[“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]**

**Ban on Food Sales Begins on May 8 in All Markets**

Effective beginning May 8, a ban on food sales in all markets has been declared throughout the nation. The measure is said to be necessary to prevent waste of food. As food items are added to the list of contraband for sale in the markets, every market witnesses, more often than usual, squabbles among peddlers and government inspectors. Inspectors confiscate the contraband items and penalize those who sell them with fines from a minimum of 3,000 to maximum 10,000 NK won.

**Noodle Peddlers Leave Markets and Head for Rural Areas**

Noodle peddlers are leaving market areas and roaming throughout the rural areas. Chinese-made corn noodles officially costs 100 NK won, but peddlers pay 700 NK won. It is sold for 800 to 850 NK won at markets. These peddlers’ wares used to end up on market shelves, but small retail quantities have forced them to try other means of distribution. They are now turning to rural areas in order to avoid frequent government inspections. They say that rural areas generate more business because rural farm workers cannot produce noodles, even with their available corn, due to the lack of electric power.

**Inspection of Second-Hand Clothing Leads to a Big Fight in Soonam Market**

In the afternoon of May 5 in the *Soonam* district of *Chungjin* City in North *Hamgyong* Province, a fight broke out between a female clothing peddler and a policeman. *Kim Hye-yung* (pseudonym, 40s) used to own market shelves at *Soonam* Market. She was kicked out of the market when the government banned the sale of second-hand clothing. Despite being forbidden to do so, Ms. *Kim* continued peddling second-hand clothing, displaying her wares on the ground, because “she had to make a living somehow.” Until recently, she was able to dodge inspectors. But on that particular day, she was not so fortunate. As soon as two policemen caught sight of her, they tried to take her to the police station, violently pushing her. She resisted her arrest, as one of the policeman tried to take the bag containing her clothing. She pushed the policeman and grabbed the bag, tightly hanging onto it. The younger policeman got angry and kicked her several times. Several on-lookers got upset over the sight. They got closer and started blaming the policemen, pointing fingers at them. The policemen did not seem to care and kept trying to take her to the police station. She scratched the faces of policemen and tore their clothes, struggling to avoid being taken to the station. The policemen got angrier and continued kicking her, which led to an even greater confrontation. Her husband finally showed up and started
fighting the policemen. As their corner of the market became noisy, it drew the attention of a couple of patrolmen, who joined in and began beating her husband. Eventually her husband was beaten into unconsciousness. Four policemen pulled her husband’s unconscious body to the police station. This poor lady followed them crying, occasionally getting kicked by the policemen. Some onlookers shouted curses at the policemen, “You SOBs, don’t hit the man, bunch of thugs.” Many more bystanders joined in, cursing at the policemen. One of the onlookers, an elderly party member, filed a complaint with the provincial party on behalf of the residents.

Watching People in Place of Peddling in Choopyong Market, Hamheung
People say peddlers at the Choopyong Market, Hamheung, South Hamgyong Province watch people at the market instead of doing business. It is of course because of low volume of business. Throughout the nation, instructions came down from Market Management suggesting that the peddlers change items in dealing. This caused a lot of frustration on the part of peddlers on top of low volume of business, which is really “killing them.” Currently they can deal with are agricultural products, such as vegetables and herbs. Jung Geum-soon (50s) says with a deep sigh, “Market is full of vegetable vendors. After a full day’s business, we still cannot afford to buy 1 Kg of grain. But we do not have any choice. We want to be able to afford some side dishes. Look at the faces of the people. They look in agony and are without smiles. There is no business, watching people with such faces whole day is no fun.” Another peddler added with sadness that mobilization for rice transplanting in early May caused business to come down sharply.

[Food]
Trouble at Uhryang River Power Plant Due to Food Shortage
The Uhryang River Power Plant Construction Site at North Hamkyung Province is having a difficult food supply situation. Corn powder is the basic food supply. On a good day, construction workers are able to eat corn noodles as two meals and corn meal for lunch. In most cases, they survive on porridge. They are given seaweed soup and salted cabbage or radish as an occasional side dish. The shock troop brigade at this construction site is formed of two companies and four platoons. Three platoons at this site are assigned to make blocks in three different shifts. They mix cement and sand to make strong blocks with their daily goal of making 6000 blocks. Each platoon needs to make at least 2000 blocks. They are not allowed to switch their shifts and have to continue working until they reach their goal of 2000 blocks. The laborers suffer due to their harsh working conditions and poor food situations. Originally the shock troop brigade is a 3 month contract but frequently the next shifts do not show up. This is the reason why there are so many runaways. Those who do not run away and work for years at this site are people who have no other places to go. For example, there are orphans with no siblings or divorcees with no place to turn to.

