“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.

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[Hot Topics]
"More Serious Food Shortage Expected Next Year", says Ministry of Agriculture
It is anticipated that food shortage will be worse next year. This anticipation arose on October 1 after the estimation of this year’s combined harvests from the bread basket regions in South and North Hwanghae Provinces as well as South and North Pyongan Provinces. The Ministry of Agriculture says that this year’s crop harvest should be managed properly at all costs in order to avoid a food crisis next year. Accordingly, the farm officials and workers are putting all their efforts into finding ways to ensure military provisions and distribution for farmers. In the meantime, upon receiving the reports on the estimation, the Central Party seems to be on the alert to secure grains. It opened the customs offices along the border areas and instructed trading companies, “Find new sources of foreign trade in order to develop and increase ways to acquire as much grain as possible.”

North Hwanghae Province Expects Corn Harvest Less Than Half of Last Year’s
This year’s grain harvests in North Hwanghae Province are anticipated to be poor because of severe drought and flood damages. Local farm officials estimate that this year’s corn harvest will be less than half of last year’s. The counties of Seoheung, Bongsan, and Shingye in North Hwanghae Province suffered the most from the recent food shortage. Because of the insufficient food distribution last year, many families already ran out of food by the end of February this year. Consequently, early this spring, many families survived on porridge of crushed corn. Many people were absent for work and stayed home because they were not strong enough to move around.

Farmers planted potato, wheat, and barley seeds at the end of April and started harvesting after the mid-June. However, the farmers were left with little harvest because military units nearby took everything away including two-crop harvests. They were told that soldiers need
more food because of last year’s insufficient military provisions. Under this dire food shortage situation, some people suffered from lingering illnesses and died during the 150-day battle. Many residents surviving on porridge died as well. The number of deaths was especially high in Seoheung, Bongsan and Shingye where five to ten deaths a month occurred between April and early July. Doctors could identify the cause of the deaths but it might as well be called ‘a starvation death.’ Large families went up to the mountains to collect various grasses, such as sow thistle, Asian plantain, or mulberry tree sprouts to make porridge. However, many did not properly boil these grasses so they suffered from swollen faces and arms, cracked skin or chaps due to the poisonous effects of the grasses. Women seem to suffer more than men probably because women feed the children and eat only the grass portions while the husbands eat the grass with corn powder.

As a hard life continues for two years due to food shortages, it is easily noticeable these days that many Hwanghae residents, who are traditionally good-natured, express their anger. Jung Eunsoon (alias) of Seoheung County complained with frustration, “From spring to fall, many families can barely survive on thin porridge. It seems that this year’s harvest will be poor and our fall crop distribution will be even less. Are we supposed to barely survive on porridge next year as well? How can we feed ourselves enough to work? When will we be free of food shortage and be worry-free?” As of September, many families are still surviving on porridge. Fortunately, starting from early fall, we will have something to cook. Luckily, nobody will become sick or die because of hunger as in May or June.

In the meantime, the security system for grain was strengthened in many farming areas in North Hwanghae Province including Seoheung County because the number of grain theft arrests has been skyrocketed in those areas. However, it becomes very difficult to punish the thieves because of their miserable situations. If you closely look at the homes of the thieves, you will find that one or two family members are in bed due to long starvation and that grasses are boiling in the cooking pots. Accordingly, instead of imposing criminal punishments, the authorities decided to deduct five times the amount of grain stolen from the food distribution they will get at the General Residents’ Meeting in the fall.

A worker in his forties at a Seoheung County farm complained with bitterness, “Miserable sights of people suffering from hunger make me feel that the so-called ‘strong and prosperous’ nation will not open in 2012. Even if it somehow does open, it will not bring any benefit to an ordinary person like me. While farmers suffer from hunger, those with any kind of titles – the officials of the Party and the Management Committee, heads of work units, or leaders of work subunits – live in abundance. The leaders and officials do not have to suffer from hunger because they somehow stash grains away. The farmers in Seoheung County received only less than five months worth of grain last year. With the grain sales money, the County farm, however, bought a computer and built The Office of Research on the Revolutionary Ideology of Our Great Leader Kim Il Sung.

