



GOODFRIENDS



Weekly Newsletter

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["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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Skyrocketing Number of Starvation Deaths in Rural Areas during 150-Day Battle

While the Provincial Party of North *Hamgyong* Province was surveying the crop yields of farming villages, it was highly disturbed to discover that there had been many starvation deaths at the villages. Even though the precise number of deaths is yet unknown, the Party had to admit that it did not realize the scale of the tragedy. Most deaths allegedly occurred during the 150-day battle. Although food rations were provided during the first month, the rations did not continue during the next four months in many places. Labor hours increased and labor became more intense but the food situation worsened. Therefore, it is no wonder the residents are going through immense difficulties. Especially, many poor farmers who already ran out of last year's food rations died. There are rumors that people starve to death not only in North *Hamgyong* Province also in South and North *Hwanghae* Provinces and *Kangwon* Province as well. In many parts of North *Hamgyong* Province, many residents who have nothing to eat during the fall have resorted to collecting mushrooms and herbs for food in mountainous areas.

"Worst Year of Famine in 80 Years", Rumor Spreads in North *Hamgyong* Province

The crop yields of this year in the North *Hamgyong* Province are already alarming. Many residents believe this year will be the worst year of famine in 80 years and are already worried about the next year. They believe that even the year of the Arduous March was not as bad as this year. Since early spring, the North Korean government mobilized people in its efforts to build a strong and prosperous nation in 2012 by providing material assistance and labor for farming areas. However, all of the efforts seem in vain. Farmers attribute the poor harvest to the long-lasting low temperature in May during the sowing season. Many farms and private small plots were substantially damaged because they could not properly sow their fields with seeds. After they barely managed to purchase the *Heungnam* fertilizer, they applied it to the fields. However, corn bugs were widely spread due to the low temperature that lasted until the end of July. Moreover, the ears of many corns did not come out because of the draught from the end of July to the

end of August. Many private farming residents gave up the farming because there was no hope of harvesting crops. At this time of year, residents used to be busy guarding their small plots but many of them are going to the mountains to collect acorns.

Government Issues Policy Regarding Punishment of Grain Thieves

Regular and private small plot farms that planted seeds following the lunar-leap year schedule suffered from poor crop harvests. Only the farms that planted later than previous years could harvest some grain this year. The government, which was well aware that the situation would lead to an increase in grain thefts, held the Party's Open General Assemblies across the country to arouse attention to the thefts. The policy details were delivered to everyone, including laborers: 1) Any grain thief will be punished by law, regardless of his or her rank or position. 2) Any laborer who steals grain will be moved to farming areas or to the farm, where he or she stole it, to work as a laborer. 3) If the damage to the farm is severe, the thief will be detained at a police station or sent to the Labor Education Center or the City Training Center. The family of the thief will be evicted to rural areas. The Party's Open General Assembly is supposed to be held to deliver the Party's instruction to the public as quickly as possible. However, the fact that the Assembly was held to discuss grain thefts made the residents wonder, saying, "This has never happened in the history of the North Korean Labor Party. This year surely is a year of bad crop yields."

North *Hamgyong* Province Bans Release of Grains to Other Areas

On September 2, the Provincial Party of North *Hamgyong* Province issued a ban, which prohibits the release of grains to other areas. All of the party secretaries and chairmen of each city and county management committees held phone conferences regarding the ban. Check points will be set up to ensure that no grain is released to outside the Province. Grain merchants and vehicles, such as trucks, cow-driven carts and bicycles, carrying grain from small plot farms will be subject to inspection. Police stations will inspect and release vehicles if there are no problems. However, if the vehicle violates the ban, they will legally proceed investigating further to confiscate the grains. The residents of *Hoeryong*, *Chungjin* and *Onsung* said they have already been bribing government officials with cash or cigarettes. The complaints are widespread among the residents because they have to bribe the officials with more cash or cigarettes because of the ban. The ban will only be another favor for party leaders and law enforcement workers who don't contribute to producing grains and do nothing but living idly. Some residents excoriate saying, 'This ban will only enrich the policemen living off others' properties like parasites.'

