[“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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Resolving the Food Problem, a Deepening Contradiction

[Hot Topics]
Meeting for "successful farming" at the Ministry of Agriculture
On April 2, the Ministry of Agriculture held a meeting "for a successful farming year" and issued a policy. There were further discussions saying, "In order to be ready for the year of ‘prosperous nation in 2012’ we should act in unison in preparation for farming. No other task is more urgent and important for the people at this point than resolving the food problem. The strong and prosperous socialist nation means people’s paradise, where everything is prosperous and all people live well. We will have to have a successful farming year and fill the granary with grains if we want to open the gate of the prosperous nation. Only if we resolve the food issues, can we develop our own socialism, and strengthen the unity of prosperous nation."

Conference Participants pointed out that the food crisis was deepened because of natural disasters for two consecutive years in 2006 and 2007, and said in consensus that it is very important to resolve the food issue on their own. Also, they said, "This year's crop should be good," "We should not be just looking at the rest of rice storage. We should actively adopt two-crop farming with all the power we have." For agricultural workers, they requested, "You should actively looking for a way to increase crop production." An executive who attended the meeting said, "In the past, we imported grains from other countries that were low in quality and in nutrition. Beginning this year, it may not even come to us. We must solve the food problem on our own. We can only ask them to actively engage in two-crop farming and potato farming."
Personal Patch-farming Hit Hard due to Dissolution of ‘Sanrimban’
The Environmental Protection Department has decided to dismantle the Forest Protection Unit (hereafter ‘Sanrimban’) based on their forest preservation policy. The dismantling of Sanrimban, in fact, means banning of personal small-patch farming causing an uproar amongst the people. Unfortunately, people cannot hide their worrisome feelings as they face the dissolution of Sanrimban. North Korean authorities declared that they couldn’t allow personal patch farming in order to prevent indiscriminate forest damage. It was determined that the Sanrimban members, who were assigned to preserve the forest, were engaging in small-patch farming in the forest by planting corns between the plants and through the planting of other crops, harming the effort to create a forest. In fact, authorities tried to dismantle Sanrimban last year, but they have decided to postpone it to this year because of serious food shortages. People are asking each other worriedly, "If we cannot do small patch farming from this year, how are we going to resolve the food problem next year?" Those who relied on personal small-patch farming think this policy is the wrong thing – they say that people should be allowed to eat food first. Then, the trees and mountains can be saved. In the mean time, on March 20, an official document regarding forest maintenance was issued to each of the factories and enterprises. From now on, factories and enterprises with more than 350 employees will be managing two jungbo (about 20,000 square meters). Unlike the existing Sanrimban they cannot plant any crops except for trees for firewood.

South Hamgyong Province: Angry Over the Transition of All Small Farms to Collective Farms
It was decided that all the small patches of fields, which originally were planted by individuals, would be handed over to the Collective Farm in each city, county in South Hamgyong Province. These small patches of fields were originally cultivated by the individuals and all the harvest from these fields were allowed for personal use. However, the decision on handing over these filed to Collective Farms in this year resulted in resentment and resistance. Kwon young-duk (50s) in Hamju County said in a frustrated voice “Because of not enough rations from the state, we have to cultivate these small fields with our own effort and the harvest from these are essential to our food supply. Now what am I supposed to do to make a living? “We always had hope that the coming year would be better than the last. But, it always gets worse and worse. What on earth is going on? The most miserable ones are ordinary people in the lowest class. This is such an unfair society! Those with power and privilege don’t have anything to worry about. It is no concern of theirs whether people in the lowest class can survive or not.” The residents said that the policy over small patch farming has shifted several times. So, they expect that the policy may change again if they stage resistance against it for sometime.

