



GOODFRIENDS



Weekly Newsletter

No.399

(Released in Korean on April 20, 2011)

["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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### [Difficulties Reaching Trade Deal with China Giving Headache to Representatives in China](#)

With government initiatives on full scale trade with China, North Korean companies are increasingly launching their business in China. Within a month (since February 16<sup>th</sup>), long term resident companies are increasing in China, making them 7 in Dandong, 5 in Dalian and 8 in Shenyang . Restaurant managers and merchants are also making purchase in China trying to attract investment from Chinese merchants who are based and trade in China. As this flow increases, it is getting increasingly difficult to find Chinese merchants. Because North Korean companies lack business skills, requesting unconditional investment and commodities without payment, Chinese merchants do not want to meet such North Korean merchants. Even if they are introduced to North Koreans by acquaintances, they do not try to see them again after the first couple of meetings. If it is not a long-term trustworthy relationship, they do not even believe those North Koreans who say they have the best

trading potential. Trade representatives are allowed to stay in China for just one week. If trade merchants need to leave without positive outcomes, they demand that North Korean trade representatives stationed in China put Chinese merchants in touch with their enterprises' representatives and pay the living costs on their behalf. This is an increasing trend. Trade representatives in China stated with frustration that "if they don't have any investment plans and come to China without any money, they simply can't see any fruits here. If they just demand that Chinese merchants trade with them without showing any signs of trust, who would be willing to invest? It is nonsense."

### **Spike in Soldier-led Assaults on Cadre Vehicles**

Early last February, a high-ranking Central Party official was attacked at night on his way to observe preparations for the February 16 holiday festivities in Hamheung City. As he had done many times before, the official was riding in a government-supplied Mercedes Benz and was heading over a hill when his car's path was blocked by a group of soldiers. Thinking that an incident of some kind had occurred, the official told his bodyguard to check out the situation. However, as soon as the Benz's car doors opened, several soldiers grabbed the bodyguard by the arms and pulled the official and driver out of the car. The bodyguard tried to resist the soldiers twisting his arm, but ended up being pummeled from all directions by several rifle butts. With a dislocated shoulder and blood running all over the place from a large wound on his head, he soon was forced on his knees. Realizing that any further resistance would only lead to an even worse fate, the captives promised to give all the valuables they had in exchange for the soldiers sparing their lives. The soldiers took all that they had, including the watch the official had received as a present from the General (Kim Jong-il). After the official arrived in Hamheung City, he immediately contacted Pyongyang with information on the time and place of the incident and ordered a manhunt for the soldiers. A Special Forces team mobilized to investigate the nearby military base was able to find and arrest the suspects within a week. More than thirty soldiers were found to have taken part in the robbery. The leading official was sent to Pyongyang for further investigation while the rest were disciplined in accordance with military law.

Incidents like this have occurred more than fifty times this year and, robbers have intentionally targeted cars driven by cadres. A total of fifteen people have been killed in these incidents up until March. In the past, robberies generally focused on wealthier members of the general population, but the recent increase in the number of robberies involving cadre vehicles has raised alarm bells within the government. The considerable amount of consternation among government officials is due to the fact that robbers not only steal but sometimes even kill their victims recently. Late in January of this year, the government warned provincial, city and military cadres and overseas representatives travelling through the country to "not drive out of the confines of cities during the night". Security and police officials who must drive at night for investigations have been warned to "only drive at night in the most urgent of circumstances, and if a soldier tries to flag you down, do not stop". This warning follows the fact that robbers tend to kill outright officials identified as part of security or police organizations.

Following the drastic increase in incidents concerning vehicles driven by military cadres, the National Security Agency and Defense Security Command have begun a rigorous investigation into the incidents. While joint investigations organized by both government organizations are ongoing in areas where cadres have been killed, cases of robbery still continue. The Defense Security Command has ordered the public executions of both the leader of the 30-odd soldiers who committed robbery near Hamheung and other soldiers from other areas of the country who were the first to have been caught stealing. These public executions will, it is hoped, serve a clear warning to other would-be robbers. The Central Party has reached the conclusion that the motive of the soldiers is politically-based, rather than just simple robbery. The Party has promised to use whatever means necessary to find the root-cause of the incidents.

### **"Tending Flower Beds and Constructing Roads? That's Just Too Much!"**

Again this year, the whole country is engaged in a mass campaign to improve and beautify the environment for the Hygiene Months of March & April. Pyongyang, Pyongsung, Hamheung, Sinuiju and others major cities received special instructions to decorate all city streets with flower beds. Another instruction directed (the residents) to place 10 flower pots on the apartment veranda to celebrate April 15 holiday. In Hamheung city, the instruction contained a detail request that of the 10 flower pots, 4 to 5 of them should be plastic pots with plastic flowers.