Drought Devastates Farms in South *Hamgyong* Province

South *Hamgyong* Province's large fields were expected to produce a larger grain harvest than its smaller northern counterpart. But despite success in seeding the corn crop, the summer droughts have prevented the plants from sprouting. The South *Hamgyong* Province Agricultural Administration Committee did not announce the exact size of the corn harvest, but they have stated that the corn harvest is lower compared to last year. The Committee also announced that a few thousand acres of dry field were damaged. According to a principal member of the organization, *Yoduk*, *Jeongpyung* and *Gowan* Districts experienced difficulty, as their grain crop has dropped to less than 1-2 tons per acre. The Provincial Rural Management Committee was disappointed by the small harvest despite having supplied much more fertilizer to the farms of South *Hamgyong* Province than those in other provinces. The extra fertilizer distribution was made possible because the *Heungnam* Fertilizer Factory is located in South *Hamgyong* Province.

Farmers have expressed worry that if their crop is taken for military provisions there will not be enough food for the farmers, let alone residents of the province. South *Hamgyong* Province and the Public Security Authorities decided to enforce security on the farms, anticipating a rise in grain thefts in the midst of short harvests. Public security members are going directly to the agricultural district to cooperate with the farm patrolmen for added security.

[Food]

Increasing Households on Porridge

In South *Hamgyong* province, the number of households living on porridge and reducing to two meals per day has increased in the early fall. A farmer from *Hamju* plainly said, "If people live on porridge in early fall, how they are going to make it to next year? Without foreign food aid many farmers and citizens will die from starvation next year. This is very similar to what happened before the North Korean famine in 1995 and 1996. One can predict a food crisis because if people are living on porridge in the early fall, many people are bound to suffer next year".

Choi Donggil (alias), a resident in *Hamheung* city, criticized, "If the harvest was so bad, then the government should allow people make a living with street peddling. However, the government criticizes and tightly regulates self-business, calling them an anti-communist phenomenon."

***Chungjin* Mine Metallurgy College Food Shortage**

In North *Hamgyong* province, the *Chungjin* Mine Metallurgy College was once known to have a great school food service, similar to the one in *Kim Il-Sung* University in *Pyongyang*. However, in the last few years the school has

been suffering with food shortages and the provisions for the current year ran out on September 16th. Since the provincial government could not provide provisions, the school became self sufficient by harvesting corn in the school's subsidiary farm. Three ears of boiled corn were distributed daily. Fortunately due to a recent import of corn at the *Chungjin* harbor, 130g of steamed crushed corn meal is distributed per meal. The food shortage has affected basic food ingredient factories in *Chungjin* city and halted the production of soy sauce; causing students to consume soup flavored with salt rather than soy sauce. The students agreed that the current situation is much better than last year's farm hardship period during which 120g of ground corncob mixed with stones was distributed. Unfortunately, poorer students are facing starvation. The students expressed that they felt better when they thought back to the days when they ate steamed rice with a block of tofu.

Order for *Jangpung* Military Officers' Families to be Self-Sufficient with Food

In September and October, the Gunpowder unit in *Jangpung* Military the 2nd Corps in North *Hwanghae* Province, only provided food rations to high ranking officers and not their family members. The family members were mobilized to farm, but the harvest was poor this year. Some wives of military officers grew and harvested corn, beans, hog millets, peanuts, etc., but could barely live off them for two months. The officers had difficulty focusing on their work because they worried about their family's shortcomings and the food crisis. Consequently the control of the unit became unfocused, which resulted many illegal accidents. Last September 8th, there was an incident when a company commander ordered his subordinates to steal grains from a farm. The commander was accused of causing conflicts with farmers and sent to the Labor Discipline Center. The sergeant and nine soldiers that executed the order of stealing grains were punished by military law.

[Economy]

Department of Agriculture Prohibits Transport of Food between Counties

Given the projected food shortage caused by the drought this year, the Department of Agriculture issued an order that prohibits transporting of agricultural produce harvested in one city or county to another. The order also bans private vendors who operate trucks and demands that their grain be confiscated if they are arrested. Following the order, each city and county in the nation set up food check points in every rural village and demanded that passers-by show authorized food transportation permits. Even if someone is going to his relatives to borrow food to save his starving family, he must obtain signatures and official stamps from the head of the farm, from which he is taking the food, the police officer in charge of the farm, and the head of the Neighbor Unit in charge of the relative who is lending food to him.

