[“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]
“Even Scarier Are Invisible Deaths Due to Starvation”
A party leader in Wonsan, Kangwon Province admitted that the province keeps witnessing deaths from starvation this year and said, “Even scarier are invisible deaths due to starvation.” He continued, “Kangwon Province keeps witnessing, since last year until now, deaths from starvation. Deaths from starvation started from last spring and continued until summer. They reached a peak towards the end of September through the end of October last fall. The general public felt abandoned. Residents became scared and shaken. Many people who suffered from severe hunger became so weak physically. As fall harvest brought something to eat, they filled their stomachs to the limit. They ended up with indigestion problems, and many of them lost their lives. The situation improved a little towards the end of November, and the number of deaths in the counties and cities temporarily stopped. As of June, deaths continued to occur throughout all the rural areas of Kangwon Province. According to the hospital physicians, almost 100% of the patients from the rural areas show signs of malnutrition and severe physical weakness. The physicians believe all these patients can be cured simply by being fed with high protein foods, rather than any medication. Massive deaths as happened last year did not occur this time, but even scarier are invisible deaths like these. Nobody seems to care about the situation. Consequently nobody will ever know how many are dying.” A physician at the city hospital is really worried, saying “Chronic malnutrition reduced stomach functions and many people ended up with swollen bodies. When this happens, the person’s body has been dehydrated and perspiration occurs with no physical activity. The person’s urine becomes red because of a lack of food. When the body is swollen, the person absolutely should not eat any food. Those who died last fall were individuals with severe symptoms of malnutrition. People with such symptoms should receive nutrition through injection, not solid food into the stomach. Our hospital
treats them, first with liquid used for making tofu, and then soft porridge. This procedure restores weak bodies. This explains why there were so many who died last fall. We see a lot of people this year whose stomachs have difficulty functioning."

“It Is So Pitiful That People Kill To Eat”
Early last June a married couple from Chungjin, North Hamgyong Province was executed in public on charges of murder. Kim Jaegeum (pseudonym, 50s) of Soobok Dong who used to be in the same neighborhood unit said that they killed a man because they didn’t have anything to eat. He continued, “This couple did not have anything to eat at home. It became their habit to skip meals every day. Around nine o’clock one evening, they decided to rob a man. They struck a man with a club. The victim died. They searched for money in the dead man’s pocket but could not find any money. They were so insanely hungry that they made a huge mistake. They decided to eat human flesh. They boiled the flesh of the dead man. They were arrested a few days later. They are not innately evil. They could not stand the severe pangs of hunger anymore. Perhaps they deserve to die in order to pay for their crime. On the other hand, it is so pitiful that good people have to suffer to the extent that they killed a man to get something to eat.” Many people who witnessed the public execution expressed great concern, “There were many instances when people were executed in public after they killed a man and ate human flesh during the days of Arduous March. Now, these are occurring again.”

“Dangerously Daring Acts Are The Only Options Left To Survive”
Jung Cho-ok (43) of Hwasung County, North Hamgyong Province, told us the story about a case of theft of grains for the military that occurred last January. It was something that happened to a person whom he was close to so it was more painful. The story goes like this:
“Byongil (pseudonym, 23) is a young man who is handsome, takes care of himself and is a little playful. His parents died during the days of Arduous March and he is the sole survivor in the family. I used to provide him with some food. But I could not continue it after a few times because I myself did not have enough. Consequently he survived by stealing since he was young. I could not say anything to him about it because I saw it as his only option. Somehow last year at a young age when he did not experience a real life, he met an eighteen year-old-girl, and they got married. A boy married a girl. They did not own anything. They could not afford a wedding ceremony, not even a wedding picture. They just started their life together. This year a daughter was born, and she looks really cute, like her father. The whole family seemed to be happy. Until that point, his livelihood depended on stealing from peddlers. As the level of business declined, there were fewer peddlers. This reduced his income quite a bit. He went through a lot of agony because there were ‘nothing to steal’ anymore. In the meantime, a few days before the Lunar New Year’s Day, a train arrived at Ryongban Station. This train was heading to Pyongyang, full of grains for the military. According to Byongil’s wife, he lost sleep for several nights trying to figure out how to steal rice from the train. Anyhow, the train stayed at the station for three days. It was two o’clock in the morning when the train left the station. It was discovered that Byongil
got help from two of his buddies. They boarded the moving train and had more than twenty sacks of rice thrown onto the path along the tracks before the train reached the next station. The three men threw themselves from the fast moving train, with some minor injuries. The three successfully gathered up all the sacks of rice along the path. They spent the following day sleeping. They then sold two sacks of rice to buy beef and liquor for their feast. They really enjoyed their ‘glorious’ endeavor with a party, singing and dancing. Then out of the blue on January 25 came the day of reckoning. Who could have guessed that the train would be back? The guards found out about the missing rice sacks. Every single grain should be accounted for the military provisions. They realized that there would be no other option but their execution if they could not catch the thieves. They found the traces of rice on the path. Additionally they located a witness. A farm worker saw the three stealing rice and demanded five sacks of rice for keeping quiet. However, Byongil thought that the train had already left the station, and there would be nothing to worry about. So he refused the farm worker’s demand without any consideration. How greedy! This farm worker filed a report in anger. Byongil ran away and avoided arrest, but two of his buddies got caught. Byongil is the main schemer and will be executed if arrested. There is no doubt about it. What is really miserable is Byongil’s wife, now with a little child to take care of. I am not blaming Byongil, because I know him well personally. This whole thing is not about Byongil’s evil character. It is the reality of North Korea that dangerous, daring acts are only options left to survive. All the healthy people cannot be engaged in peddling. Small plot farming is prohibited. What else is left but the road to unlawful activities? There is no other option. I do not know what lies ahead.”