For the residents whose livelihood had gotten worse, this perennial beautification campaign brings no joy. They have no objection to removing trash accumulated through winter, repairing broken water and sewer pipes, whitewashing walls, and other general spring cleanup, but what's bothering them is the demand to supply things. The Central Party will be shocked to learn that there are even talks that "(We) wish the General has no more overseas travel." It is because of a rumor that says, "When the General returned from his visit to China, he gave instructions that the streets in Pyongyang should be decorated with flower beds just like the streets in China, thus prompting the campaign to decorate with flower beds and flower pots." A Central Party official says that, "In principle, the Central Party does not want to burden (residents) with non-tax items. When the local parties hear the (General's) speech regarding the flower-decorated streets in China, they are taking their own action. The subordinates make collection in order to flatter. The Central Party does not order them to do." Regardless, it is an unavoidable burden to the residents who are suffering from hardship.

The same applies to the policy of widening roads. The Chairman Kim, Jung-il, upon his return from the visit to China, issued instructions that, "We need to widen roads like China," and every city launched preparatory work for construction. Even though there was no money to buy cement, some cities formed "production squad" with DWU (Democratic Women's Union) members. Hyesan City in Ryanggang Province, Danchun City in S. Hamgyong Province, and other areas drafted DWU members to form the production squad causing increased complaints from them. Their reaction was pretty strong. They say,

"These days if women don't work, the whole family is going to die of starvation. Housewives do not mean they do nothing at home. Why form the production squad with women only?" Lee Myung Ok (alias) who lives in Hyetan-dong, Hyesan City says, "My husband is sick at home and I am working at the market to feed my two children. If I go to the production squad, who's going to bring food to my family? I absolutely refuse to go." At times there are quarrels and even physical confrontations between the DWU members who refuse to join the production squad and DWU officials. Some pay a lot of money to obtain a doctor's statement to prove illness. Some offer rice or money to the party officials and get (their name) removed from the list.

Pyongyang residents face similar situation. Jang, Bok Soon (alias) who lives in Sungyo area says, "The General visits China to improve people's livelihood, but the officials who work under him are doing a poor job and pressure people for their blood and sweat. We have no food and may die today or tomorrow. Drafting us to work on the road widening construction means nothing short of telling us to die of hunger. Who comes up with such terrible ideas? I wish the General finds them and punishes them. I don't know why the Party repeatedly comes up with the policies that bring pain and hardship to the people."

Lee, Hyang Sim (alias) who lives at Sapo 1-dong, Sapo District, Hamheung City, S. Hamgyong Province expressed the distrust toward the Party: "Every day there is no good news, only news that torment us. Out great General Kim, Jung Il cares for us and visits the food factory, pig farm, and never takes a minute's rest, but the officials under him don't seem to do any work as there's no improvement in our livelihood. Every day they collect money and draft people (for work); this is no way to live. There's no improvement in our livelihood and people dying of starvation increase every day. Who could believe the Party's propaganda and instructions? The Party's propaganda is for show only; none of it comes true. (They) only lie to cheat people."

### **TB Patient Increase Nationally Due to Food Shortages**

The Third Prevention Center located in Mankyongdae District, Pyongyang City is the Central TB (Tuberculosis) Prevention Center. The hospital saw a rapid increase in patients when the weather became severely cold at the end of last year, and now it does not have enough room to accommodate incoming patients. The center receives TB medicine support from outside the DPRK, which allows patients to receive treatment in a relatively stable condition, but patients do not look too contented.

Among TB patients registered at the Province Prevention Center in Pyongsung in South Pyongan Province, more than 2000 are closed type TB patients. Pyongsung used to be one of the DPRK's most active commercial cities, second only to Pyongyang, and acted as a national wholesale market until it was attacked by market closure measures early last year; it has not recovered its former glory as of yet. As the food shortage deepens, malnutrition increases and TB outbreaks follow. Doctors are not taking action, claiming that there's no way to provide necessary medicine and nutrition. Patients now even say "I just need to wait lying in bed until I die. I wish I could die instead, and lift the burden on my family." In the Wonsan City Prevention Center in Gangwon Province, there's a noticeable increase of TB

patients between the ages of seven to twelve. Seventy to eighty child patients receive x-ray examinations every day, and the number is increasing. Most of the children have a parent suffering from TB and many of them first caught a cold this winter - which was severely cold - and it developed into acute pneumonia and then into TB. Open TB patients are allocated medicine, but it would get lost on the way and leaked to markets. The number of TB patients is rising as the food situation aggravates, and the authorities are not taking necessary measures.

