[“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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The Goal of Abolishing General Markets Steadily Comes Closer to Becoming a Reality

The goal of abolishing general markets is gradually becoming a reality. Beginning in the second half of last year, North Korean authorities have increasingly made it clear that they attend to completely abolish general markets and replace them with farmers’ markets. For several reasons, the implementation of this plan was deferred for six months. The most symbolic example of this crackdown was the closure of the Pyongsung Market, which was shuttered because it held the title of being the nation’s largest wholesale market. It was decided that, in place of the Pyongsung Market, several smaller district markets should be opened. In addition, the Central Party instructed the Ministry of Commerce to fill government department stores with a significant quantity of Chinese-produced goods. Other cities have similarly been issued instructions to import as many Chinese-manufactured goods as their situation permits. These policies are intended to keep supplies of in-demand items from running out in the lead-up to the Pyongsung Market’s closing. The policies are being implemented in direct response to the resistance being put up by residents, which initially caused the market’s abolition to be deferred. A party leader in Pyongyang reported that these measures were put in place to minimize the inconvenience to residents. He added, “The Central Party believes that the general markets should be shut down completely, but they fear forced eradication may result in increased resentment from residents. As a result, they are trying a policy of persuasion this time. Regardless, they are determined to completely transform the market structure. They hope that if citizens are relentlessly mobilized and severely restricted, they will not have time to develop ill will.”
City of Hoeryong To Restructure Commerce System and Build New Dining Facilities

The City of Hoeryong, North Hamgyong Province, has decided to remove the existing convenience service facilities along Route One and to build new restaurants and other service facilities at the Feeding and Clothing Care Center. Additionally at Nammoon Dong and Industry Dong, they have decided to build a street of food establishments, similar to those in Pyongyang. In Nammoon Dong alone they will be constructing six produce stores. In preparation, workers from neighboring farms, including Daeduk Li, have been working on the construction of these produce stores in place of their 150-day battle projects. Two work units from Daeduk Li have been using cows, borrowed from the farm, to transporting sand to the site. As a result, the weeds on the farm have grown so extensively that it is almost impossible to tell the different between the corn and the weeds. Public enterprises are struggling, because they are obligated to participate in the construction projects and general managers risk losing their jobs if it is deemed that their contributions are unsatisfactory. An anonymous general manager complained, “these frequent construction assignments make it difficult to maintain a public enterprise. Many of these ventures end up significantly in debt after the construction project has been completed and we will have wasted significant funds, resources, and man-hours. I may lose my job because of it.” Residents are struggling with the costs of supporting the stores’ construction in sand, gravel, and lumber. In addition, each household is expected to pay 12,000 NK Won. While no residents are willing to complain in public, in private many remark. “Why would they want to build a street of food service facilities? Are people not eating because of a lack of restaurants? Food is being removed from the market to support this. Who are they building the restaurants for? It is clearly being done for party leaders.”

[Food]

Residents of Myongchun County Received No Food Rations since January of Last Year

Residents of Myongchun County of North Hamgyong Province have not received any food rations since January of last year. Poor crop yields have caused the county to fall short on meeting their targeted military provisions. Last year’s target was 2,800 MT of grains, but the county could only provide 2,200 MT. The remaining 600 MT is yet to be filled. The Responsible Party Workers including the County Party Secretary and Chairman of the County Farm Cooperative Management Committee received strict warnings from the National Defense Committee that they would lose their jobs in the event that they failed to meet the expected targets. Strained by the requirements to meet the planned military provisions, more than 80% of the residents must subsist on seaweed they have gathered from the beaches. Residents near the Chilbo Mountain seem to be a little better off. They can earn additional income from services they provide to foreign and domestic tourists. Residents of Myongchun County say, “Now that grains are not sold in the market, people like us, poor and unemployed, can hardly afford it. Wouldn’t it be nice if government could provide food rations? We do not anticipate any such day to come during our lifetime.” Kim Chae-joon (80s), an elderly man said signing that he could not understand how things got this bad in
Myongchun County. According to Mr. Kim, Myongchun County has been known to be a good place to live since the days of the Japanese occupation. “As you know, many prominent families and proud people reside here. But now, it is hard to find a grain of rice. I must have lived too long,” he added.

