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

[Hot Topics]
30% Reduction in This Year’s Harvest of Corn Anticipated in North Hamgyong Province Due to Drought
Guarding against Grain Thieves at Soonchun Farms

[Food]
Residents of Mountainous Kangwon Province Anticipate Worst Food Crisis since Arduous March
70% People around Wonsan City Barely Manage to Live with Corn-grass Porridge

[Economy]
Road Expansion for Military Purposes between Hoeryong and Chungjin Cities
33% Absenteeism in Chungjin City Construction Office

[Politics]
Border Patrols in Ryanggang Province Track Down and Impose Strict Punishment on Enemy Benefiting Transactions
Pyongsung Finds Handbills Libeling the Government

[Society]
Released Person from Re-Education Center Cannot Gain Employment without Bribery
Residents of Hamheung Ordered to Move Rocks
“Does It Make Sense to Take Away Our Land When We Don’t Have Enough to Farm?”

[Women/Children/Education]
Gaining Power of the Heads of the Neighborhood Units Incites the Question, “Opening the Door of Strong and Powerful Nation is the Sole Responsibility of Housewives?”

[Accidents]
Fight between Farm Guards and Soldiers Attempting to Steal Corn

[Hot Topics]
30% Reduction in This Year’s Harvest of Corn Anticipated in North Hamgyong Province Due to Drought
On September 14, the National Committee on Provincial Farm Management dispatched surveyors to the cities and counties to assess this year’s grain. North Hamgyong Province also sent departmental specialists to its farms. The Ministry of Agriculture will collect and analyze all the data collected on the crop output of corn throughout the nation. It is anticipated that corn production this year will be reduced by 30% due to drought. Rice production was similar to previous years, but corn production has showed a significant drop. The overall production in North Hamgyong Province is considered to be better than North Hwanghae Province or South Pyongan Province. According to the farm workers in Hwanghae Province, corn production in the area farms is merely 2 to 3 tons per jungbo (2.45 acres). There are many remote mountainous farms that produce not even a ton per jungbo.

Guarding Against Grain Thieves at Soonchun Farms
Many residents of the City of Soonchun, South Pyongan Province are worried about the food shortage. A poor crop this year will make it more difficult to survive next year. Those residents with money and merchants tend to buy all the grain that they can find. As the height of the harvest season approaches, farms are increasing security measures in an effort to ward against a predicted rise in grain thefts. Farms are more than doubling the number of security personnel, such as the Civilian Defense Force and patrols.

[Food]
Residents of Mountainous Kangwon Province Anticipate Worst Food Crisis since Arduous March
As food shortages grow more severe by the day in Kangwon province, there has been an outcry from residents. Many residents are already scared of the food crisis that has been predicted for next year, the worst since the Arduous March. The situation in remote mountainous areas, such as Kumgang, Chulwon, Kimhwa, Yichun, Changdo, Pangyo and Bubdong, is more serious. Residents in the coastal towns, such as Tongchun and Kosung, can get something to eat from the sea. However, mountainous areas provide no supplementary resources, only insufficient harvests. Those who cannot depend on small plot farming suffer the most. Complaints have reached such a point that “Daily survival is worse than dying.”

After reviewing this year’s crop situation, workers in Kangwon Province estimate that the number of families that will run out of food will reach high numbers around next February or March. They are scared that “In the days of scarce food supply during the 1990s, starvation started in the north. But now it is starting in southern plain areas.” Many residents have negative reactions to the 150-day battle. They say, “The 150-day battle was an unparalleled obstacle to making a living.” They complain that the 150-day battle stopped businesses and small plot farming. No business activity then means no money available now. No small plot farming means no grain. Residents complain in unison, “We are being led to our deaths. We need survival measures set up by the government.”

70% People around Wonsan City Barely Manage to Live with Corn-grass Porridge
People in Wonsan City in the Kangwon province are experiencing severe food shortages. Villages such as Ryongha, Galma, Bokmak and Wonnam are experiencing the most severe food shortage. More than 70% of residents in these villages barely survive on grass porridge made out of handful of corn and vegetable slices. In villages such as Ryongha, Pyonghwa and Yangji, people are barely making a living by making and selling briquettes. Residents make these briquettes at home using coal. Residents in other villages make a living through the farmer’s market. Conditions are slightly better for central villages such as Bongchoon, Bongsoo and Haebang where many families are engaged in used-goods businesses. Nowadays, it is hard to make ends meet without women earning a living through businesses. If the women in the family are sick, the family cannot even afford grass porridge. People are saying, “We are returning to the era of maternal clan society.”

