“Good Friends” seeks to help the North Korean people from a humanistic point of view and publishes “North Korea Today” describing the way North Koreans live as realistically as possible. We at Good Friends also hope to be a bridge between the North Korean population and the world.

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Ministry of Agriculture Concerned by Low Temperature Phenomenon

As the low temperature phenomenon has continued this summer, the officers of the Ministry of Agriculture have been vigilant in monitoring its effect on agricultural production. A responsible officer of the Ministry of Agriculture expressed his concern: “Low summer temperatures have resulted in unfavorable weather conditions. Although fertilizers have not been provided in sufficient amounts, they have been applied on a majority of the farmland. Still, there may be some trouble with the corn and rice crops due to the weather.” He said to other officers that “Although there may be some trouble due to the cloudy weather, it will not affect the harvest.”

The Ministry of Agriculture did not mention the low temperature phenomenon; rather they reiterated the following several times to provincial, city, and county parties: “Even if we propose to open the gates of our strong and prosperous nation, the key is successful farming in the countryside this year. In resolving the food crisis, the whole nation must stand up to participate in the 150-day battle, with everyone participating in the weeding battle. This year, every region must be successful in farming so that we may be able to live by ourselves without importing food from abroad.”

Mealworms Propagate in North Hamgyong Province due to Low Temperature

As the low temperature phenomenon continues in North Hamgyong Province, the spread of mealworms in the corn fields has become a problem. The agricultural technologists in the Provincial Farming Management Commission in North Hamgyong Province expressed their concern, “If this phenomenon, due to clouds obscuring the sun, lasts 15 more days, this year’s crop in North Hamgyong Province will decrease significantly compared with last year. If it continues to be cloudy, no matter how effective the pesticides are, the risk from mealworms will increase.”

With the assistance of the City Department of Education, Hoeryong city started to mobilize elementary and middle school students in catching the mealworms. The 6th group of the 1st work unit in Osan Farm cultivates 9 Jungbos (unit of land, 1 Jungbo is 2.45 acres) of cornfield, but the mealworm damage has become so serious that it has become difficult to gather a crop. Currently, the worms have eaten all the corn ears, leaving only the stalks. The farm workers want a heat wave to begin as soon as possible, saying that the worms will eventually disappear once the heat wave starts. In addition to Hoeryong city, the mealworm damages have occurred in the areas around Saebyul County, Onsung County and Eunduk County as well.

The Komosan laborers’ district in Buryung County and Changpyung Farm have also become concerned about poor corn growth even though more fertilizers have been applied than the last year. The workers of Changpyung Farm expressed their serious concern that the harvest crop this year may fall short of last year since frequent cloudy days have hampered corn growth.

1960’s Living Conditions in Okchun Division in Baekam County

Potato is the main staple food in the Okchun division of Baekam County, Ryanggang Province. Because potato is the main agricultural item and corn has not been growing well corn is rarely seen in this area. In
addition, the arable land is not very fertile, which has contributed to the food shortage. There are 7 work units in Okchun division and 80% of the population is exiled families, primarily from Pyongyang, Kaeong, and South Hwanghae Province. Shin Hakrim (alias, 60s), who came to visit his relatives, said that the living conditions in this area are very similar to the farmers’ living conditions in the 1960s. According to Shin “You cannot see corn; there is no electric light so people use pine wood fires rather than electric light.” He said that, due to strict surveillance and control by the police, bringing food to relatives is very difficult.

Workers Flee Special Labor Brigade in Onsung, Wanjaesan due to Food Shortage

The shortage of food rations has caused delays in the restoration of the Wangjaesan museum in Onsung County, North Hamgyong Province. Some hunger-ridden members of the Special Labor Brigade have escaped to go home, and are now wanted by the Brigade. One platoon leader from the Special Labor Brigade who led the search for the deserters admitted that the food crisis is serious. He told sources that a mixture of corn rice and ground corncob is commonly provided as a meal. “Due to such harsh living conditions even I go to the village to beg for food. Also, about a half of the cement and many other construction materials are stolen to be used as an exchange for food and alcohol despite strict controls and surveillance” he said.

He further lamented that such things could be happening considering the caliber of his unit’s highly selective labor force, which has been tasked to uphold a place for revolution, tradition, and culture. He can only imagine what could be going on at other construction sites. He revealed that the members who have brought some money from home at least go out in the evenings to drink; however, for the others these nightly trips into the village are to steal food in order to survive. He hopes for the earliest possible recovery from this food crisis.