[Economy]

Soonchun Has the Best Knock-Off Shoes

Each area specializes in certain products and has prices that are determined by the markets. Pyungsung and Chungjin Soonam markets are considered to be the main wholesale markets. However, nowadays specific products determine the centers of these wholesale markets. For example, one can find the greatest deals in clothing and footwear in Rajin; and similarly, in Haesan of Ryangkang Province is where you can find the main wholesalers for flashlight, light bulbs and television accessories. Fans made in Southeast Asia and other appliances are transported to Sinuiju and then to Pyungsung to be distributed throughout the rest of the country. Pyungsung produces large numbers of knock-offs of foreign-made clothing, which are indistinguishable from the real thing. Soonchun is known for the knock-offs of shoes made in China. Individuals in Soonchun purchase the materials from factories and replicate the footwear by hand in their homes to sell in the market. These shoes may look like the Chinese-made shoes, but they tend to fall apart easily due to their inferior quality. Hamheung is known for medicine, especially ‘Ice’ (illicit drug) because medical students and chemists with skills in pharmaceutical production reside there. There are rumors that approximately the same number of households producing “Ice” resides in Hamheung as those producing tofu in other regions. Hamheung’s “Ice” producing methods have spread throughout the country; which has led to many more “Ice” producing regions including Pyungsung and Soonchun of South Pyongan Province and Jakang Province. Aside from producing “Ice”, Hamheung is also known for manufacturing pills and herbal remedies, which are produced by extracting the juice from medicinal herbs. Recently, herbal medicine from Jakang Province has become more popular. The signature product is named, “Jakang Province Herbal Medicine” after a review on Jakang Province producing the best version of the medicine.

Cheapest Herrings and Anchovies in the Country Are In Rajin

Recently, there has been a sizable harvest of anchovies in Rajin of North Hamgyong Province, where the average price per kilogram is 800 NK won. Despite its own sizable harvests, the amount produced in Chungjin is not comparable to either the yield or the price in Rajin as the price per kilogram sold in Chungjin is 1,300 NK won. In the inland provinces, such as Hoeryong, Onsung, Gilju and Gimchaek, the price per kilogram has reached between 1,500 NK won to 1,800 NK won. Market prices of Ammodytes personatus in Eunul, South Hamgyong Province, Nampo, South Pyongan Province and Onchun range from 2,000 NK won per kilogram up to 5,000 NK won per kilogram in the East Sea Coast. Also, prices have been rising even higher in cities in the northern part of the country. In Chungjin, North Hamgyong Province, the price soared to 5,500 NK won, and at Onsung and Hoeryong, prices even reached 8,000 NK won to a maximum of 10,000 NK won. The large regional variances in the prices are caused not only by varying costs of distribution, but they are also due to
disruptions in the markets caused by the “150-day battle”, which is a government sponsored campaign to revive nationalism and hard work in the country. The people have unanimously decided to wait until the end of the campaign hoping that sales would improve.

**Goods Circulates Best in Chungjin Market**

Merchants prefer Soonam market in Chungjin, North Hamgyong Province because money and goods circulate at a faster rate in this market as compared to all of the other regions in North Korea. Endowed with a large population, these markets are able to clear faster, selling vegetables, foods and rice as well as industrial goods. Goods that would take five days to sell in other markets could be sold in literally a fraction of the time at Chungjin market. Oil, sugar and flour are supplied from Hamheung and Danchun of South Hamgyong Province as a result of the viability of this market. Merchants agree that even with fewer endowments, more income is earned when goods sell faster; therefore, attracting more people to benefit from the vitality of the markets in Chungjin City.

**[Politics]**

“**The Strong and Prosperous Nation Will Be Ours upon the SuccessfulCompletion of the 150-Day Battle This Year**”

Instruction materials are sent continuously to each unit as the 150-day battle progresses. Each factory and public enterprise in Pyongsung, South Pyongan Province held a seminar on the political situation one week after the completion of the second nuclear test in which it was said “There is no one in the world now that can match us in military strength.” The main message was propaganda and serves as a motivational tool for citizens. It said, “If the United States and US satellite nations impose an economic blockade upon our nation, we will consider that as a war provocation maneuver and confront it with a military power. The strong and prosperous nation will be ours upon the successful completion of the 150-day battle this year. Everyone must learn and follow the revolutionary military spirit of the People’s Army so that we can open the gate of the strong and prosperous nation as soon as possible.”

**A Mass Conference about the Prosecuting Officers’ Irregularities and Corruption Was Held**

A conference for the public as well as for officials was held in Sinuiju, North Pyongan Province where cases of corruption by judicial authorities were reported. Cases regarding prosecutorial misconduct were enumerated one by one in this conference. In one case a prosecuting officer was introduced and accused of accepting more than $1,000 from black market dollar dealers and pretended not to know about the illegal acts.