[Food]
Food Distribution is Improving at the Coalmines in Gangseo County
The status of the Public Distribution System (PDS) at the coalmines in Gangseo Province has recently started to show signs of improvement. Recently, laborers who work in the coalmines received 17 days worth of rations. While these rations still did not provide for the families of the miners, it was a significant improvement from a time when there were no rations available for distribution at all. At the same time, laborers who work outside the mines received 12 days worth of rations. Additionally, laborers are now starting to see their monthly wages paid on time. Miners currently receive a salary of 35,000 NK won and those who work outside the mine receive 25,000 NK won. In order to achieve the goal of increasing coal output outlined in this year’s New Year’s Editorial, it was decided that something must be done to address the chronic malnutrition that was plaguing the areas workers. To address this issue, a new dining facility was established to distribute bowls of corn and bottles of liquor to workers when they finish their workday. At the same time these improvements were made, it was deemed that, starting on February 18th, the workday should be increased to nine hours per day.

[Economy]

Reasons for Chungjin Tractor Parts Factory’s Failure to Accomplish Its First Quarter Production Goal
The tractor parts factory in Chungjin City of the North Hamgyong Province did not accomplish its first quarter goal. In January, the Provincial Executive Committee of the North Hamgyong Province instructed the factory to produce the parts well and send them to each farm in the Province. As such, the factory manager held several meetings with engineers and technicians to accomplish the production task instructed by the Provincial Party. All the meeting participants pledged, “We will maintain high political consciousness as the honorable warriors for our Great Leader, Kim Jong-IL. We will complete the parts production as planned before April 15th.” However, each farm still severely suffers from lack of tractor parts because not even half of the parts were produced after the first quarter. The Provincial Party Organization and Guidance Department began to examine the ideology of the factory managers and secretaries because they didn’t complete the task issued by the Party. The managers say, “The abilities of the technicians are low, and the machines are so old that they do not often operate properly. That is the reason why the production rate is so low.” Several workers who have observed all the circumstances say, “We workers have stolen many of the parts because we have not received any food rations or wages. The task couldn’t be completed because the stolen parts are sold at the markets even under the low production situation. But we don’t understand why the Party would criticize us so harshly because our factory is not the only factory with this sort of crisis. Other factories are under almost the same conditions. I feel as if our factory received punishment to make an example for other factories.”

Decisions Made to Send Middle School Graduates to Farms
Following the directives of sending the members of the Democratic Women’s Union to farming areas, decisions are made to send middle school graduates to the farms. The purpose behind this decision is to form youth work units and youth groups to increase
agricultural production. Therefore, the students who graduated from middle school but failed to join the military were first called out to the farms. Some students in one school in the Songpyung Area, Chungjin City, in North Hamgyong Province, volunteered to go to farms. Forty out of the sixty female middle school graduates volunteered to go to the Daeduk Farm in Hoeryung City. However, only after a few days, the girls complained, saying, “The work really kills us.” One farm executive said, “The young students tried to do the work with passion only. However, it took only a few days for them to realize that the work is hard for them.”

Only 1/3 of Farm Volunteer Women in Eunduk County Reports to Work
The attendance rate is dropping again for the farmwomen, who had reported to Eunduk County, North Hamgyong Province. In the first month there was food ration and the attendance was pretty good, but in the second month there was no rationing and it caused massive absentees. Then some rationing was resumed and the attendance rate went high again until March 10th. But when there was no prospect of ration, again the attendance rate is rapidly falling. As of March 20th, out of 60 women who had volunteered to the work force of the Women’s Party Farm, only 20 women reported to work. Due to severe labor shortage in the farms, the Women’s Party Committee had sent the members of the Women’s Party to the farm. The Eunduk County Party Committee and Ryangjung Committee members had determined that even if they can not give rations to the laborers of general factories, they would give ration of whole corn to those Women’s Party members who had volunteered to the work force. However, as the amount and timing of ration are not consistent, the percentage of women reporting to work fluctuates greatly. Therefore not only the chairman and the officials of the Women’s Party but also the officials of County Party and Farm Management Committee members are visiting the Women’s Party members who did not report to work and ask them to sign that they would definitely report to work.