**[Food]**

**Industrial Equipment Factory in Heechun City has Suspended Food Rations since April—Absenteeism a Growing Problem**

Since the industrial equipment factory in Heechun City, Jagang Province has suspended food rations in April; laborers have hastily acquired small plots of farmland causing an increase in absenteeism at the factory. Due to the fact that this factory produces military supplies, the distribution of food rations has been relatively consistent. The director of the Bureau of Machinery of the Second Economic Committee became aware of this situation while touring the ‘150-Day Battle’ site. Subsequently, a report was filed to the provincial party on the workers’ growing diversion from factory work to farming, claiming to dampen the spirit of the campaign. In response to the report, the provincial party ordered prosecutors to investigate and punish the forest inspectors who permitted the use of the small plots. The prosecutors had four inspectors of the Forest Utility Team relieved of their positions and sentenced to six months of labor with no pay. The small plots of land farmed by workers of the Industrial Equipment factory were confiscated and transferred to neighboring farms and military units. The officials believed that confiscating the plots would allow the workers to return to the factory. “Because of the cease in the distribution of food rations, the small plots were our only hope. Now even this is taken away. What are we supposed to do? Are we supposed to starve to death? We cannot understand the authorities,” protested the laborers.
A Meal for a Farm Worker in Jungjoo County Consists of as much as Chicken Feed

In Jungjoo County, North Pyongan Province, some farm workers are crying out that they cannot do any work because of hunger. The farmers claimed that, “It is the busiest time on the farms and we need all the energy we can get, but we eat as much as chickens eat. We don’t have any strength.” Kim Junggook (50s), a farm worker said, “Our farm workers say they are so hungry. The average family consumes only 30g of corn at each meal; not much more than chicken feed.” He added, “Some farm workers do not report to work because of hunger. However, if they continue to miss work, they will be sent to a forced labor camp by the Li authority.” One farm leader disagreed and stated that, “That is not the only thing we have received to eat. At the end of last year, everyone received food rations. The 30g of corn was for lunch in addition to what was rationed.” Other farm workers retorted, “Nonsense! How many households still have any rations left from the last distribution? Farm leaders might have received enough to last several months, but we received very little after setting aside military provisions. Many families have already run out of food.”

[Economy]

An Elderly Woman Established a Daycare Center that Earns 6,000 Won a Day

Lee Boon-Soon (70s, Alias) from Joore-Dong in Pyungsung City, South Pyungan Province makes about 6,000 NK won a day by operating a daycare center. She charges 300 NK won for each child and takes care of about 20 children a day. We asked why mothers send their children to a daycare center facility like hers instead of a preschool and Lee answered, “Public daycare or preschool facilities asks for so much extra monies for this and that. That’s why mothers do not send their children to these facilities. Mothers come here because private daycare center like my facility charge the same 300 NK won without charging them any extras.”

