[“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]
How Ordinary Laborers Manage To Survive In The City Of Danchun
The City of Danchun, South Hamgyong Province, is located in one of the most important and well-known mining regions in North Korea and serves as one of the country’s industrial centers. Among the significant mines in the area are Gumdeok, Ryongyang, Daehuing, Ripa, Dongam, and Gwangchun. Also the region hosts a number of important factories including: The Magnesium Clinker Factory, The Reagents Factory, The Mining Machinery Factory and The Dongda Ore Separation Plant. Employees of these mines and factories are directly managed by the state and are given priority over other workers when it comes to food rations. As a result, these workers are able to lead relatively comfortable lives. Comparatively, the conditions for employees of all other local factories are quite bleak. Factories with less than 200 employees, including those involved in city construction, fabrics, clothing, food and soy sauce, have not received any food rations since the “economic difficulties” began. Recently, as the food crisis has worsened, these small factories have begun to face many difficulties. The stories below are about the impact the current situation has had on these workers...
A Cement Factory Located Too Far From The Markets
The Cement factory in the city of Danchun employs more than 500 laborers. Since there are no available food rations, these laborers and their families routinely head into the mountains to collect greens and herbs that they can later sell in the market. Unfortunately, the factory is located far from town, which makes transportation to and from the market quite difficult. As a result, workers are often unable to get their goods to the market in time and are forced to go hungry. Toward beginning of last March, Shin Myung-hee (pseudonym, 40s), a laborer at the factory, wandered around the mountains to collect grass-roots and tree barks for his family of four. While searching, he fell down the hill and was injured. He was unable afford medical treatment. So, he was forced to suffer and eventually died from his wounds. Choi Gil-lim (67), an old woman, was on her way home from the market when she collapsed due to physical weakness. She soon died without being able to rise again. These sorts of incidents occur quite frequently among employees of this factory.

Many Laborers Collapse While Operating Machinery Due To Malnutrition At A Paper Factory
The Paper Factory in the city of Danchun has more than 300 employees. Even though the factory is normally full, there are usually far more workers idly standing around than there are workers actually working. These workers argue: “We need to eat to if we are to have the strength to work, but we have nothing to eat. How are we supposed to work?” Han Ji-man (50s, pseudonym) says, “Family members worry about each other wherever they are. Those at work worry about their family at home. Those at home worry about their family at work who have no food to eat.” A work-unit leader reported that is common for workers to collapse while operating the machinery. Lee Sook-gyong (pseudonym, 30s) whose husband is an employee of the factory says, “My determination not to collapse provides me with the strength to keep going. If I were to collapse, who would give my husband even a bowl of porridge? I am always worried that my husband, the head of our household, might collapse while at work.”

Families of Laborers Rely On Boiled Tree Bark For Sustenance At The Machinery Repair Factory
The Machinery Repair Factory in the city of Danchun employs more than 400 laborers. These workers main job is to repair machinery used by different mines, including the coalmines. Everyone from the factory is experiencing similar difficulties due to the food shortage. Housewives are concerned that they are not able to provide adequate meals to their husbands after work. The New year has not brought any improvements to the food supply system and the situation is growing worse. As a result, families are now forced to boil tree bark instead of corn. The wives of laborers do not have any money to start businesses, so they must rely on the collection of grass roots to sell in the market. Many housewives are facing a daily struggle to feed their children in these difficult times.

Food Shortage Causes Many Workers To Go Absent And Delays The Production Schedule At The Probing Machine Factory
The probing machine factory employs more than 700 laborers. This factory produces machines needed in probing. Since the food crisis began last year, there has been a steep increase in the number of workers absent, which has caused many delays to the production schedule. Many of these laborers have left their homes to start businesses and many others are immobile due to malnutrition. These families collect tree bark and roots, which they grind up into a powder to make porridge. Many family members starve and are unable get out of their beds to move around. Many workers faces have turned a shade of yellow and they develop deep-set eyes. Many have lost so much weight that they appear to be made up of nothing but skin and bones and have hard time even opening mouths to speak.

[Food]

Heoryung City Announces 15 Day’s Worth of Food Will Be Distributed During the Month of July
The Heoryung City Government of North Hamgyong Province has announced that, “between April and July, we can only distribute food rations for the first half of the month and we cannot afford to distribute for the second half of the month due to our current food situation.” In addition, they said that they would distribute potatoes instead of corn during August and September; they will distribute the new harvests in October. According to an official, “General Kim Jong-Il gave delicate attention to our city and ordered us to supply only the Border Patrol and the nearby Regional Education District Center and not to supply other Regional District Centers when he came to visit us last February. Instead of giving to the other divisions, he told us to work hard to give more to our own city.” With the exception of Pyongyang, Heoryung City might be the only city with the ability to distribute rations.