[Economy]
Road Expansion for Military Purposes between Hoeryong and Chungjin Cities
Road construction work has increased between the cities of Rajin, Chungjin, Hoeryong and Chungin in North Hamgyoung province. The purpose of the No. 125 road is to prepare for military maneuvers. The road expansion
construction lasted from January of this year until March. The width of the road expanded from 4 meters to 6 meters between Changtaeri, Hoeryong and the Chungam district in Chungjin. However, it failed the standard army inspection on March 29th due to its narrow width. Starting on September 19th, road expansion construction will start again, beginning at the area which contains factories and public enterprises in Hoeryong City. The current construction is overseen and directed by the chief of the local reserve army who is also the chairman for the city party’s civilian defense.

33% Absenteeism in Chungjin City Construction Office
Currently, the Chungjin City Construction office has 550 employees but only 350 employees attend work with any regularity. Since there has been no food provision for more than sixteen months and the food crisis has only intensified, absenteeism is on the rise. Employees expressed discontent, “Even we come to work every day all we hear is ideological propaganda and all we do is work without pay, are we criminals who must do forced labor? In early September, only 24 construction workers reported to work out of a total of 162 employees. In the construction material branch of the office, only 11 workers came to work out of 110. The absence of employed workers has become such an issue that it was even reported to the provincial party. Since the provincial secretary and managers couldn’t come up with a solution, the city party’s Organization and Guidance Department immediately came up with a plan called the “Labor Exertion Drive.” After the plan was implemented, ten policemen are mobilized to enforce attendance.

[Politics]
Border Patrols in Ryanggang Province Track Down and Impose Strict Punishment on Enemy Benefiting Transactions
On September 5th, two soldiers from the 25th brigade and four residents were arrested in Hyesan, Ryanggang Province, for having transactions benefiting the enemy. As a result, eight security guards from the Jagang Province Defense Security Commands were dispatched in Hyesan City as a Special Investigation Patrol. They have started the investigation of the Defense Security Commands since September 11th, and they are planning to investigate until May of 2010. It is known that they will track down enemy benefiting transactions by military officers and private soldiers of the Border Patrols and the residents who are involved in them. One military officer said, “I know that the security guards from the Jagang Province are keeping their eyes open to purge the scum of the society before opening the gate of the strong and prosperous nation.”

Pyongsung Finds Handbills Libeling Government
At a time when the 150-day battle solidifies the nation, approximately 20 handbills were discovered in the unit 50 of Jurye-dong in Pyongsung City, South Pyongan Province, which libeled against the government. The original copy of the handbill was a printed copy from a computer. In order to arrest the criminal, the counter intelligence agents and the security agents in Pyongsung City and South Pyongan Province are conducting an investigation by thoroughly searching the organizations in the city and the residential homes where a computer is used.

[Society]

Released Person from Re-Education Center Cannot Gain Employment without Bribery

Shim Gum-chul (alias), who lives in Onsung, North Hamgyong Province, was released from jail in June of this year. After his release, he had to go through several places such as Neighborhood Unit, district offices, and the National Security Agency in order to obtain employment and receive a resident card. This process was never easy. When Shim went to visit the primary party secretary where he was stationed to work, the secretary and the administration chief of the primary party saw the prison release document, and they asked detailed questions about “where he worked and why he was imprisoned.” Shim told the secretary that he “was sentenced for three years of re-education for possession of ice (drug) while working in the border area, and was assigned at Juwon Mine.” The secretary replied brusquely, “Juwon Mine is receiving another troubled person.” Then he rejected Shim, saying, “A person who is known for crossing the river to conduct a substantial trade should know better. How can he visit a person empty handed? He should bring at least one or two bottles of wine and a pack of cigarettes.”

“I lived in obscurity in the re-education center for a few years, and after I was released, I was wandering from one place to another without a home. So, how would such a person have money to prepare those things?” asked Shim and went to them a few more times despite his sense of dignity, but they had several excuses and kept postponing the date. The party instructs the officers to “ensure the living condition of released persons from the re-education center so they would be well established and taste the pleasures of life,” but even obtaining an employment is not possible without bribing the low-ranking officers. The residents are resentful, saying this is the “wiles” of the low-ranking officers.

Kim, who used to be a co-worker with Shim in his previous employment, expressed his frustration: “Because of these people, people who once committed a wrong in the past cannot hold up one’s head forever. The low-ranking officers oppress the people by using their position, and make ill use of
the revolutionary ideology of the party in order to make a profit for themselves.” As a result, Shim was not assigned any employment and was considered as a person with no affiliation, so he had to be summoned almost every day to meet authorities. He had been continuously supervised every day and the life had been too weary, so he obstinately tried to cross the river but was caught in the end. He was reported for “not accepting the reconstruction of the ideology by the party and the repentance of the crime but attempting to defect the country” and is currently awaiting trial. Since it happened soon after the release, the sentence is expected to be more severe.