While farmers sweat profusely from the work during the summer months, the Management leaders pursue their own benefits. Last year, some elderly residents over sixty went to the
Party and the Farm Management Committee and requested they should be helped first because they are the ‘sufferers from hunger.’ However, the Party and the Committee simply ignored and even retaliated by reducing food distribution, assigning tough tasks, and maltreating them. The elderly also let off their anger saying, “It is well known that spring is the hardest time of the year for farmers. However, the Party made a big fuss over constructing the mushroom cultivation facility. That is how they exploited the farmers.”

**South and North Hwanghae Provinces Endeavor to Prevent Grain Leakage**

Large scale controls over the leakage of grains to other areas are under way in Ongjin, Chungdan, Baechun and Yeonan counties, Yeonbaekbul in Hwanghae Province. Since September 15, patrols have been inspecting residents transporting grain. They confiscate any grain that they can’t identify the source of. They also inspect even the sources of vegetables such as squashes or potatoes that the residents received from relatives. Any transportation of new grains from the farms requires certificates signed by the farm manager, security personnel and head of the neighborhood unit. The police in each farming area are in charge of managing and checking grains. The County Party leaders oversee the overall control of grains.

The Farm Management Committee managers in Seoheung County, North Hwanghae Province, held a meeting to ensure proper management of fall grains. They also went for the on-site grain management counseling. Before new fall grains are sent to the threshing floors, a special measure was taken: no grain would be threshed without approval from officials dispatched from the Provincial Party. The measure was taken to prevent illegal grain consumption by the farm management leaders and the work unit. The County Party claims that the measure could provide two months’ food distribution for the farmers.

**A Normal Rice Harvest in Baechun County in South Hwanghae Province**

The collective farm situation in Baechun town in Baechun county, South Hwanghae province is little better than that of other collective farms in North Hwanghae province. The farmers predicted that “Corn farming was bad but the rice farming is better than last year with more rice to harvest.” Many families, who lived on porridge until summer, have been eating rice since early fall. In addition, there was an abundant fruit harvest. The farmers stored the apples and pears and other harvested fruits in a space dug out of mud. Once winter comes, they are planning to sell them in Haeju, Sariwon, and Pyongyong areas, and the money they earn from the sales will be used to buy food for the winter. Therefore, the great anxiety over food has been relieved in this area and the atmosphere is more relaxed compared to other regions. According to Kang Myungssoo (alias), a local farmer, the amount of apples and pears that each household was able to store is at least 2-3 tons. There will be no death from starvation with this amount.

However, due to increased number of raids to steal fruits by army units nearby, the entire family takes turns to guard the fruit storage space all day and night. If the army units sweep away the entire fruit, then the family members could die from starvation; therefore, each
house guards the fruit with a life-or-death attitude. Kang Dongchul (alias) said that “Since people have their profits, their sense of responsibility is very strong. If the collective crops are guarded like that, then many people will volunteer to do it. The government has to give more profit to the farmers so that they could work hard with best effort and strong sense of accomplishment. But the benefit for the farmers in the collective farm is very small. Farmers act according to the situation and hardly work on the collective farm; therefore, it’s obvious to expect a low yield from the farm.”

[Food]

**Munduk County, All Family Members Busy Gathering Grains**

Residents in Munduk County in the South Pyongan Province are busy gathering grains in the fields after harvest. Normally, residents cannot gather grains because the farmers gather grains first. However, residents are allowed to gather grains after helping with the farm work for two hours a day. Many residents work on the farm until 10 a.m. and spend the rest of the day gathering grains in the field. Poor families mobilize all the family members to gather grain because it would be difficult if they miss the opportunity. Some families even keep their young children from attending school so they could help with the grain gathering. If successful, a family can gather up to 130 kg of grains in the fall.