An investigation ensued when it was disclosed that Kim, Sung-hee (pseudonym), who lives in Sinuiju, North Pyongan Province, has been actively managing black market dollar dealers in other cities such as Pyongyang, Sariwon, and Pyongsung. During this process, Kim, Sung-hee
and other people who were caught offered a bribe in the amount of more than $1,000 to the investigating officers, and the case seemed to be concluded at that moment.

The superior office became aware of this incident and ordered another investigation. However, even the officers in charge of this second investigation accepted a bribe in the amount of $1,200 and concluded the investigation in a hurry. The case was about to be closed in such a way when an informant revealed the full accounts of the prosecuting officers’ involvement in bribery.

People tend to doze off or chitchat during the mass conference, but during this case, people were listening attentively. One officer said, “The citizens seem to be interested in criticizing the officials as no one was complaining or chitchatting during the conference.” Sim Mi-hwa (30s), who had attended the conference, repeatedly asserted that an illegal act is not just committed by ordinary citizens but also by everyone. She said, “Who would not commit an illegal act when the prosecutors, who used to be on the forefront of the struggle to root out the antisocialist behavior, are committing an illegal act in order to satisfy their own bellies? Nowadays, no one can survive without committing an illegal act.”

After the conference every party member must write a self-criticism in a month. In the paper they have to review and reflect on their own work. Individuals must evaluate their own job performance. For example, an obstetrician has to discuss how many illegal abortions he had conducted and how much he had received for doing so. Other physicians must disclose how many medicines they sold illegally on the market. A judicial officer has to detail how many crimes he had excused in exchange for a bribe. A teacher has to admit whether he offered private tutoring in exchange for financial compensation.

**Eunduk County Conducted House Searches to Crack Down on Illicit Distillers**

For three days beginning on June 2, authorities of Eunduk County in North Hamgyong Province intensified efforts to combat illicit alcohol distillation. The government outlawed and cracked down on home brewing, which it believed conflicted with principles of socialism and was a waste of food. The police of Eunduk County, acting on information supplied by the heads of the neighborhood units, searched the houses of about 30 people suspected of home brewing, and, as a result, confiscated 7.2 tons of whole corn and 28 pieces of home-brewing equipment. The confiscated corn is processed into crushed maize and is given to students who have been mobilized for farming. The local grain policy distribution center compensated those whose corn was confiscated at the officially fixed price of 30 won per kilogram, which is the official price set by the government.

**[Society]**

**Hepatitis, Tuberculosis Medicine Leaked into Black Markets**

In May, the Centers for Disease Control provided each city and county with hepatitis and tuberculosis medicine. Unfortunately, they were leaked into the black markets even before reaching infected patients. The drugs are currently being sold for 5,500 NK won to 7,000 NK won at Pyungsung market, Chungjin market, and Hamheung market. Kim Dong-Hak (40s), a resident of Hamheung, South Hamheung Province, said, “This is happening due to the increasing numbers of medical doctors who are doing illegal practices.” Patients confirmed
of being infected with the diseases at nearby clinics are sent to the city hospitals. However, these patients are being told that they “seem to be doing just fine and have no problems with their health” by doctors of the hospital’s Department of Tuberculosis. The medicine is not being used to help cure patients, but rather used for individual monetary purposes and thus sold to markets. Jung Mi-Hye (30s) purchased the hepatitis medicine at Sapoh Market because she was unable to get any from the hospitals. “It’s nothing new that medicine are being sold to the markets, but selling the hepatitis medicine that our leader, Kim Jung-II, generously provided for us, is just too much,” Jung said furiously.

Number of Patients with Tuberculosis in Hamheung City May Exceed 10 times Bigger Than Estimated

Hamheung City of South Hamgyong Province has an estimated number of about 1,500 tuberculosis and 1,470 hepatitis patients. Among these, 380 people have died from these diseases. These numbers have resulted after the Second Prevention Clinic in South Hamgyong Province analyzed data from year 2007 to May 4, 2009. Based on this data, the Second Prevention Clinic calculated the amount of needed tuberculosis and hepatitis medicine and requested for them to the Department of Health and Human Services. Dr. Jang Sung-Man (alias, 40s) said, "It is a lie that the number of infected tuberculosis patient is 1,500. They did not count the people with infiltrative tuberculosis. Tuberculosis is strongly associated with nutrition and thus malnutrition causes the tuberculosis bacteria to be active. Doctors are hiding the true diagnosis of patients, let alone register them, unless they are at an advanced stage in their infection. Off the record, total number of infected patients could be well over 10 times more than the estimation."