Heungnam Fertilizer Factory Completed Fertilizer Distribution to All Provinces

Fertilizers produced by Heungnam Fertilizer Factory in South Hamgyong Province were distributed to all provinces. Last June 10, approximately 13,000 tons of fertilizers were delivered to the Farming Management Commission in South Pyungan Province; 16,500 tons to South Hwanghae Province; 10,000 tons to North Hamgyong Province; 7,000 tons to Ryanggang Province and 8,500 tons to Jagang Province. Secretary of the Guidance Department called the party in each city and province to instruct that, “They should set up a thorough plan to prevent any fraud or personal use of the fertilizers during conveyance. In accordance with the order, police officers and security agents were in charge of guarding the fertilizers from the railroad station to the appropriate farms. If anything should happen to the fertilizer during the transport process, all responsible farm workers and police officers would punished according to the legal provisions, they were warned.

[Politics]

“The Whole World Watches Us” Mass Conference
North Korea is at the height of the 150-day battle. The following has been stated in a mass conference to fuss over the work: “At this time, the whole world watches us. The world is showing great interest in how North Korea conducts the 150-day battle. We are not strengthening national defense anymore but instead, we are focusing on improving the lives of the people. In order to show what we are doing now, we must support the rural villages and do our job well. Our General led the 70-day battle and the 200-day battle to victory in 1974, and this 150-day battle is also a battle that has historical significance. It will be engraved upon the history of our party as it will open the gate of the Strong and Prosperous Nation.”

“Ten-Day Discipline” Punishment Threatened During 150-Day Battle Assessment
The national Democratic Women’s Union (DWU) is recording an “honorable 150-day battle memorandum” every day and considers it in the assessment. People who properly participate in the battle will have no problem, but other people will receive an ideological indoctrination through “10-day discipline punishment” as soon as the assessment is finished. Through “10-day discipline punishment,” people who behave poorly will be gathered and educated using various ideological programs. Starting at 8 o’clock in the morning, the people who are punished with the 10-day discipline punishment will undergo ideological education, such as “the great leader Kim Il-Sung’s instruction” and “the General’s message.” They will write a self-criticism for three days and will write the resolution every day. In the afternoon, they will be disciplined with labor. Kim, Sung-Sook (40s), who lives in Sinuiju, North Pyongan Province, describes how shuddering the experience is. “They badger us so much, so once the DWU members experience the badgering, they do not want to experience it again.” she says.

Government Officials, Writing and Rewriting Self-Criticism Papers
Government officials nowadays are so busy writing self-criticism papers that they cannot do anything else. Every day they are required to write three self-criticism papers. If any of the papers do not meet standards, they have to be rewritten. “Can a completely broken down system be fixed by doing this?” asks one official from Pyongyang. He told the following tale: “Since all the government officials and party officials read ‘the Red Letter,’ which had been sent privately to all of them, officials have begun writing self-criticism papers listing all their faults, even minor ones, in the last three years. It is truly a frustrating business. The officials are supposed to focus on their activity of accepting bribes and write about them. During the mandatory political lectures, we are told that the officials are the pillars of this nation and that because they are giving favors to people based on money, power, or personal acquaintance, the talented individuals are being wasted and the nation’s progress is delayed. But, when people hear this, their reaction is that of a jeer – ‘There is nothing new in this talk. It is already a fixture of our society. Do they expect to change this social trend with these talks? Do they really think that they are able to straighten out the crooked landscape?’ The reality is that even the directive officers from Central Party who visited all the regions of the country for the 150-Day Battle accepted bribes.”
Last June 19, the Propaganda Department of Pyungsung City in South Pyongan Province held a lecture for all the officials and party members as well. Its content can be summarized like this: “The current officials and judges are taking bribes, and by doing so, they are creating an anti-socialistic environment and terrorizing the public with legal oppression. There should be no more cases of this abuse happening.” And then they were told to write self-criticism papers detailing all their errors in the last three years. It is expected that the whole party should express its remorse. Due to such expectations, all the officials go to the 150-Day Battle during the day and write self-criticism papers during the evening.

“The Official’s Self-Criticism Papers for the Purpose of Remission”
One official from Pyongyang commented that punishment is not the only purpose for writing the self-criticisms. It has the effect of giving an official a pardon from any number of unlawful activities he committed once he confesses them. He said, “Once an official confesses to his crimes, the party council lets him pass, but keeps the evidence. Since high-ranking officials receive large amounts of bribes, there are more chances that their misdeeds will become public. But, if they turn themselves in, then the law does not punish them as if they are completely innocent. For them to have a new beginning, the remission of their offenses is provided. That is why, for the officials, writing self-criticism papers is not such a bad thing.” However, because these officials still receive bribes through different means and methods, there is almost no one who experiences the new beginning.