Special Distribution to Disabled Veterans for the 4.25 Army Foundation Day
There was a special distribution at Disabled Veterans Factories throughout the nation on the People’s Army Foundation’s Anniversary on April 25. A Disabled Veterans factory located in the Ranam District of Chungjin City, North Hamgyong Province distributed valuable goods according to a soldier’s rank. The highest-ranked disabled veterans received 3kg of rice, a suit, a pair of socks, and 1 kg of sugar snacks. The second-ranked recipients received a short-sleeved summer shirt, a pair of socks, and 700g of sugar snacks. At this special distribution, they not only gave to disabled veterans but to their wives as well. Wives received a pair of Chinese-made women’s shoes with a market price of about 9,000 won. However, there was no distribution to the third-ranked disabled veterans, which led to dissension.

[Economy]

Potato Farming Recommended for Factories in North Hamgyong Province
North Hamgyong Province ordered all districts to have their factories and enterprises borrow about 500-600 square meters of arable land to farm potatoes. There is nothing to distribute to the residents because everything they produced last year had to be ceded for army provisions in regions including Chungjin City, Uhryang County, Hwadae County,
Myungchun County, Kyungsung County and Kilju County. North Hamgyong Province is known for its lack of self-sufficiency and because they had to contribute to the army provisions they have no hope of being able to provide rations to local residents. Due to this situation, they recommended side work of 500 square meters of potato farming to factories and enterprises with more than 350 workers. The problem is that workers are responsible for the potato seeds. Each worker needs to prepare 2kg of potato seeds. On top of this, they are also responsible for the fertilizer and farming equipment. To make it even worse, each person can only take home 35kg of potatoes. Due to such circumstances, it is fair for an average worker to think, “It will be easier not to participate.” The percentage may vary from factories and enterprises but overall only 60% of workers participated in this potato farming. When the potatoes are harvested, they will be distributed for August and September rations.

Hamju County’s Pig Processing Plant Wastes Public Supplies Preparing for Chairman Kim Jong-Il’s Visit
A pig processing plant in Hamju County, South Hamgyong Province is busy in preparation for the upcoming visit by Chairman Kim Jong-Il. Though it had been remodeled and modernized last July, another renovation began in February. Last year’s project updated and beautified all the walls while this year’s focuses on placing glass windows on the entire front facade. However, it has not been easy acquiring the required amount of glass or coming up with the entire construction cost. Last year’s project used 80 tons of cement, while this year’s will require no less than 70 tons. Central Party workers received many unkind stares when they scrapped several fully functional apparatuses following their inspection of the factory. Over half of all the laborers and factory workers are against the latest renovation project, saying, “This renovation is too much for us in our situation to handle. Though we would do anything for the glory of hosting our Great Chairman, it seems that wasting public supplies will cause him concern.” Despite such negative public opinion, Central Party workers are urging everyone to focus on the renovation effort. Since they do not have a choice, the laborers go along with their directive, but more and more of them are skipping their work due to a lack of food provisions.

Grueling Conditions at Raheung Talcum Factory, Dozens of Workers Collapse on the Job
The living conditions of the workers at the Raheung Talcum Factory located in Riwon County, South Hamgyong Province are becoming worse. Their work consists of extracting ore, crushing it, and picking out talcum. Many who work in the mining pits collapse due to their severely weakened physical state and the demanding nature of their work. Last year, more than 100 workers had to be carried out. On a single day, 13 people collapsed. The Raheung area has been impoverished for a long time, and the food crisis has hit the factory especially hard. The workers have to venture at least 4 km outside the town to dig for grass roots and pick wild greens, as all the areas closer to town have already been picked clean. Many people walking on the street seem to lose balance and totter because they do not have any strength left in their legs.
[Politics]

Manager of *Namyang* Farm Management Council in *Gilju* County Arrested for Graft and Corruption

The Manager of *Namyang* Farm Management Council in *Gilju* County, North *Hamgyong* Province, was arrested recently. She is accused of embezzling the farm fund and other loaned money, which amount to approximately more than ten million (10,000,000) NK won. *Namyang* Farm originally had a few paddy fields and dry fields, so people planted some corn. However, there were not much corn seeds to plant this year. Moreover, the moneylenders were visiting the farm frequently to demand the payments for the loan. One of the workers in this farm said that the person who reported the Manager was an accountant for the farm because he anticipated an investigation. As soon as the Manager learned of the report, she implored to the Secretary in charge of the Party, but only to be criticized. As the moneylenders visited the house every day to demand the money, the Manager’s husband even caused a commotion with suicidal threats.