[Economy]

Chungjin Residents Turn Away Poor Quality Bean Paste Made by the Basic Food Factory

The bean paste and soy sauce made by the basic food factory are being turned away by residents in Chungjin, North Hamgyong Province. The residents can easily purchase bean paste and soy sauce from groceries in each district; however, the poor quality of these products has caused much reluctance to buying them. In order to force sales, the city is selling laundry soap with a condition to purchase bean paste or soy sauce. In order to buy laundry soap, one also needs to buy the unwanted products. While general residents can purchase only low quality bean paste and soy sauce, executive officials and their children are allowed to buy the higher quality. The residents are skeptical of the City Party, claiming that “The general residents are only given poor quality foods.”

Production Rate below Thirty Percent at Lanam Mine Machinery Factory in Chungjin

Lanam Mine Machinery Factory in Lanam District, Chungjin, Northern Hamgyong Province, has been facing production problems. Although the factory is one-third of the way into the 150-day battle campaign, its production rate is still below thirty percent. The Gaebun Mine Association in the Southern Pyongan Province is still waiting for machinery from Lanam Mine Machinery Factory. On July 17, the entry-level Party members at the factory held a meeting to come up with a plan to increase production. An emissary sent by the Central Party threatened that if the production goal is not achieved, those in charge of production will be punished at the end of the 150-day campaign.
One entry-level Party member at the factory responded by saying, “The Central Party Committee has tightened its control over us. Just from the number of dispatched officers in each city, farm, factory, and public enterprise, we can gauge the extent of the Committee’s control. If we do not reach our production goal at the end of the 150-day battle campaign, even the dispatched officer will not be able to avoid punishment. Thus, each officer has an incentive to do whatever it takes to ensure the goal is met. Our factory is no exception.”

**Workers at Sangwha Mine in Onsung Have Low Morale**

Workers at Sangwha Mine in Onsung County, North Hamgyong Province, have held several meetings to achieve something more than their coal production goals with little progress. In these meetings, county officials and the chief of workers have emphasized their resolution saying, "We must achieve the party’s assignments and be part of the force making a powerful nation." Miners seem to disregard such statements about production goals and respond by saying, "We risk our lives to work in the mines and we get almost nothing."

Cho Kwang-Sik (alias, 50's) said, "Before the late 1990's food crisis, food such as oil, meat and rice wine were well provided. It was a good time for us to work hard. Since the food crisis, people are suffering from hunger. Ten years have passed and we are still hungry. No matter if we work hard or not, there is no difference, we just don't get enough food. The monthly food provisions, such as whole corn, are not provided in a timely manner, and only last for 15-days. Often times we don’t even receive any food ration at all. How can we work hard in this situation?"

Ryu Jung-Ae (alias, 40's) said, "Even though I work everyday, I am extremely sad and furious that I cannot support myself, let alone my family. After a meal, I have to worry about the next meal. A day passes, and I have to worry about what to eat the next day. How can I live like this? We cannot openly say, ‘I can’t wait to see if this country collapses,’ but the majority of us think this way."

Some other miners stated, "It’s so hard to survive without proper food rations. And on top of that, there is so much control and so many kinds of inspections that I get very tired and angry. Our future is as dark as a mine tunnel without any sign of light ahead.” Most of the miners feel the same and the morale of the miners seem to be extremely low. Another miner said, "The officials are trying to encourage us to work hard with lectures and propaganda, but I don’t see it having any impact on us to meet the production goals unless they can guarantee our livelihood."

[Politics]

**Informant Rewarded with Seized Drugs**

On July 15th drug smugglers were arrested at police checkpoint unit 10 in the Komoosan laborers’ district in Buryung County, North Hamgyong Province. A drug smuggler was traveling with two children, from Danchun city, South Hamgyong Province, and he was arrested while trying to pass the border area. He had about 500g of narcotics in his luggage. The Komoosan police checkpoint was waiting for them after receiving a tip about the smuggler. When police successfully arrested the smuggler, they rewarded the informer with 200g worth of the confiscated narcotics. They received a report on drug smuggling and rewarded the informer with drugs. This is a rare incident, but some security agents are eager to meet their goals of the 150-day battle and give away contraband seized from smugglers to informers.
If Drug Use Is Ignored, Enemies Can Destroy Our Society

The police authorities conducted a nationwide analysis of drug use and ordered each district to enhance the warning about using drugs. According to this analysis, the number of drug addicts is soaring in Hamheung, South Hamgyong Province, a region that has a history of making drugs intensively and the site of fast-growing places of drug manufacturing such as Soonchun and Pyongyang, South Pyongan Province. Drugs produced in these regions were sent to border areas such as Sinuiju in North Pyongan Province, Hyesan in Ryanggang Province, and Musan and Hoeryong in South Hamgyong Province, and even to Pyongyang. Although accurate numbers are unknown, an official said that police counted drug addicts in every mental hospital in North Korea.