[Politics]
After the Launch of the Gwangmyungsung No. 2, People are Starting to Ask, “What has been gained?”
Immediately after the launch of the Gwangmyungsung No. 2, the official organs of the North Korean Government reported that the international community had responded with great shock and admiration at the nation’s achievement. Initially, people throughout the country enthusiastically celebrated the feat, but as time passed, this enthusiasm became tempered by skepticism. Kim Dong-Hyuk (alias, 30s) of Pyongsung voiced his doubts, “I had thought things would get better after the Gwangmyungsung No. 2 was launched, but that did not happen. Directives coming down [from the government] are now beginning to make our lives harder. What did we gain from the launch of the Gwangmyungsung No. 2? Nothing has changed, has it?” A mid-level official in Pyongyang also reported, “We rejoiced [the launch of the Gwangmyungsung No. 2], but now, I don’t know what to think. The food crisis is getting worse and new policies are making our lives much more difficult. I am worried that we might return to a situation like the First Arduous March. Unless we reform
in a hurry we may all die. If things stay like they are now, there is nothing ahead of us but despair.”

A War May Be Coming, But Survival Requires Major Change
In Sinuiju, North Pyongan Province, it is generally believed that even if war breaks out North Korea needs to radically change its foreign policy for the sake of the country’s twenty million citizens. Before the excitement surrounding the successful launch of Kwangmyongsong-2 subsided, the entire county had been kept on a full-time high alert. One official remarked that, “Ever since talk began of the need to get ready for imminent war, the political climate has been toxic. We can sense that other countries are viewing us judgmentally. Everyone says similar things; Because of the sorry state of the country, we would not mind a war – it may even be a good thing.” Local residents bemoan the situation, “Either 4 or 5 million people will die in a war or everyone will eventually starve to death. If war breaks out, our world will likely to change and many more people my end up surviving because of it. If we continue on our current course, nobody knows how many will die from starvation this year or next, you just can’t tell what will happen in the future.” Kim Jong-Han (pseudonym, 40s), a resident from South Sinuiju, forcefully claimed, “People no longer want to simply wait until they die, like they once did. Only a very few want to maintain the status quo. I will not say how things need to change, but it is clear that if there is no change, everyone will perish. Everyone I know thinks the same way.”

Hoeryong City Frees 3 Lawbreakers Who Came Back to Vote
In Hoeryong, North Hamgyong Province, authorities have freed three criminals who returned to the country to cast votes in the last month’s election. Among these criminals was a woman who had illegally gone to China for business and two men who had fled to China in order to avoid arrest over drug charges. The two men were believed to have been missing for over a year, but were apprehended when they came back into the county to vote in the March 8th Election. After reviewing their cases, officials from the legal hierarchy – City Party, police, public prosecutors station and the court – generously found the defendants “not guilty.” The legal authorities responded that, “even though they had broken the law, these individuals demonstrated, through their participation in the election, that they are people of good social conscience.” All three were set free with a not guilty verdict.

[Society]
A Son Discharged from 10 Year–Military Service Died at Sea While Seeking Food for His Parents
Cho, Jung-Ho (60s) in Yeonho-Dong, Kimchaek City, North Hamgyong Province, couldn’t continue to speak because of sorrow. Mr. Cho’s son died while fishing in a stormy sea in February. Mr. Cho said “Kwang-Hyok (his son) was discharged from the military service on Feb. 2nd. When he came back home, he seemed to feel sorry for his parent’s poor life. His mother was bedridden due to an illness and his grandmother in her eighties was immobile with stroke. Although I was working at a factory, I did not get any wage or ration from the
work. *Kwang-Hyok* decided to start business to make money right away after his discharge from military. But his business did not go well. Later, he decided to go out to sea to make money for his family. After the holidays have passed, he begged the owner of a small boat into letting him use the boat so that he could go out to the sea for fishing. He said he would collect seaweed, kelp and catch fishes. On that day, the wave was very high and the wind was strong. The boat ended up sinking in the sea.” That’s how Mr. *Cho* lost his son. He said he should have stopped his son going out to the sea. He and his wife finally burst into tears. Their neighbors felt sorry for them. Because the neighbors expected their life to be better after their son came back from the military.