**Yonpungni Farm Distributes Corn In Advance to Families with No Food**

In Yonpungni Farm in Anju City in the South Pyongan Province, more than 5 people per work unit on average do not make it to work due to food deficiency. Farm management officers distributed 30kg of corn in advance to those people who had no food. This ration will be deducted from their share of the end-of-year distribution.

[Economy]

**Farmers in Leewon County, South Hamgyong Province, Turn to Sea due to Poor Harvest**

Leewon County, South Hamgyong Province usually suffers from a poor harvest season because of its seaside location. However, this year was worse than average, and residents had no corn to harvest this year. There were farms with no guards because the gardens had no corn. This area has a bad rice harvest and even individual patches of land farming failed this year. Since vegetable farming failed, there is nothing for farmers after distributions are made to the military unit. Accordingly, the farm management workers ordered people to prepare for winter pickled vegetables with their own garden.

Due to such a poor harvest season, farmers are expecting to receive no crops and are suddenly turning to the sea. Some farmers are going to the marine base in Leewon and receiving 500 NK won per day for processing fish. Other farmers are going out to the sea and catching squid for their daily wage. Because the situation changed, the farm management workers are emphasizing the importance of showing up to work even during the failed crop season. But farmers are not returning to their workplace and are asking, “What are we going to do at the farm? We don't have anything to receive because of the
failed crop season. We need to earn money at the sea to buy food for next year.” The farm workers are perplexed, as one said, “This is the first time when farmers quit their job and work for wage at the sea.” At the farmhouse, children are picking seaweed and women are processing fish and squid for their wages at the marine enterprise export base.

**Farmers Manages to Live by Alluvial Mining at Kangsuh County**
This year’s corn harvest is predicted to be worse than the previous year in Taesung-Ri in Kangsuh County, South Pyongan Province. Although rice farming is better than last year, it is not enough to satisfy the food crisis. Therefore, farmers are trying to make ends meet by alluvial mining. They make about 3,000-5,000 NK won a day. Farmers said, “It is more comforting to make money by alluvial mining than relying on farming.”

**Product Prices Not Observed by Regulators at Chungjin Market**
The Management Center at Soonam Market in Chungjin City, North Hamgyong Province arbitrated product pricing after reaching an agreement with the district people’s committee. Starting last September 10, instituted pricing was displayed at the entrance of the market and the police department began to inspect for merchants who sell prohibited products or charge different price than the agreed price. However, the instituted price of 2,200 NK won for rice and 750 NK won for corn is not being observed as actual prices are 2,550 NK won for rice and 1,000 NK won for corn. Also, prohibited products such as cigarettes, medical supplies and UN products are being circulated. Merchants selling prohibited goods are displaying legal items at their store and are selling prohibited items in secret. If they get caught selling illegal products, they get fined 10,000 NK won or have their cigarettes and medical supplies confiscated.

**[Politics]**

**South Hamgyong Province Party Ordered to Strengthen Drug-related Education in Hamheung**
The South Hamgyong Province Safety Administration has decided to educate drug producers in Hamheung on the history of their registered party. Also, a harsher punishment has been prescribed for lawbreakers so that the "trend of drugs in society can be eradicated so that the strong and prosperous country will be rid of any drug addicts in the year 2012". Divorce rate has been increasing due to drug use, leading to the Hamheung City Council and regional officials asking the court to be more careful in the detailing of the divorce. The thought behind this action is to prevent divorces and get to the bottom of this problem in families. On September 15th, Hamheung City Council and the People's Administration gave a lecture titled, "Drug addiction is a deadlock that harms the institution" to the public at the village office.