Re-Education Center in *Jeongurrie* Will Be Converted into a Women’s Correctional Facility

The *Jeongurrie* Re-education Center in *Hoeryong* City, North *Hamgyong* Province, will be converted into a Correctional Facility for Women. The Safety Bureau of the Party in North Korea is examining specific plans to intern women starting in 2010 by transferring male prisoners into other Re-education Centers or by releasing them. Considering that men are capable doing some work, a plan to leave behind a few male prisoners is also under review. Currently, there are 1,200 women imprisoned in this Re-education Center. Female offenders are increasing every day. Currently in this April, the number of newly committed female prisoners amounts to 20-30 per week.

[Society]

Nationwide Events for April 25, Founding Day of the Military

Lectures and events were held nationwide to celebrate April 25 Founding Day of the Military. *Hamheung* City, South *Hamgyong* Province, a formal military inspection of retired soldiers celebrations was held from 8:00 am and members of the Democratic Women’s Union wore the traditional clothing for the events. Party members offered 1 Kg of corn to the family of war-dead and discharged soldiers. Members of the Democratic Women’s Union collected 1,500 Won to buy necessary goods for the military. Each public enterprise gave comforts to each military unit. Each military unit would receive 10 pieces of facial soap, 10 pieces of laundry soap, needle and thread. Big public enterprises also offered rice cake and pork. On April 24, the day before the celebration day, there was a recorded lecture held. The recorded lecture included a story about a soldier, who saved fishermen while he was patrolling with a chief engineer: A ship sank and three out of 29 on the ship died. A soldier saved 25 crewmembers and received the ‘*Kim Il-Sung* youth honor award’, while the chief engineer received ‘First-Class National Flag Medal’. The residents seemed to watch the recorded lecture with tears. In order to celebrate ‘Founding Day of the Military’, electricity
was provided to regular households. The electricity supply was terminated at midnight on April 25.

**Suicide Due to Straitened Circumstances after the Car Accident**

The end of March, a funeral was held for *Huh Byung-Nam* (40s) in *Sunchun* city, South *Pyongan* Province. He was working for a pharmaceutical company and also had a side business as a second job. Earlier this year, he tried to jump into a car just starting to take off and was being dragged by the car a few meters. In that accident, he got his back severely injured and had to quit his work. His wife started doing business for a living, but she was not successful. She felt guilt for her failed business and became very worried for her family’s situation. Later she ended up becoming insane and his kids became beggars or ‘*KKotjebi*’. Mr. *Huh* got depressed with his family situation and eventually committed suicide.

**[Women/Children/Education]**

**Because of Crackdown of Rice Trade, Living is not Easy**

*Park Hye-ran* and *Lee Jeong-oak* are best friends and natives of *Soonam* District, *Chungjin* City, North *Hamgyong* Province. They were born, raised, and got married in the same district. They graduated from the same elementary and middle school and worked for the same company. Although they worked hard, they did not receive any food distribution and therefore began trading together starting in 2005. So far they have done every possible trade and their latest business was trading rice. They went down to *Haegu* or *Sariwon* in South *Hwanghae* Province to buy rice and delivered it to *Pyongyang* by vehicle. Then they delivered the rice to *Chungjin* through the railroad system by bribing acquainted train crewmembers. They usually sold rice at a profit of 200-300 won in *Chungjin*. They have traded rice this way more than they ever have this year, but they were detected this March by the police. The amount of forfeited rice was as many as 2 tons. They had an unusually difficult time last year and the forfeit was extremely critical for them. It seemed like a final blow to them because they ran out of funds. Fortunately, they did not receive any jail sentences, but they felt despaiired because they do not have anything to survive. They have decided to begin their trade again and are looking for trading items, which do not demand so much investment.

**“Starving Children Walk Like 80-year-old People”**

After a severe winter, *Kkotjebi* children came swarming around the market places of *Gimchaek*, North *Hamgyong* Province. The children are usually under 15 years old and do not go to school. Some of them acquire food by delivering shoppers’ stuff. Some children pass out because they have not had food for a long time. Some *Kkotjebi* children kneel in front of a food stand and beg for food until they can get it. A few children can get food, but most of them are kicked out of the place. A police officer said, “Because these children do not eat appropriately, they seem to have no vitality and walk around like 80-year-old people. Some children starved to death and this month we have already found four or five dead bodies of these children in isolated places.”
[Accidents]

**Vehicle Transporting Gas for Plowing Collided at the Ryunha Collective Farm in Kim Hyungjik County**

There was a collision at the Ryunha collective farm in Kim Hyung-jik County, Ryanggang Province, while a vehicle was transporting gas used for plowing. The collision caused the gas tank to explode and 1.5 tons of diesel fuel to spill on the ground. Farms that could no longer use the diesel fuel called an emergency meeting to discuss what to do with the plowing. The Li Party and Management Board members decided to individually sell 60 kilograms of food to raise money. In addition, the members appealed that each farmer must donate 40 kilograms of food, promising to repay them with distributions at the end of the year. Some farmers have started plowing after the members have urgently acquired gas from the retailers on credit, but they are still puzzled how to collect all the necessary amount of gas. Under these circumstances, some farm workers proposed that the best way to save money is to use oxen. However, there are only a handful of good oxen to use for plowing because they have been poorly fed.