**Mother and Daughter Manage to Live with the Help from Neighborhood Unit**

*Park, Chun-Sil* (40s) and her young daughter, in Shinpoong-Dong, Wonsan City of Kangwon Province, manage to live with porridge provided by a neighborhood unit. She lost her husband from a car accident in January this year. Her husband used to be a soldier and took care of his family. When they did not have enough ration, he always managed to get some extra food for his family. It was not unusual for some of the military families to move into wife’s family house because they did not receive ration. However, Ms *Park*’s never had to worry about the food thanks to her husband. After her husband suddenly passed away, she did not know how to make living. She has never done any business or peddling before. So, she had difficulty finding work to make a living. She had some emergency food stocked up, but it ran out quickly. So, she and her children had to live on porridge everyday. They often skipped meals. Her two kids couldn’t go to school. On April 2nd, she and her two children got food poisoning after having grass root porridge. On the very same day, her son died from the grass porridge poisoning. She and her daughter fell ill as well. Ms. *Park* said, “We would have died without the help from the neighborhood unit.” The neighborhood unit is providing porridge made with corn and mung beans collected from people. Ms. *Park* said, “We should go to see a doctor to get treatment. But we do not have any money. We are just waiting for the day we die.”

**[Women/Children/Education]**

*Chungjin* Mine Metallurgy College Re-took the Entrance Examination Due to Illegal Conduct

The *Chungjin* Mine Metallurgy College in North *Hamgyong* Province re-took the entrance examination because of illegal conduct on the examination. When students took the college examination on February 4th, 10 proctors supervised 50 examinees to prevent cheating. However, some faculty members were bribed and increased some students’ test scores this year once again. When illegal behavior was detected on some subjects, officials of the Department of Education of the Central Party visited the institute and stopped the examination. The officials announced that any illegal conduct on the examination was not allowed and said, “We give admission only to excellent students.” Thus, they declared that students that had already taken the test would have invalid scores. Therefore, examinees were told to take the examination again on the 7th of the month and the officials administrated the examination themselves. They changed the desk formation of the testing
centers in a way that there were 10 rows and 5 columns. The dispatched officials of the Department of Education scored the test themselves and announced the scores on the 18th of that month. Four hundred ten students out of 600 candidates passed the examination. There was an additional examination on March 25th and 20 additional students received admission. Although the administration was conducted in a strict manner, some students still received admission through bribery by paying 2 million NK won.

[Accidents]

An Intoxicated Police Officer Killed Residents by Motorcycle during Mass Rally in Hamheung

On April 17th, an accident occurred where a person was struck and killed by a motorcycle during a mass rally in Hamheung City, South Hamgyong Province. A mass rally was held at 3 PM in Hamheung, to celebrate the successful launch of “Kwangmyungsung-2,” a satellite and also to encourage the building of a “Strong and Prosperous Nation”. A police officer monitoring blocked roads near the statue of President Kim Il-Sung on a motorcycle struck some participants in the mass rally. However, he was intoxicated. As a result of this accident, three residents were killed and four were severely injured. The whole area around the rally was plunged into confusion as it occurred within five minutes after the mass rally took place.

A Big Consecutive Fire in Hoeryong City

A wildfire swept through Hoeryong City in North Hamgyong Province. The morning of April 11th, a fire arose in the 4th unit of Hongsan-ri in Hoeryong City and gradually spread into Oryu-ri and Ryongchon-ri. More than 1,000 Jungbo (1 hectare) of forest was destroyed by fire in these three divisions. Fifteen people among those who tried to extinguish the fire were suffocated or perished in the flames. These victims included six forestry officials, three soldiers, and six laborers. The fire also injured many other people. The fire was barely controlled in the early morning two days later on the 13th. The fire caused extensive casualty loss and forest damages as well as damages to some farmhouses nearby. A deer ranch was also included in the affected area, and all thirty deer in seasonal grazing on the day were perished in the flame.