**Three Pharmacy Students Expelled for Producing Drugs in Hamheung City**
During the 150-day battle, police in Hamheung city of South Hamgyong Province arrested about 60 people for producing and purchasing "ice" drugs. The three arrested pharmacy students have been making these drugs from October of 2008 to August of 2009 and have
been found guilty for producing and distributing them to drug dealers, thus leading to expulsion. The Defense Security Command of the Security Department's current understanding of the situation shows that the total amount of produced drugs is about 10kg. In response to this situation, residents said, "What is the point in studying if you don't have any money? You need money to study so how can you punish them for trying to earn money by making drugs?" The city police department said, "To become a great country, we must get rid of all filthy things harming society. In order to do this, we will give stricter punishments by the law". During the 150-day battle, criminals arrested for selling drugs will be incarcerated after the hearings.

[Society]

Regular Fall Civil Defense Training Enforced in Entire North Hamgyong Province
As the fall season approached, civil defense training is enforced in the entire North Hamgyong Province since September 21. Each city and county party office announced that, upon discovery, a fine of 5,000 NK won will be imposed on people who miss the training and required civil defense training every evening for an hour. People were trained on how to cover the light even though they did not have electricity. On September 25, the training lasted from 5 a.m. to 12 noon. People who owned small patches of land went to the field; the heads of household went through the training, and the rest of the people just stayed at home.

In Hoeryong City, the factory enterprises, farmers, and civil defense forces were gathered in the city stadium on September 21 and 22 until 6 a.m. and underwent military marching and wartime training for unit battles. Women from the district offices were divided between upper and lower regions, gathered along the riverside, and dug for pebbles and sand. Students from universities, vocational schools and middle schools were also gathered in a location where the Great Leader Kim Il-Sung was fishing at the time he was on a field inspection, and they received training from officials. Civil defense training is required twice in the spring and twice in the fall each year, and everyone except the farm members and the railroad department attends this training. If anyone who does not attend civil defense training or hides at home in an attempt to avoid participating is discovered, he/she has to pay a fine of 5,000 NK won to 10,000 NK won, depending on the severity. The use of motor vehicles and oxcarts is also restricted during the civil defense training period. There is no exception, even for the long-distance traveling vehicles from another region and trade vehicles.

Telephone Installation Application Fee Is Too Expensive in Soonchun
In order to install a telephone in a house in Soonchun City, South Pyongan Province, one must pay 600,000 NK won of application fee to the post office. The telephone installation application fee is determined based upon the distance between the post office and the household that wants to install the telephone, and it usually costs 800,000 to 900,000 NK won. Usually, households that make a lot of money from doing trade business install telephones. Upon the receipt of the telephone line application at the city post office, the
city post office spends the half of the application fee and sends the other half to the provincial post office. Since the residents in Soonchun City are burdened with an exorbitant amount of telephone application fees, sometimes more than two households are sharing the fee to install one telephone line. Once the main circuit is installed, it is shared by several households by connecting more telephone lines to it. If it is an apartment, the same circuit is used in the entire apartment, and each residence uses it by connecting a telephone line to it. There are additional costs after the line is set up. The additional costs to pay linesmen are high. During holiday seasons, the linesmen sometimes sever the telephone lines on purpose. The linesmen will fix the problem only if the telephone users will visit them several times, offer a gift, and accept their requests. If the users reject the linesmen’s request, the lines will not be fixed.

**Medical Examiners of Chungjin City Take Bribes**

Under the orders of the Labor’s Agency and Labor’s Department of Provincial People’s Assembly, Chungjin city of North Hamgyong Province decided to conduct medical checkups for old and feeble people who did not go to work. Beginning September 9, medical examiners of Provincial Health Department visited City or County Hospitals and specifically examined the health condition of social security beneficiaries. Based on the result of checkups, they classified patients into light workers (who can work only 4-6 hours a day) and ordinary workers. According to the seriousness of their illness, they also divided patients into who can work and who cannot work. Because of the checkups of medical examiners, patients and their families have a lot of mental and financial pressure. For instance, a hepatitis patient with abdominal dropsy was classified into a light worker who can work for 6 hours a day. Although patients said their conditions were critical, they cannot complain anymore if the medical examiners classify them into light workers who can work for 6 hours a day. When patients bribe examiners with several cartons of cigarette at the minimum, they can be classified as candidates to receive social security. There are two medical examinations a year, and examiners take tremendous bribes from the patients. During the period of examination, they receive about 2 to 2.5 million NK won from patients. They give half of this money to supervisors because this offer can ensure their continued appointment as examiners. Although the corruption of Public Health Section is serious as thus, ordinary people cannot complain because they face political criticism when they raise questions about it.