[Society]
“You can only work as someone’s servant if you have no money.”
Nowadays, North Korean people are voicing the opinion that “Rich people make money using money, and poor people can only work as someone’s servant.” Ham, Bong-soon (age 45) who resides in Chungjin, North Hamgyong Province told the story she witnessed. “There is a snack store at 48 Ban, Soobook Dong in Chungjin City. In that store they hire women without a job or poor children who cannot even afford porridge and pay wages to them. In general, their age ranges from 15 to 22. One day I went there to buy some snack and became very surprised. They get up at 4 in the morning, eat just a spoonful of cold rice without soup, don’t even get a break throughout the day, work until 10pm, and go to bed at 11pm. They say they make about 890 to 1,000 NK won per day. That’s like not even half kg of rice even though they come to work with packed lunch on their own. Some of the children suffer from tuberculosis, and other children suffer from constipation. Strictly speaking, they have more loss than gain. However, the store doubled the profit by selling the snack at high price while paying low wages. The owners had extravaganza weddings for their daughters. There were rumors that the daughters are neither pretty nor smart, but they were able to find well qualified men as groom because they are rich. I realize that there is nothing you cannot do if you have money.”

People Fainted due to Sunstroke at the Mass Rally Commemorating 6.25
Last June 24th, there was a mass rally in Sariwon, North Hwanghae Province. The rally was about calling for the withdrawal of US military forces who provoked the 6.25 Korean War and denouncing Lee, Myoung-bak regime in South Korea. On that day, as many as 5 people fainted due to sunstroke at the site of mass rally. They were 3 men and 2 women, and the medical team at the site gave emergency treatments. People at the site said, “More people would have fainted if people stood there for another 10 more minutes. People fainted because they had to stand for a long time under strong sunlight especially when they had not eaten well. I wish there was no more such a rally as this.” Suh, Mi-jung (30s) who fainted that day received an injection as soon as she got home. However, she could only regain consciousness next day morning perhaps because of the side effect from the injection. On the same day, there was the same type of mass rally in front of Kim, Il-sung’s statue in Pohang district, Chungjin city, North Hamgyong Province. This site also had as many as 12 people fainted because of sunstroke. One of them, a 55-year-old man, who lives in Namgang 2 Dong, died due to severe cerebral hemorrhage.

Furloughs Granted to Military Officers on the verge of Getting Divorce to Bring Their Wives Back
In the 10th and 7th regiments of the 5th division of the 5th Corps in Kangwon Province there are as many as 20 military officers who are on the verge of divorce. Last March, military bases issued orders to young officers under the age of 38, asking them to send their wives to their parents’ home when the food situation became very difficult. As a result, they had to live separately not knowing when to be reunited. After five months passed they were allowed to bring them back. Most of the women returned, but some of them refused to come back to their husband saying, “I can no longer live with a military officer who can’t even get food.” As such, the officers went to their wife’s parents’ house, but as many as 18 officers came back alone. Last June 10, the political committee members of each division gathered the 18 officers and issued a special order of bringing their wives back. “Why can’t you bring your own wife back when the whole country is supporting the military with the ‘military first’ policy. We will grant you furloughs again. Bring your wives back. There can never be a divorce for a military officer when we give the first priority to the People’s Army with the ‘military first’ policy.”

[Women/Children/Education]
Evaluating the performance of staff members at Wonsan Economic College
In response to the rising concern of decreasing quality of education, Jung-Joon-Taek Wonsan Economic College, located in the city of Wonsan in Kangwon Province, has began to evaluate the performance of staff members including Ph.D.s and professors starting on June 15th. According to one of the evaluation workers, the result of the evaluation showed that personnel who were 28-35 years of age received high ratings, while those over 35 years of age performed at a level equivalent to that of undergraduates. One member of the college staff provided another perspective on the evaluation, stating that “Prior to the biannual evaluation, high-level evaluators at the Department of Education usually prepare a blacklist of school personnel. They are not straightforward about it, but do say that we (the
evaluators) ‘should evaluate such and such a person carefully for the better of the party committee.’ As a result, the evaluators feel that they need to lay off some faculty members. After this year’s evaluation, many young staff members were promoted, while the older ones were ordered to be laid off. The older workers are not near their retirement age, but by the looks of it, it seems as if the process was designed to shift employment from the older to the younger generation.”