On the afternoon of the 13th, a fire arose in the Soobukdong-2 area and burned twelve houses. Among them, eight houses were completely burned and lost all their properties. Hence the members of the Democratic Women’s Union in Soobukdong Office camp up with an emergency assistance plan by collecting food, clothing, and other necessities. The members of the Democratic Women’s Union held an emergency meeting on the next morning (14th), to provide relief to fire victims. During this meeting, the members of the Democratic Women’s Union requested assistance to collect more necessities for each DWU member. The City Party came up with an emergency food assistance plan to collect 30 kilograms of corn per household. In addition, a workplace, which belongs to the householder of the damaged household, was instructed to take responsibility in repairing the homes destroyed by fire.
**Hoeryong City, A Severe Setback to Supply of Lumber for Construction Due to Forest Fire**

The fire affected *Hoeryong* City and it caused severe setback to supply lumber for construction in heavy loss areas of the forest. The trees used for lumber spread in *Songhak*, *Ryongchun*, *Oryu*-ri, and so on. Now it is not ensured that they can receive useful lumber from now on. At *Hoeryong* City Party, the chapter of construction workers held a meeting day after day. *Hoeryong* City was fully determined to advance the Strong and Prosperous Nation for two years from 2012 to 2010. Construction businesses of various kinds were expected to be completed by that time, but are now setback because of the large forest fire. The City Party sent the land forest security patrol to each rural area starting from the 17th to look for useful logs for material lumber.

**Commentary**

**Resolving the Food Problem, a Deepening Contradiction**

The North Korean Agriculture Ministry declared at a meeting "No other task is more urgent and important for the people at this point than resolving the food problem." They also said, "We should not be just looking at the rice storage. We should actively adopt two-crop farming with all the power we have. We should resolve the food problem on our own." These are all correct statements. Since the aid from the international community is suspended they should make every effort to make this year’s farming a success in order to solve the food shortage problem.

The problem is that the policy of “Resolve the problem on your own” is a contradiction. For the people the only way to resolve the food problem on their own at this point is “creating the land” for farming. Whether to become a member of *Sanrimban*, create a patch field in the slopes of mountain, salvage an abandoned land, the only way to survive is through small-patch farming. The forest is becoming devastated and the land is being damaged. The way to protect the farmland is to preserve and create forests. However, it contradicts the reality the residents are facing.

It is reported that recently, North Korea issued a policy, which requires dismantling of *Sanrimban* and transferring of personal patch fields to cooperative farms. We also hear news that people are much puzzled and frustrated by the contradictory policies of "Take care of the food problem on your own." and "Strive to create Forest." Especially, we are curious to know what will be the outcome of the rivalry between the local Party, which managed *Sanrimban*, and the Central Party since the dismantling of *Sanrimban* involves transferring of management from the local to Central Party. So far, the agencies and enterprises that belong to the local Party have been entrusted to protect the forest. They secured food by planting young trees in slopes less than 30 degrees in the sunny, South-facing direction, and through patch farming between the trees. However, opposition from the local party is expected, as the management authority will be turned over the Central Party. On the surface it is the issue of ‘forest protection,’ but eventually it becomes the issue of who will have the right to manage the forest for farming.

The chagrin of the people is greater than the opposition from the local Party. It is quite natural for the people to clamor since they have to hand over the patch field they have
created using the power of your own effort to cooperative farms for free. The position of the people is, "We will hand over our patch field if we receive food ration. We can’t give it up because this is our only source of food". They argue that, "Just to hand over the land without any measures of compensation literally means death to us."

Forest preservation is a very urgent and important task in terms of land management as well as agricultural production. However, what is more urgent and important for the residents who have to make a living is to create small patch of field for personal farming. The policies cannot be carried out because they ask people to take care of food problem on their own and issue orders that are contradictory in nature. The contradiction surrounding the issue of food problem will only deepen unless North Korean authorities come up with a dramatic 'reform' action.

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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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