[Economy]
South Hwanghae Province Ordered to “Bring Full Strengths to Secure Fertilizer”
Last May 2, *Haeju City, South Hwanghae Province* held a Province Party meeting with all their members. Participants of this meeting included Chief Secretaries from all cities and counties and the Agricultural Management Chairman. The main topic for this meeting was about ways to secure fertilizers. “Being the Nation’s main granary region, *Hwanghae Province* needs to have a good crop production and contribute to the opening of the Strong and Prosperous Nation”. They announced that they do not have enough chemical fertilizer. So, it is urgent to secure maximum amount of fertilizer. In response, farmers raised the importance of securing the *Heukbosan* Fertilizer and dry manure. “We need to use more chemical fertilizers because *Hwanghae Province* is the most successful farming region. However, there is not enough fertilizer for every region. So, some farms would not receive any fertilizer. Due to the circumstances, everyone over middle school age from all cities and counties needs to submit 20kg of human manure.” In addition, they spent much time talking about workers ideology education. The repeated, “Keep in mind that the grand idea of 150-Days Battle is created by the Great General to open doors to become a Strong and Prosperous Nation. Workers need to concentrate and give full efforts to their work.” They pushed to stimulate ‘the proposal for better crop production’ and added, “We can find out our worker’s capability at the end of the harvesting season in the fall.”

**South Pyongan Province, Agenda Meeting in Preparation for Farming**

On May 4th, the Organization Secretaries of the Provincial Party and the chairmen of Farming Management Commission held a meeting in South *Pyongan Province*. Every Secretary of the Divisional Party in Sukchun County, Moonduk County, Pyongwon County, Anju City, etc., which has a large area of cultivated land in South *Pyongan Province*, as well the administrative workers, were present in this meeting. The main issue was “to resolve the food problem by ourselves as we face the world-sweeping food crisis”. Especially on this day, each official was asked about “how much farming preparation has been made in order to achieve the amount of yield planned for this year”. The purpose of the meeting was to examine thoroughly whether the fertilizers, gases and the labors needed for farming were sufficiently prepared.

In addition, each official was required to pledge to accomplish the farming principle of the Party during this meeting. It was said, “This year’s farming must be successful at all cost, even if every farm members will have to be driven out”. Further, it was even hinted that there will be no inquiries for personal irregularities if the farming is successful. In this early May, approximately 20% of farms in South *Pyongan Province* have started *Monaegi* (transplanting rice seedlings). There are some farm villages where people cannot use farming machines because they do not have gasoline; students and soldiers are assisting these villages by manually disking up the surface.

**[Politics]**

**Punished for Doing Sideline Work on the First Day of 150–Day Battle Campaign**

The Party punished several laborers in ship repair center and several Party members in *Heungnam City, South Hamgyong Province*. They were punished because they did sideline activities on the first day of the 150-Day Campaign. In case of Pipe Manufacture Work Unit
No.1, many workers went out to the sea even though the 150-Day Campaign has already started. It is because the people could not miss the opportunity to work and earn 7,000 NK won per person. The Primary Party Committee reported to the higher Party that “this tendency was noted from day one of the 150-Day Campaign”, and punished six Party members for six months per each. The Central Party officials and the dispatched personnel from the Provincial Party went to the ship repair center this year and emphasized to workers the way to attain the joint task-force, but it was not enough to prevent the workers’ sideline activities. It is because a person can earn 7,000 won by going out to the sea and work for one or two days as a sideline work. The Party members who were caught and punished this time were known to have resisted by saying, “What is the point of being a Party member? It is needless. Being a Party member is rather more troublesome. It is not like that a Party member would receive more distribution”. The Party members who said that were immediately expelled from the Party. The principle and the policy of the Party have been emphasized as such; however, the number of absentees increases because the distribution has not been kept up.

[Society]
A Teacher’s Family Decided to Disperse After Night-long Debate
Only a year ago, Kim, Jung-Hwan (pseudonym, 47) was a teacher at one of middle schools in the city of Hamheung, South Hamgyong Province. He was also a head of a family which included his parents, wife and three children. Because wife could not go to work due to her illness and his parents were too old to work, he had to be the sole bread winner for the entire family. So, he gave up teaching to go around washing for gold. He was able to provide just enough for them to live on porridge everyday until he was diagnosed with stomach cancer. When the father was unable to work any more, the three children went out to beg for food and brought it home for the entire family. But, the family knew that they could not go on much longer in that way. One day, they held a discussion, which lasted all day and all night, on how they would survive the days and weeks ahead. Since no brilliant idea emerged, they decided to split the family. Mr. Kim stayed on with his oldest son and his parents, and the rest of the family – his wife, younger son and the youngest daughter – went to live with the wife’s family.

Last September, the 70 year old grandfather died, and Mr. Kim followed him to the grave soon after. Then not even a month later, Mr. Kim’s mother passed away because of grief over losing both her husband and son. After her mother-in-law’s death, Mrs. Kim called the oldest son over to where she was. However, the wife’s family was not happy about having to feed four hungry stomachs in addition to their own during this difficult time. So, the Kim family had a discussion once again on how they would survive through this crisis, and they decided to split once more. The five year old daughter and the mother would stay with her family, and the boys, sixteen and eleven, would go out to make a living somehow. Though it has been several months, there is no prospect of this family being reunited and living as one family any time soon.