The police analyzed the soaring number of drug addicts and warned that drug use can cause chaos in society and insisted, “They are manipulated by the strategies of the enemy acting in this society.” An official said, “From 2007 to March 2009, National Security of the Party, Police Station, and the Public Executors’ Office had inspected drug use and arrested many criminals controlled by spies. They are anti-socialists who can lead our society into political chaos.” Thus, National Security has handled incidents related to drug use or connected to political issues since June 2008.

An official with the Central Party insisted upon intensifying punishment and said, “According to a report of National Security, each district has a tremendous number of drug addicts and the society is disordered and corrupt, so it is going to be too demoralized to cure. He warned, “If the punishment is not strong, the enemy can destroy our society soon.” The police have decided to seek stronger punishment for drug manufacturers and dealers rather than drug users and expect an increase in the number of life sentences by sending criminals to National Security Detention Areas.

[Society]

Injured during Nampo Dam construction, Man Tells His Story of Survival

Now in his sixties, Lee Gab-soo (alias) recalled his twenties, when as a young man he joined the military and was called upon to serve in the construction of the Nampo Dam, losing one of his legs in an accident. He described his story, saying that “it’s a miracle that I’m still alive.”

“After I was discharged from military service, government organizations helped me a lot and showed great concern for my daily livelihood. However, the country’s economic situation has worsened since the end of the eighties and benefits including medical treatment for disabled soldiers have evaporated. Ever since, I have had to work hard in order to feed myself and get daily necessities as ordinary people do because I don’t want to dwell on my suffering in the past.

When I first started out in my new career, I worked for a clothing company where disabled soldiers like me trimmed loose threads, made buttonholes and sewed buttons onto garments. However, the company only paid employees a meager salary and distribution was irregular, almost halting production. When the company finally closed down, I was forced to quit and thus began my battle to save myself from starving to death. I barely get by, selling sugar water for drinks, vegetables, sea foods, and etc. It’s really hard to maintain peace of mind. Were it not for the help I receive from my parents and siblings who also live in poverty themselves, I would already be dead.”

Despite being an aged man in his sixties, he bawled like a child. The living conditions of homes for the elderly are so horrible; he cannot even imagine life at one. He said, “Living in a nursing home for the
elderly is similar to the Training Center or Re-education Center.” Meals consist of a thin gruel with noodles and napa soup, but they did not provide enough. Due to the lack of sufficient nourishment, adequate shoes and clothes are more than likely a luxury. “They do not regularly wash clothes for residents, so they smell. The residents cannot bathe, so they are so dirty and have lice in their hair and on their bodies.”

He finished his story by saying that “the government and the Party are unfit to lead, so the country’s economic situation is rapidly getting worse and the people are grumbling about their misfortunes more and more. Metaphorically speaking, the whole country is drying out like dead wood and all it’s going to take is a small spark to start a massive fire.”

[Women/Children/Education]

Members of DWU in Oongjin County Protest, “We Are Treated as if Being Punished”

Democratic Women’s Union (DWU) members in Oongjin County, South Hwanghae Province, protest “We are being treated as if we are in a women’s labor discipline center.” During the 150-day battle, members of the DWU were ordered to perform hard labor in collective farms. The DWU members work from early in the morning until past 8 in the evening, removing weeds and performing other types of farm work. The mobilized DWU groups are sent out to rural areas and are replaced every five days.

[Accidents]

Fire Breaks Out at Bull Farm in Oakchun Working Branch, Baekahn County

In the middle of last May, in Oakchun working branch, Baekahn County, Ryanggang Province, a fire broke out at a bull farm. The County Security Department arrested three heads of household suspected of being responsible for the fire. Adamantly denying the charges, they were nevertheless escorted to the Provincial Security Department.

The farmers suspect however that, “The fire at the bull farm was all a conspiracy made by the Provincial Security Department.” Another person in the area says, “There are talks that the fire was set to punish politically unfavored people.” Additional people also note, “It has not been confirmed who was responsible for the fire, so what is the reason for arresting those three people?” The people extended their sympathies for the arrested, who were forced to confess to the arson and sent to a re-education center.
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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’ friends, a peace movement to fundamentally resolve disputes and conflicts that human beings face, and a 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 the humanitarian and human rights situation of North Korean residents and to inform 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 organizations so that they can support the North Korean population effectively.

2) investigating the current situation of North Korean refugees in China, and providing protection and aid for them.

3) assessing human rights violations occurring in North Korea, informing international agencies, and requesting that the North Korean government act to improve 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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