[Accidents]

Security Guard Protecting Potatoes Dies after Being Beaten by Soldiers
On June 2nd, a security guard working at the Collective Farm of Hwangju-town, Hwangju County, North Hwanghae Province, died after being beaten by a soldier thief. The attackers, who were found to be four soldiers of the 4.25 training institute, were arrested by security agents. The soldiers said, “At first, we kindly begged the security guard of the 2nd work unit to give us good potatoes. We asked for two packs of potatoes because it was one of our squad member’s birthday, but he didn’t listen to our request so we got angry and attacked.” The security guard who was beaten died from a visceral cleft during the second day of treatment.

Group of Robbers Acting Like Police Officers Finally Caught
A group of robbers who have acted like police officers in Jangyeon county, South Hwanghae Province, were arrested. The nine group members have been pretending to be police officers by wearing police uniforms and inspecting passersby to feed off of bribes and steal people’s belongings. Most of the time, three men usually impersonated as uniformed officers and conducted false inspection while the other six thieves followed them around to carry the stolen goods and later sold them in other areas. Their sale networks branched all the way from South to North Hwanghae Province and were able to make a huge profit. They were finally arrested on June 8th in Baecheon County, South Hwanghae Province. After hearing this news, the residents of Jangyeon city said, “This just shows how easily the officers have been making money off of the citizens. Because of the officers’ past actions, these incidents are happening.”

[Commentary]

Any Solutions for Fatalities from Chronic Malnutrition?
Fatalities from chronic malnutrition are progressing as we speak. North Koreans say that current deaths from starvation are ‘invisible deaths.’ They say the dead bodies are not easily found on the streets, or at the station and markets as in 1998. However, this does not suggest that people are not dying from starvation. Many people are dying on the mountains, in the fields, and in their homes alone. That is, people are dying slowly because of chronic malnutrition. When a person’s hunger reaches the point of severity when death seems imminent because of starvation, it is believed that anything will look edible. During the days of Arduous March, there were many testimonies about starving North Koreans eating human flesh. Those charged with the crime of eating human flesh were executed in public. Many dare to do very dangerous things, risking their lives without hesitation. Many
realize that the risks will lead to certain execution. Examples include stealing military provisions, cutting off telephone lines, and killing bulls for food. During the middle of the 1990s, even though those crimes were considered capital offenses, many committed such crimes and were summarily executed. Alarmingly, those tragic instances are now being repeated in 2009. One may argue that instances of eating human flesh are isolated cases, occurring among only the very few extreme poor who went insane because of severe pangs of hunger. However, it really does not matter whether there is only one case or two. That cannibalism occurs at all during extended period of food crisis is a serious concern. Detailed analysis of many testimonies that more people died during the fall, a time of harvest, than during spring, supposedly a much more difficult period, reveals that the main cause of death is chronic malnutrition. In other words, stomachs, severely reduced in their functionality, cannot handle any food. A sudden intake of food after a long period of starvation causes stomach problems, even fatalities. Extreme cases such as ‘eating human flesh’ are supposedly ‘easily visible’. One can only imagine, then, how many ‘invisible deaths’ are behind a ‘visible extreme instance.’ As North Korea’s food crisis has extended itself over a period of twenty years, suffering caused by chronic malnutrition has increased. What is painful is that the real picture of this entire tragedy remains hidden. So far, even though the international community has provided imminent aid to a so-called ‘confirmed situation’ - which represents a visibly confirmed situation of massive starvation – the global community has shown relatively little interest in the invisible situation of ‘chronic malnutrition.’ Admittedly, providing aid to North Korea has not been easy where it is difficult to have a firm grasp over the actual situation. The current international financial crisis has resulted in an overall reduction of support by the World Food Program. Additionally, North Korea’s nuclear tests have made the situation worse. Aid programs toward North Korea have been reduced to a third of the level of support that existed previously. On July 1, the U.S. Department of State announced that more additional support towards North Korea would not be made available because of difficulties in monitoring the flow of aid and accessing. Under these circumstances, any possibility of hope and encouragement to North Korean residents must now come from us. Aside from political differences with the North Korean government, a social consensus should be reached to solve the issue of survival for North Korean residents. Both authorities in North and South Korea should wipe away the tears of twenty million North Korea residents suffering from the agonies of starvation. What else could better demonstrate love for humanity and love for our people? The South Korean government should be ready to provide emergency aid for the spring hardship period. Both North and South Korean authorities should work together to prepare a long-term solution for the chronic malnutrition. The current political situation does not present any possibilities in the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, the reason for not abandoning hope is that we are the only hope the North Koreans have. If we lose hope, they will only have hopelessness.
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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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