians should be encouraged to cease their complaining.

[Women/Children/Education]

500,000 NK Won Will Buy Admission to Kyungsung Professional Medical School
The admissions examination for Kyungsung Professional Medical School in North Hamgyong Province has ended. The admissions exam was harder than last year due to high numbers of applicants. Although it was highly competitive, many of the rich paid their way into acceptance regardless of the exam results. Some admissions faculty bluntly asked for money. Students with very poor exam score were accepted after donating 500,000 NK won and students with somewhat better score but failed to make it above the cut-off point paid 300,000 NK won. A school worker said that this is relatively inexpensive because it is a professional school and it would cost hundreds of dollar to get into a medical school.

Students Associate Only with Those in Their Own Economic Status Level
There are increasing numbers of conflicts among students due to economic differences. Chung Kyung-mi (21), a student at Kyungsung Professional Medical School, commented, “I do not get involved in this because I am a ‘straight student’"1 but it is sometimes scary when I see those living in dormitories” There are fewer conflicts among ‘straight students’ because they commute from home to school. The rich students home-stay and are few in number so they do not cause any trouble. The major conflicts are occurring among non-local students in dormitory housing. Because dorm food is not enough, students with money go out to restaurants to eat. Poor students collect money amongst each other to cook. This is against the regulation, but they have no choice to satisfy their hunger. The complication worsens when dine-out students complain about such illegal activities during their collective meeting. Chung commented, “Male students usually get along well by jokingly fighting over food. Female students are very scary. They criticize vigorously that I think they might fist fight.” Lee Myung-sook (20) lives in dormitory shared similar story. “Last year there was a girl from Kiljoo called Myung-hwa but she left without completing school. Her roommates bullied her. They looked down on her because of her economic status when she tried to make something to eat. She ran away one day because she couldn’t bear the criticism. I haven’t seen her since then.” Lee said that their association

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1 The University is formed of straight students and discharged military personnel. The student who attends the university immediately after the middle school is called a ‘straight student’ and anyone who attends after their military service is called a ‘discharged military personnel’.
changes due to their economic level and added, “They (students) associate amongst their own group only. Home-stay students affiliate only within their group, as do the dine-out students. Even students who secretly cook their meals differentiate themselves between those who eat crushed maize and those who eat soup.”

**Haeju City Gives Textbooks Only to Students Who Do Well**
The Educational Department of Haeju, South Hwanghae Province, has decided to provide only students who do well with textbooks for lack of paper. For the 2nd and 4th graders of elementary school, textbooks of Korean, music, and math have barely been printed for each student, but the number of other textbooks is critically insufficient. In this context, each elementary school has provided a classroom with 10 textbooks for each subject.

**Hyesan City Allowed Kkotjebi (Homeless) Children from Other Locations to Go to Secondary School**
Compared to other locations, Hyesan City in Ryanggang Province has many more Kkotjebi children. Residents describe and analyze the reason: “The circulation of trading items is good in this city, so it is a good place to live.” The members of Kkotjebi Welfare Institution of Ryanggang Province and the Youth Anti-Socialist Conscience Investigation Patrol of the province are rounding up Kkotjebi children with police officers. Some children are from a long way off such as Chungjin or Gilju of North Hamgyong Province. For a while now, the Organization and Guidance Department of Hyesan City Party discussed the issue about Kkotjebi children from other locations. From the meeting, these children were deemed orphans or homeless, and were allowed to go to secondary school in Hyesan even if they are not from the same district.

**[Accidents]**
**Train’s Turnover in Ryanggang Province Causes the Loss of 28 Tons of Diesel Fuel**
On March 21st, there was a major railroad accident in Ryanggang Province. A train that was transporting diesel fuel for the provincial forestry department’s United Forest Company Station 121 derailed and turned over. The accident caused a loss in 28 tons of diesel fuel, which had been acquired with a great difficulty and would have been used for increasing the lumber production set out by New Year’s Combined Editorial. It was a huge blow to the lumber production plan.