A Grandmother Starves to Death out of Grief after Selling Granddaughter to China

Choi Jum-soon (70s), a resident of Ingokdong, Chungam district, Chungjin city, North Hamgyong Province, died after refusing to eat for more than 15 days. She hasn’t been able to eat due to the overwhelming guilt of selling her own 16-year old granddaughter. Choi’s daughter passed away last year during the spring hardship period, whereas her son-in-law died last December after suffering from epidemic hemorrhagic fever. Choi had been plagued with many worries due to debt from her son-in-law’s medical bills and her lack of funds for her granddaughter’s schooling. After consulting with her second daughter, Choi decided to hand over her granddaughter over to China for 5,000 NK Won. The grandmother who lived with her granddaughter for 7 years could not stop weeping, saying she could not eat the food that she bought with the money that she received from her granddaughter’s sale. As she shut her eyes on her deathbed, Choi said that although she had to send her granddaughter to China out of poverty, she will be praying for her granddaughter to meet a good husband and live a good life.

[Women/Children/Education]
Kkotjebies Drafted to the Shock Troop Brigade, Mostly Deserted
The Welfare Institutions in each city and county in the South Pyongan Province sent 80 Kkotjebies to the Baekdoo Mountain construction shock troop brigade. However, as many as 60 Kkotjebies deserted the brigade. They suffered from malnutrition due to lack of food, and many Kkotjebies had a stomach disease. Some of them had colds due to the cold weather and others contracted a waterborne epidemic. Nevertheless, they only received few pills because the situation did not allow them to receive treatment. For this reason, most of the shock troop brigade members ran away because they felt that they would die if they stayed in that condition. There were 17 remaining shock troop brigade members and 63 of them deserted the brigade while some of them returned to the welfare institutions they originally came from. For this incident, the leading member of the Organization and Guidance department went to South Pyongan Province Brigade to criticize and urge a solution to this problem.

[Accidents]

Kaesong City Koryeo Celadon Porcelain Smugglers Received Life Sentence

In early May, the Kaesong City Police arrested smugglers of Koryeo celadon porcelain and sent them to the court for trial. Those apprehended are the employees of Koryeo trading company and a locomotive engineer of Kaesong Station. It was discovered that since October of last year they collected and smuggled Goryeo celadon porcelains and various antiques to the National Border Area. Investigative agencies assumed the Koryeo celadon porcelains were smuggled out to South Korea via China. So, they have questioned the suspects intensively about the route used for smuggling. The investigation ended on May 20, and the smugglers were sentenced to life in prison at re-education center along with the label of ‘enemy’.

[Commentary]

Can the Government Really Close the Markets?

Slowly but surely, plans to close all general markets are coming into reality. Originally, these closures were scheduled for January 2009, but public outcry resulted in a six-month deferment. The basic premise of this plan is that industrial products should be sold at national stores, grain should be coming from public distribution agencies, and that markets should be restricted to being farmers markets. Now that the six-month deferment period has passed, the closure of general markets is slated to begin, starting with the Pyongsung Market. Unfortunately, North Korean officials have still not come up with an acceptable answer to the most question residents ask the most: “Does the government have rice to distribute to us?” No apparent steps are being taken by the government to address growing food shortages that are only being exacerbated by the prohibitions against small plot farming and the sale of grain in markets, as well as the disbanding of Forest Utilization Teams. They have no answer to concerns like “Sales are no longer private, so there is no bargaining over prices or discounts. There are no longer several products to choose from. Why do we need all these controls?” There are also questions surrounding what to do about the illegal sale of industrial products, now that their sale on the market has been prohibited. People hear claims by the Party that National Stores will soon be filled with goods, but they are doubtful how long it will last. They doubt that the government has the resources to fill National Stores with
necessary items. Unless acceptable solutions are found to these concerns, the policy of closing the general markets will either result in the spread of illegal markets or general markets reemerging regardless of the law. North Korean authorities claim that the market system causes a huge disparity between the rich and the poor and an increase in crime. In reality, it seems obvious that the exact opposite occurs. We firmly believe that policy alone cannot close markets when those policies leave residents unable to support themselves. If the government cannot provide for its citizens, the markets should not be closed. Instead, the government should focus on how to counteract the negative byproducts of the market system. Mobilizing of all government resources towards eradicating the general market system, a policy that seems doomed from the start, is a huge waste of national resources, both in human and material. On top of that, it will result in great suffering for residents. At this time, peddling in the market and small plot farming are the only ways many North Korean citizens are able to sustain themselves, so these activities should be supported. In summary, we firmly believe the policy of closing general markets should be reconsidered.

for Peace, Human Rights and Refugees

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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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