Controversy over Grain Theft in *Pyongwon* County

South *Pyongan* Province is struggling to tighten its control over agricultural production, which seems harder to do this year due to a bad harvest. The number of grain thefts this fall has greatly exceeded the average from previous years. *Ehpa* Farm in *Pyongwon* County reported a 60% loss of the corn harvest from the field assigned to *Nongsan* no.2 work unit and an independent work unit after soldiers stole part of the harvest. The farm authorities announced that security guards must be held responsible for the loss and their share of food rations this year will be reduced by the amount of the loss to the work unit. This policy sparked furious resistance from workers at the farm, who argued that no security guard would be able to get any food rations at the end of the harvest. The workers expressed their discontent: "We heard that this decision was made by the County Party and the Rural Management Committee. Then, why aren't the officials held responsible for it as well? They are just idling around and only exploiting others. That is too much."

On another occasion, *Cheongam* District in *Chungjin* City, North *Hamgyong* Province, decided to harvest corn early rather than let it ripen in the fields and be stolen by thieves. The district started the early harvest on September 21.

[Politics]

Strict Regulation of Mobile Phones in National Border Area

The National Border Area, including *Hoeryung*, *Musan*, *Onsung* in the North *Hamgyong* Province and *Hyesan* in *Ryongyang* Province, was declared a major surveillance area. If it is discovered that the husband and wife both own mobile phones, it is considered a transaction benefiting enemy, and the entire family is sent to the detention center. If one person uses the mobile phone for simple operation and no one else knows about the use of the mobile phone, the person receives three years of re-education. However, if the entire family conceals the use of the mobile phone, the act is considered a transaction benefiting enemy, and the family receives a more severe punishment.

Serious Human Rights Violations in Traveler's Police Detention Cells in *Chungjin*

The traveler's detention center in *Chungjin* City in *Soonam* District in the North *Hamgyong* Province mostly detains people who are caught while using trains or freight vehicles in the North *Hamgyong* Province. Most of them are charged with misdemeanors which they could get out of if they bribed the officials with a pack of cigarettes. Most detainees are men between the ages of 19 and 40 and women between the ages of 18 and 30 and come from North *Hamgyong* Province, South *Kangwon* Province and South

Pyongan Province. Many of them are in dire situations and are caught while traveling to the Northern provinces to seek help from their relatives or make a living by peddling goods. A man was kicked out of his house because he could not provide for his family; a teenager ran away from home, unable to withstand her stepmother's abuses; a woman was kicked out of her house because she could not earn living by selling goods; and another woman came to peddle goods after a divorce. While their stories may be different, many of them leave their homes due to shortage of food. In the detention center, the detainees are treated like criminals. If they break any of the detention center rules, they are stripped down to their underwear and beaten with a belt or a club.

Furthermore, if a woman is pretty and young, prison guards and police officers request sexual relationships from them in the evenings. If they obey, they are given the tasks of washing the prison guards' clothes and beddings. If they resist, they are taken into the discipline room and physically and verbally abused. If these women become unconscious during the beatings, cold water is thrown over them. These women are also punished by being forced to repeatedly do sit-to-stand movements.

On August 5, a woman from *Anju* County in the South *Pyongan* Province died of high fever after being detained for 20 days. The death certificate stated epidemic hemorrhagic fever as the cause of death. Despite the medical certificate, the cause of death cannot be verified. The public sentiment is growing more outrageous as the abuse and acts of violence within the detention centers are revealed. Some residents have filed complaints to the authorities which have led the *Chungjin* Police Detention Center to provide internal countermeasures.

[Society]

Large Number of Absent Workers on the First Day of 100-Day Battle

The 150-day battle period ended and another 100-day battle started on September 23 with a large number of absent workers reported at the factory in *Hamheung* City, South *Hamgyong* Province. Factory primary party laborers searched for absentees and picked up workers. Laborers expressed their fatigue with the battle period and said, "Does the battle feed you?" *Choi Hyungchul* commented, "I don't think the central officials know the realities of the lower class. They think it would work if they push us around but that's a big misunderstanding."

Confession of Officer at People's Committee, "Pity on Ordinary People"

The following is a story shared by an officer with *Chung Kwangho* (alias), a businessman in *Pyongyang*.