**In Onsung County, Sharp Increase in Suicide Cases**
In Onsung County, North Hamgyong Province, there have been multiple cases of suicide recently due to the presumed pressure to repay debts. On March 25th, a 38 year-old female was found dead from taking more than 100 pills. According to her neighbors, she incurred over 3 million won of debt from her failed businesses. Police are supposing that she took her own life because of harassment from her creditors, and they have been questioning her family members and relatives. On the evening of the 28th, a 46 year-old man was also found dead on a street. He was found lying down on the top of his neatly placed outer garments at the crime scene, which was located about 300 meters from his residence. Police are
looking at it as another case of suicide due to the lack of evidence for any foul play. Although police have not concluded their investigation, his neighbors’ statements seem to point to suicide. They said “He was always a healthy person without any illness. I don’t understand why he suddenly passed away.” However, several days ago, I heard that the amount of his debt had grown larger.”

[Commentary]

Ensuring the Right to Survive and the Protection of the Disabled
One question I periodically get from curious North Korean defectors is "Why there are so many handicapped people in South Korea?" Defectors often seem surprised to see handicapped people visible and active in public places, such as the Seoul subway stations, train stations, bus terminals and on the street. They will often proudly reply that, "there are no disabled people in North Korea." When I challenge whether this is true, I am told that "[they] have never seen such people." While there are some disabled veterans, they report, there are never disabled people walking on the streets like there are in the south.
Until recently, basically nothing was known about the plight of the handicapped in North Korea. Even now, only the most basic information is publicly available: the number of handicapped citizens, their living conditions, and policies in place for their protection. Not even 'North Korea Today' is able to provide much information on North Korea's handicapped. Our reports have been limited to stories about disabled veterans or about the students at the school for the handicapped in Onsung, Sambong District who skip classes to beg for food and to stealing to survive (NKT No. 133).
North Korea officially enumerated rights for disabled citizens with the North Korean Disabilities Act of June 18, 2003. This act required that there be separate workplaces for laborers with disabilities, special educational facilities, and centers designed to care for disabled persons who are unable to work. While this may be true, it is extremely doubtful that these facilities are properly managed and maintained, as illustrated by the earlier mentioned school for handicapped children. In fact, we have been receiving a steady stream of eyewitness accounts that tell of inhuman treatment. We have obtained multiple testimonials that repeat the same things: "The handicapped are not allowed to live in Pyongyang, they are restricted to certain residential areas, they are commonly quarantined in camps, and they are forcibly sterilized." No matter what the regime claims, it seems unlikely that the handicapped are being properly provided for when the entire social support system has collapsed due to the ongoing economic crisis.
While we don’t want to rely too much on speculation, the reality of conditions faced by those with disabilities can likely be read between the lines of the daily news. When we hear these stories, we can only imagine the harsh realities faced by the physically handicapped and the struggle they must face to survive. "Even the healthy are losing their homes and disappearing from the world." There truly is no place for those with physical disabilities in North Korean society. When one man lost an arm, it became very difficult for him to produce enough to sustain himself, so the man was forced to turn to begging with his young daughter. Even begging would have been too much for another man, who was entirely dependent on his daughter who led her blind father around by the hand. Then there was
the young girl who suffered from polio and was unable to get around outside without being carried on her brother’s back. She eventually died from prolonged malnutrition after living in neglect alone in her room. It is unquestionable that people with disabilities are neglected and left to die on a daily basis.
The disabled in North Korea do not currently demand the right to move freely, to have access to decent medical facilities, educational facilities or to receive the assistance they need to flourish. To request such things would seem unimaginable, but what they need is not that different from what other North Koreans need. All they want is to be able to eat enough to survive, to be able to work and get paid enough to support themselves. They expect no more than the ability to have a meal. Protecting the rights of the disabled begins with ensuring they have enough food to survive, so we believe the current policies designed to support the handicapped should be revived and we look forward to the day the North Korean authorities’ take action and enforce support their citizens.