**[Women/Children/Education]**

**Only Pregnant Women Exempted from 150-Day Battle Mobilization in Sariwon**

Sariwon Democratic Women’s Union (DWU), North Hamgyong Province, sent its members to the farms during the 150-day battle, saying, “The City Party, using strict and direct control, should not allow any exceptions for controlling of women and their work for the organizations and the society in order to maintain strict adherence to regulations and orders.” As the farmers had nothing to eat and could not work, the members of DWU have done the job for them. Three to four farmers, working like team leaders, took the members to cornfields or rice paddies and showed them what to do and how they should do it. When
a member wants to skip the farm work, she had to pay 3,000 NK won a day and there was no exception even if she was sick. If they do not pay, they must work. Only pregnant women or women who delivered babies recently can get their duty waived, for the periods right before and after their delivery. In this way, women work at the farm in the morning and trade in the market in the afternoon to feed their families and themselves. Women let out a sigh of relief at the end of 150 day battle, but they are worried as another 100-day battle began.

**Nampo Democratic Women’s Union Requires 80kg of Scrap Iron per Person**

On October 2nd, DWU (Democratic Women’s Union) in the city of Nampo, South Pyongan Province, made a resolution that each member of DWU shall submit 80kg of scrap metal to government and therefore all members were recruited for collecting scrap metal. Those members who do business resorted to buy the scrap metal at the price of 350 NK won per kg and give it to government. Poorer members that live in Gapmoon 1-dong and 2-dong went to the landfill or trash piles with their husband to search scrap metal. Those who could not do even that have to give things made with iron from their households.

[Accidents]

**Security Guard of Ginseng Field Seriously Injured by Thieves**

On October 6th, the security guards who were guarding the ginseng field in Logya Division, Eunduk County, North Hamgyong Providence, were attacked by thieves who were trying to steal ginseng and were gravely injured. Police Station in Eunduk County is suspicious of the coal miners of Obong Labor district. As the miners received no food ration for a long time, the number of thieves has rapidly increased. Ginseng field in Logya-li is about 1 acre and the People's Safety Agency directly manages it, and the products are classified as No. 8 and sent to Pyongyang.

**Military Officer at 4.25 Training Center Loses His Bag in Ganli Station**

Ganli station in Soonan District in Pyongyang is a busy station for travelers before entering Pyongyang because the paths to mid-north and northwest all meet there. There are a number of Kkotjebis, the homeless, from different parts of the nation gathering at Ganli station. If travelers do not fully pay attention to their luggage, they would soon lose it.

Last September 3rd, a military officer at 4.25 Training Center, Seoheung County, North Hwanghae Province, lost his bag while waiting for a train at Ganli on the way back from Hamheung. Under the suspicion that it was Kkotjebis who stole it, Ganli Police Station arrested all the Kkotjebis in the station and gathered them at the police station yard. Altogether 40 Kkotjebis were arrested, out of which six were adults and the rest of them were all children. A station police officer came out in front of them and asked whether they stole any luggage, intimidating them to return the bag because it contained official documents. The military officer, on the other hand, desperate to find the important official documents, promised Kkotjebi children some compensation and school education if they could find the bag for him. However, no one could find the bag, and the incident was
reported to Security Department.