"On August 7, 2009 I went to visit my cousin in *Pyung Sung*. He introduced me to his uncle-in-law who works at the City People's Committee. He seemed to be 47 or 48 years old and appeared very well educated. After exchanging introductions with the in-law, we sat down to drink. We made small talk and somehow started talking about this. He said, 'In the old days, the Great Leader (*Kim Il Sung*) used to emphasize the importance of education of people over and over again. But nowadays, the Dear Leader (*Kim Jong Il*) tells us that we have educated people enough and need to purge those who deserve to be purged. This is the Dear Leader's political view. Am I not right, in-law?' So I asked, "How can you talk like this when you work at the People's Committee?"

He laughed and said, "Why should I hide anything from my in-laws? We don't have to worry about putting food on the table, but do you remember how many people suffered and lost their lives during the Arduous March? Whenever our officials sit around, we talk about those days and compare these days to that time. Ah, please do not assume that I am opposing or criticizing our society because I am saying this. We need to righteously judge and analyze in order to develop the society, right? I am saying it because I am upset that we have to hold our thoughts in our head and only speak about what is appropriate. It is not as bad as the Arduous March, but people are suffering. The Great Leader guaranteed food, and there was no complaint about society. Nowadays people gather and agree that those were the days of communism. Isn't it natural to miss those days because life is so hard these days? With the Dear Leader, citizens are starving to death and factories are closing down.

How are living standards? There is so many non-tax duties imposed on people, and you can see how badly our living conditions deteriorated. Even children and elderly people complain about this hard life. What is the cause of this? Because there is no food, people try to survive by escaping to China and South Korea. How can they possibly arrest all these people? Even if they successfully arrested all of them, how are they going to feed them? If they can't solve the problem within their country, isn't it right to save their family by working abroad? During the Japanese occupation, people migrated to foreign countries to survive. Those are the current *Jochongryun* in Japan and Korean-Chinese in China. I don't understand why they stop those who are trying to save their families. Then, is it right to sit and starve to death? You must know very well. What is the root cause? Is it politics or management? They all know the answer but never talk about it. Only the poor citizens are suffering.

It will be especially hard to find food because all of the bread basket regions had a poor harvest this year. If they can't bring foreign assistance to solve

the problem, at least they should not stop people from going abroad in search of food. That is saving lives. Am I not right? Tell me, please. If they know that they would die either way, wouldn't they give it a try? Ha ha. You are not going to report me for saying these words, right?"

This is what I witnessed. He told me because he trusts me, but I was surprised by his courage. It is more shocking that it wasn't an average citizen but an officer at the People's Committee is thinking like this. He must have seen and heard many things and then reached that conclusion. But what surprises me most is that, as he told me, many other high ranking officials in the country are thinking the same way."

[Women/Children/Education]

Prostitution Increases as Means of Survival

The hard economic times have caused an increasing number of women, who have completed their middle school (equivalent to high school in other countries) education, turn to prostitution to feed their families. In the *Pohang* District in *Chungjin* City, North *Hamgyong* Province, a drug bust by the enforcement division this past August and September revealed that most drug users in the area were women who abused the drugs in order to endure prostitution. As the problem of prostitution gains attention, the police authorities condemned it as a side-effect of capitalism, and sent the drug traffickers to Re-education Centers and the drug abusers to discipline centers of the People's Safety Agency (the police). The police authorities also decided to send prostitutes to Discipline Centers of the People's Safety Agency on the grounds that they are disgracing themselves and their families, without taking into account the circumstances and conditions that caused the women to turn to prostitution in the first place.

The Youth Union in each district is tasked with census of every one in each village offices and Neighbor Units during 100-day battle, identifying individuals who have graduated from school since 2007 and reporting on their first full-time job and employers. The government will take action against those who do not secure employment after graduation or are absent without leave. The Investigation Team of the Youth Union, organized during the 150-day battle, was also reorganized to decrease the number of youth committing delinquency and criminal behavior.

[Accidents]

Fishing Boat Sinks in *Shinpo* City, Eight Missing

On September 6, in *Shinpo* City, South *Hamgyong* Province, a fishing troll boat carrying nine sailors and ten temporary workers sank due to a breach on the bottom of the boat. Five sailors and six temporary workers were

rescued by the coast guards, but eight others could not be found. Authorities believe that the eight did not survive. The cause of the accident was discovered to be an improper repair of the boat. As a result, the chief engineer of Export Seafood Company was held responsible and relegated to a laborer. The accident temporarily stopped all fishing boat traffic, negatively affecting the fishing industry. 🌸



Good Friends: Center 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' 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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