Sent to Jail Because of Just One Misspoken Word
Mrs. Choi, Hyang-Nam (age 30s) is an ordinary housewife raising a family of two children with her husband in the Pohang district of Chungjin City, in the North Hamgyong Province. Two years ago, her husband who was working for a Gimchaek Steel mill, was involved in a serious accident leaving him as a stay home dad. Thus, Mrs. Choi became a tough woman, supporting a family of four all by herself. She has done everything, such as collecting kelp and seaweed from the sea, selling salt, and even selling perm hair dye door-to-door. However, it became increasingly harder to put food on the table for her family of four. When lucky, the family was able to eat corn with rice, and when unlucky had to settle for corn noodles or porridge to alleviate their hunger.

Because her family came first, she habitually had to starve in order to feed her husband and children. That day was no different from any other when she sat on the streets all day in hopes of selling some vegetables and was coming home with barely anything sold. The street vendors were gathered in a group, complaining about the lack of profit when Mrs. Choi said, “I don’t understand why it’s becoming harder and harder to live when the government always says that our country is getting nearer to the Strong and Prosperous Nation and passing through the difficult time.” It is unknown who told who, but the very next day, the police came to investigate Mrs. Choi and arrested her. Because of the one thing she had said at the marketplace that day, she was now behind bars. Mrs. Choi said, “I do not recall ever saying such things. Someone is plotting against me. How could I ever say such a thing when we are all fighting and working 150 days battle towards a strong country?” Despite her plea, Mrs. Choi was in jail for one week and educated before she was released.

[Women/Children/Education]

Research by Heungnam Educational Department Shows Over One-third of Students Are Absent

According to the research by Department of Education of North and South Hamgyong Province from May 2nd, over one-third of the students in every school have been absent for an extended number of days due to family and/or economic issues. An official of the Department of Education of South Hamgyong Province stated that each City Party conducted this research because student attendance was noticeably low. For example, 12 out of 34 students in a senior class in Sapo Middle School in Hamheung, South Hamgyong Province have been absent for an extended time. The main reason for their long absence from school has been related to economic issues: they need to trade with their parents, make money by delivering packages in the stations or market places, or collect wild greens to help support their families.

A middle school teacher in Heungnam said, “Students who live in critical economic situations do not attend their school at all. When I visited them, all of their parents told me similar stories that their trade was so bad that they cannot survive from June to August if their children do not work. They should trade to survive.” He said that paying extra contributions to school is another burden on students and their parents. When Chungjin of North Hamgyong Province also conducted a survey on student attendance, residents of
Ranam district said, “Going to school is a heavy burden on the students and their parents. So, the attendance can’t be anything but low.”

**North Hamgyong Province Has the Largest Number of Runaways from Military Draft**

It was reported that North Hamgyong Province has the largest number of runaways of middle school graduate recruits from this year’s enlistment. The enlistment office of North Hamgyong Province stated that 27 draftees already ran away from their service within a month from April 13 to today. According to the ‘August 20’ policy which says to “Send draft dodgers to the most dangerous and arduous sections such as coal mines, mineral mines, or lumber sections,” those run-away recruits will be sent to one of these areas. Ministry of the People’s Armed Forces ordered the Party of North Hamgyong Province to “enlist the most appropriately verified students” for this fall’s enlistment project. On the other hand, the elementary institute of Gilju County in North Hamgyong Province does not have a single recruit this year because many of the students have troubled backgrounds.

Kim Young-kyu (a pseudonym, 50s), a teacher, said, “Many of the students have had their parents starve to death during the Arduous March, crossed the border to China and then executed by a firing squad, or divorced. So, most of them have broken families. Their background was too unstable for them to serve in the military. They cannot be enlisted.” Graduates of this institute are usually sent to farms or construction areas such as 12 students to the Pyongyang Shock Troop Brigade, 25 students to Gimchaek Youth Goat Farm, and 20 students to each Youth Work Group of Urang County Collective Farms.

**Accidents**

**Military Officer Murdered a Woman Who Turned Down His Marriage Proposal**

Last April 27th, a murder case occurred in Gangseo town of Gangseo County. It was a case where a head of platoon was refused by a county woman he admired and through spite he murdered her. The officer said he was drunk and didn’t intend to kill her but only hit her several times out of anger. The military police tried to take over the case, but the police decided to investigate the case themselves, saying it was a “major murder case.” The police wanted to handle the case because the victim was a civilian. For that reason, there were frictions the police and the military police. Soldiers heard this news and said it is a shame of unsavory incident “Unmarried officers have a hard time meeting woman. This is because there are no women who want to marry military officers. The whole society is suffering from food problems and the army is also suffering food problems without any solution.”
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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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