[Investigative Report]

[Correspondence from Sinuiju] “Purchase of Alcohol on Credit? You’ve Got to Wait for Payment”

I was born in Sinuiju and was married in 1994 to a military officer who was stationed in the City of Gaesong, Gaepoong County. We had two sons and when my husband was discharged from the army in 2005, we moved back to Sinuiju. It has been four years since we moved to Sinuiju and we had to share someone else’s house because we could not afford our own. When we moved, we sold all the furniture and other household items. Because the exchange rate skyrocketed, we could not afford anything here at all. Sometime ago we found a small office with an area of thirteen Pyong and remodeled it as a space in which to live. There were several attempts to take it away from us, but we overcame each one because my husband was a former military officer. My husband was assigned as a laborer, but he earned money doing other kinds of work after paying a bribe of one hundred dollars a year. He worked at the Office of Military Commerce Control, in the Provincial Security Agency and used to earn around 200,000 NK won a month. Nowadays, the river crossings to China are completely blocked and he cannot even make 1,000 NK won a day. I earn money bootlegging with powdered corn bought for 950 NK Won per Kg. I sell the liquor in the market and dregs are used to feed pigs. Because I need good fuel when distilling the liquor, I buy fifty packs or a hundred packs of coal. A pack of coal used to cost 200 NK won, but now it costs 160 to 170 NK won. But it does not bring in much profit because of credit purchases. Close to our house, there is a military training center. Soldiers there usually buy liquor on credit. But collection on those credit purchases is a big problem. At first I tried to appease and entreat, but it did not work. My husband tried threats. But where would soldiers get money to pay for it? I just wished that soldiers would try anything, including stealing, to get money to pay us.
I tried to borrow 200,000 NK won from an acquaintance to make some liquor on the occasion of February 16 celebration (Lunar New Year’s Day). I explained what I needed money for and he said, “Would it not be better to stay as a military officer and live in
"Gaesong? Why are you having such a hard time here?” I will tell you why. Gaesong is not fit for anyone to live. During the period of the Arduous March, Gaesong probably lost the largest number of residents to starvation. What is good about its being the old capital of Goryo Kingdom? Severe lack of food caused many residents to eat herbs and different grasses, which resulted in permanent health problems for many people. There were so many like them in our village. Sinuiju is much better even if one ends up living as a Kkotjebi. We are barely surviving with one meal of bean-curd scraps, and yet we still think we made the right decision to come here. Nowadays, there is a saying among people, “Sympathy is a trap, purchase on credit is free, and delayed payment is missing.” And such is the truth. I am having such a hard time in daily life and my cousin keeps saying she regrets not realizing that “sympathy is a trap.” There is a family who used to enjoy the privileges of a high-ranking party official, even driving a Mercedes-Benz. They are now relocated to Sinuiju. Their eldest son was drafted into the military. When they were relocated, they had another son who was in the graduating class of a middle school and a 25-year-old daughter. Even though they were once enjoying lives as high-ranking party officials, nobody recognizes them as such in rural areas. Even though their daughter was serving as a nurse, she said she could not save enough for her wedding with the rations and wages from the provincial clinics. She started peddling. She pays 10,000 NK won a month to her employer without ever showing up for work. This daughter used to buy some items from my cousin. My cousin sells cotton clothing. She was happy to see the young lady working so hard in peddling and ended up allowing some purchases on credit. Now three months have gone by without the young woman paying my cousin. My cousin ended up visiting her house, but was told that their daughter does not come home. My cousin did not get paid for over ten pairs of cotton clothing. She literally got sick in bed and kept moaning, “Sympathy was a trap.” Nowadays, all we hear is about swindling. More people seem to think that swindling is the only way to make a profit. How can a strong nation be built with such a spirit among its citizens? I am worried and doubt that the goal of establishing a strong nation can be accomplished by 2012. ☺

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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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