**Teacher, Drunk and Broke Portrait, murdered Fellow Teacher**

Last November, a teacher murdered a fellow teacher who was doing night duty with him in Gokgu middle school of Gokgu-ri, Leewon County, South Hamgyong Province. Kim Seong-Hak (alias, 40s) was sleeping, drunk, and dropped a portrait of Kim Il-Sung by mistake, when waking at midnight. He tried to put it back in its place but crushed it because he was not able to keep his balance. The next thing he knew, everything was out of hand. While he was flustered because he didn’t know what to do, Choi, a fellow teacher, who thought he was sleeping, caught him. Kim made an escape attempt but was caught. Kim confessed that he killed his fellow teacher thinking that if the act was known that he dropped the portrait he would receive a maximum penalty sentence.

[Commentary]

**Revival of Danchun, Treasury of Natural Resources, Would Benefit South Korea**

During last May, at the height of spring hardship period, Ryongyang Mine in City of Danchun, South Hamgyong Province, suspended its operation completely because no market was found for its product, magnesium clinker. Consequently, there was no food ration for its laborers. According to a party leader who conveyed the news at the time said, "This area is typically dry. So, around here no grass lives, which people tried to feed on. Therefore its laborers and other residents had harder time than other areas."

Ryongyang Mine along with Daeheung Mine is the largest producer of magnesite. Magnesite, essential to steel industry, is not produced in South Korea at all, and South Korea’s dependence on foreign imports is 100 %. According to the Reports of Chamber of Commerce and Industry of South Korea based on “Joint Development Strategy of Natural Resources of North Korea" announced in 2007, North Korea can provide a stable supply for the quarter of South Korea’s annual demand of magnesite for 10,080 years. This implies an eternal source of magnesite supply. Of course, a huge amount of investment is predicted to be required considering extraction and transportation of the ore. However, consideration of
annual price increases of natural resources in the international markets would make the investment economically feasible and beneficial.

In the year of 2007, authorities of North and South Koreas conducted three joint studies in accordance with the “Agreements on Development Cooperation of Light Industries of North and South Koreas and Natural Resources”, and they also investigated the economic feasibility of the projects. The targets of investigation were three mines, Ryongyang, Daeheung and Gumdeok Mines that happens to be the North Korea’s largest producer of zinc.

Unfortunately, the blueprint of development cooperation of North and South that had looked like being realized soon enough turned into an old tale, only after a year. Even toward the end of last February, we could hear loud voices of journalists saying, “Unless we rush development of North Korea’s natural resources, China will take over.” Now those voices are all gone. Tourism on the Mount Geumgang has been suspended and Gaesung Industrial Complex is going through a stage of life and death. These events have become hindrances to the North-South development cooperation of North Korea’s natural resources.

The worst victims of hardening of North-South relationship are naturally the residents of North Korea. Severe food shortage crisis of last spring after the suspension of South Korea’s humanitarian aid in food to North Korea did not leave the City of Danchun alone. In the case of Ryongyang Mine, we learn that even the mines and factories managed directly by the state went through harsh and severe crisis of food shortage. It is obvious that the situation in the factories managed by local authorities was much worse. Even those factories with 300 to 700 employees were under similar situation. It is nearly impossible to confirm numerical data about production level, rate of absenteeism, and nutrition level of the employees’ families of each factory. What we can guess from the situation of Ryongyang Mine says that they are very vulnerable.

Absolutely essential is the policy shift to reconciliation between North and South, which might be helpful to easing the food shortage crisis of the residents. Reactivation of North-South development cooperation of North Korea’s natural resources can become a very important occasion, hopefully beneficial to both sides. It should be remembered that the closer the North-South relationship gets, the more lives it can save. How much longer are we going to let the residents of North Korea barely survive, day by day, on the grass roots? It can be an occasion of saving lives, acquiring essential natural resources, planting good reputation throughout the world, and ultimately contributing to peaceful unification of the peninsula. Should the South Korean government take initiative in grabbing the opportunity to get many birds with a stone? We keep praying that the frozen North-South relationship be melted, sooner rather than later, and reconciliation between North and South become reality as quickly as possible. ☀️
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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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