Although about 40 Kkotjebi had been held in the police station for three days, the police could not find any clue, and let them go because the police did not have food for them. Had there been any military secret documents, the officer would have been prosecuted in the military trial, discharged from his position and punished based on the military law. Even if the bag had no secret documents, the officer who lost the bag could not avoid being punished harshly because of his inappropriate management of basic official documents.

[Editorial]

Time Has Come to Renew Food Aid to North Korea

The South Korean government announced that it will provide 10,000 tons of corns to North Korea as food aid. This is very good news. For the last two years, North Korean citizens have suffered greatly due to the estrangement of relationship between North Korea and South Korea. As such, South Korea’s decision to provide food aid to North Korea is welcomed news that signals the first step toward solving the food crisis problem.

The South Korean government chose to send corn instead of rice because corn is less likely to be diverted to the high ranking officials or the military in North Korea. As the food crisis continues, corn, not rice, has become the main staple of North Korean citizens’ diet. To North Korean citizens, a meal consists of corn and not rice because rice is difficult to come by. Therefore, the South Korean government’s decision to send corn is not a bad decision. In light of the news forecasting poor harvest due to cold weather and drought, the South Korean governments’ decision to send corn is appropriate.

However, there is a question as to whether 10,000 tons of corn is enough to qualify as a humanitarian aid. Compared to the class of North Korean citizens who are in need, 10,000 tons of corn is just not enough. According to the report released by the World Food Plan (WFP) in September, North Korea will have a food shortage of 1,800,000 tons of food. Many North Korean citizens are seriously malnourished and without a large scale food aid, several millions of people are at risk of death by starvation. In this regard, 10,000 tons of corn appears to be a symbolic gesture of consistency in the North Korean policy rather than a humanitarian aid.

Another unfortunate issue is that the South Korean government issued a statement, “We are not going to resolve the surplus rice problem through North Korean food aid.” The South Korean government should not only be concerned about the North Korean citizens’ right to life but also to the South Korean farmers’ concerns. South Korean farmers are concerned over the continual drop in rice prices and because production of rice processed food products is not resolving the problems, they are calling for North Korean food aid to resolve the problem. It has been reported that it costs 300 billion won to inventory more than one million tons of surplus rice. Some are also saying the surplus rice would be used as cattle feed.
The South Korean government states that it is against the sentiments of South Korea to provide aid to North Korea while the nuclear issue remains unresolved. However, South Korean people are not unfamiliar with farmers shaving their heads in protest and setting fire to their fields because these are the reality of their parents’ lives in their hometowns. Furthermore, the South Korean government will not be able to avoid the criticism that they are using rice as cattle feed while North Korean citizens are starving. Many South Korean citizens would want the government to use the surplus rice to aid North Korean citizens and provide relief to South Korean farmers instead of spending 300 billions won to inventory the surplus rice or use the surplus rice as cattle feed.

Now is the beginning. We hope that the South Korean government will take this opportunity to explore a food aid that is of bigger scale and variety. While the South Korean government should address the issue of distribution with the North Korean government, they should provide both direct large scale aids as well as indirect aids through the World Food Plan (WFP) without reservation. If they remain committed to such aids, they will win the hearts and gratitude of the North Korean citizens which will be the best policy toward reunification.

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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.

Currently, Good Friends is making efforts to improve humanitarian and human rights situation of North Korean people and to inform this situation to the international community by:

1) Collecting information on food shortages, public health conditions, education, the basic necessities situations and inform humanitarian organizations so that they can support North Korean people effectively.
2) Reporting the current human rights situation in North Korea where rights duly protected by law are being violated; assessing incidents of human rights violations in the process of arrest, punishment, and imprisonment and informing international communities; and requesting that the North Korean Government act to improve human rights.
3) Investigating the current situations of North Korean refugees in China, and providing protections and aid for them and their children in particular.

For these purposes, Good Friends USA publishes the weekly newsletter North Korea Today (English edition) to inform the international public.

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