Residents of Hamheung Orded to Move Rocks
Hoesang District of Hamheung City, South Hamgyong Province, gave orders to all neighborhood units to move 10-rocks for fish farm construction. Because the transportation of heavy rocks using machinery requires large amounts of fuel which they do not have, the district handed off the responsibility to the people. Residents are complaining saying, “How do they expect us to do this when the government doesn’t even have enough energy to do it. They asked us to give up our socks, spoons and now they’re asking us to move these rocks!”

People also added, “We wouldn’t complain if they compensated us, but they are only taking things from us with nothing in return. They’re saying they will reduce the extra duty orders, but keep on imposing a lot of material submission.” All police officers, including police associates, are also required to make contributions, but there are no rules specifying that they must complete their duties themselves or give up their own possessions. Police officers frequently hold security inspections at the marketplace where they make collections from the residents.

People are protesting: “This is too much! Everyone comes to the market to make ends meet but these police officers are taking our money because they don’t want to pay with their own money.”

“Does It Make Sense to Take Away Our Land When We Don’t Have Enough to Farm?”
In North Hwanghae Province, Chang Jeong-ae (ailas) from Sarinon is full of tears. She was expecting a successful harvest because she managed to keep some manure from the previous year. However, officials told her not to farm the small piece of land she had during the 150-day battle. This made it very difficult for her to farm in secret, and the weather did not cooperate as well, causing several corn ears to fail. It rained when the crops needed sun, and there was a drought when crops needed rain. The loss was too great for Chang to trade her corn for tofu beans, so she tried to save the remaining
seeds. However, her troubles grew in the fall and she blames her failed harvest to the party policy:

“It wouldn’t be this bad if the country didn’t take away my small piece of land. Residents worked hard and pulled out old tree roots, plant roots and other weeds to make the land arable, but the land management office took it away. It’s difficult to prepare a new field and to find manure. Combined with the helpless weather conditions, people’s grudge is growing sky high. Are all officials stupid? They are claiming that they will take away all the land by 2012. They can tell by looking at our corn, even with a small bit of land, we have no manure and the weather is not helping. We don’t know what we’re going to eat next year. It is hard enough with such little land for farming...does it make any sense to take it away? I am losing my mind because the country is taking everything away without anything in return.”

[Women/Children/Education]

Gaining Power of the Heads of the Neighborhood Units Incites the Question, “Opening the Door of Strong and Powerful Nation is the Sole Responsibility of Housewives?”

Women are complaining about the burden of non-tax contributions. Some women are saying it would be better to die than to make the non-tax contributions which continue to increasing. Gu Jeong-ok, who lives in Pyongsung in the South Pyongan Province, grumbled, “They force me to contribute gloves to the construction fields of Uhrang Dam, Mt. Baekdu and Heecheon Power Plant, send meat to People’s Army, pay fund for loyalty, and collect lots of scrap items. I’m afraid of what I will have to pay the next morning.” Gu also does not like heads of the Neighborhood Units. They are exempted from making non-tax contributions in exchange for collecting non-tax contributions from others. The authority told these heads to be strict about collecting the contributions from every household. Gu said, “Some of the heads are very mean and cruel because they have the backing of the authority” and did not want to talk about them anymore.

Lee Hye-young (alias), who lives in Soobukdong in Chungjin City in the North Hamgyong Province, said, “There are lots of stuff to contribute. They force every household in the Neighborhood Unit to make non-tax contributions without exception. The government propagandizes that our country will become a powerful nation in 2012, but I am sick of this announcement. They make us to contribute gloves, iron scraps and other things based on this propaganda. I wonder why these contributions are necessary to become powerful nation. Should housewives like us alone make the powerful nation?” Lee said she heard that the authority secretly gave agricultural fields to the heads of the Neighborhood Units and officials of the district office. She
complained, “They give more to the rich and collect more from the ordinary people, so we will die before we see the powerful nation.”

[Accidents]
Fight between Farm Guards and Soldiers Attempting to Steal Corn
In Onchun Eup, Onchun Country, South Pyongan Province, there was a fight between farm guards and three soldiers at a corn farm. The fight began when farm guards confronted soldiers who were attempting to steal corn, and escalated to a guard stabbing a soldier with a sickle. A police officer on patrol shot a blank cartridge to disperse the fighting. However, the soldiers responded by attacking the officer. The officer then shot and seriously injured one of the soldiers with a blank bullet. The two injured soldiers were transported to the hospital. After the case closed, the three soldiers were arrested and dismissed from the army by the North Korean People’s Army Party.
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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, 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 aid for them.
3) assessing human rights violations occurring in North Korea, informing international communities, 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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