### **“Early Harvesting of Barley and Potato is the Only Thing to Depend on”**

Daehongdan County, Samjiyeon County, as well as Baekam County in Ryanggang Province have been cultivating potatoes and barley since March 27th. Workers and students from various institutions and factories were ordered to work for the farming mobilization initiatives. Middle school (equivalent of high school in South Korea) students had their schoolwork put off until mid-April when the sowing would be completed. College students in Hyesan City were added to the work force of the potato farms in Baekam and Daehongdan Counties as well, after a meeting in which they sought to resolve the current food crisis. The amount of sowed barley was increased in Daehongdan County farms, the reason being that “the food crisis can start to improve as early as in July if one sows barley, which can be harvested earlier. Early harvesting of barley and potato is the only thing to depend on.” The farmers were devoting as much of their resources as possible into barley and potato farming under this rationale. But the problem lies in fertilizer deficiency. Although there is some fertilizer they managed to obtain from a factory in Heungnam, it is so little that Heukbosan fertilizer has to be used instead. Heukbosan fertilizer is so lacking in nutrients. Fertilizer issue poses the biggest problem to both potato and barley farming. Plowing is another issue. Tractors cannot be used because there isn't enough fuel, and even if they are running, the horsepower is below 15, making it impossible to plow deeply. Many therefore resort to using laboring cows, but the cows aren't well fed either and do not have enough strength.

Meanwhile, officials from the provincial party of Ryanggang Province have been dispatched to farms in order to direct the sowing process and check up on the farming conditions. Some farms have adopted sowing methods that allow them to follow Juche farming techniques. The officials and managers of the farming mobilization initiatives have obligations to participate in such a process and learn the Juche farming ways. But in the end, all these efforts are proving to be quite futile.

### **The Arduous Farm Mobilization Begins in Ryanggang Province**

Mass mobilization of residents to plant potatoes and barley has begun in Ryanggang province. Especially hard hit by this mass mobilization are students, residents and local farmers forced to suspend their daily activities to work out in the fields. Residents heading out to the fields from Friday into the weekend have to bring their own meals, and most either do not eat at all or bring along porridge made with powdered skull of corn ear or several cooked potatoes to eat. Cadres and other head officials bring 5/5 meal (half rice and

half maize) and other well-off residents bring steamed corn meal to eat. When students head out to the fields they are provided with food. In Yupyong Laborer Zone, Seodu-ri and Yanggok-ri, mobilized students are provided with cooked potatoes. However, many of these potatoes are rotten and students are forced to work on empty stomachs most of the time. Many farmers have stolen seed potatoes and grow their own food saying that having individual plots is much better. Mobilized university students provide the farmers with seed potatoes and receive something to eat in return. Farmers find time during lunch to focus on farming their own individual plots and there are cases where students steal food. Stealing food has become a major issue because of starving people among those mobilized to farm, and everyone is on the lookout for thieves. Residents too old to work in the farms are left to look after the house, and families that have children leave their children home to look after the house without sending them to school. People unable to work in the fields in People's Committees are chosen to guard against thieves and local police departments have strengthened security around seed potato and compost warehouses by organizing patrols made up of former soldiers.

### **The Students of Hyesan University Raise the Question, "Am I a Student or a Farmer?"**

The Hyesan Industrial University in Ryanggang Province assists in farm work. The food provided only consists of potatoes and rice mixed with the powdered hulls of corn kernels. With less than 200g of side dishes per meal, the food does not fill the young students. There are many students who crouch down, fatigued, on the fields. This is because of their empty stomachs. They only pretend to work when City Party or County Party officials overlook fieldwork, and after they leave, they sit back down. The educator in charge was condemned for the sloppy work of the students, but they are not capable of much change either. This is because they are aware that the students cannot work in a state of starvation. In some student groups, 5000 won is collected per student to assist in purchasing corn for the meals. 5000 won is not affordable for many students, but they borrow the money in order to pay for the food out of fear that they would starve. If they cannot afford to pay such an amount, they turn to robbery. University students who assisted in cultivating the Yu-Pyong Labor District boiled and ate the potatoes they planted only 3 to 4 days ago. A sophomore at Hae-San Industrial University, Gwang-Il Kim, (alias) commented that "the food provided for lunch is only 2 to 3 spoonfuls worth. I cannot even tell that I have even eaten anything, or whether there is even food in my stomach. I can only think about food and eating when I work. Whether or not I get punished, in order to survive I feel the need to ravage the potatoes I planted, so I steal with no sense of shame."

There are also instances where fertilizer is stolen. People spread little amounts of fertilizer on the fields, bury some of it in a hole, and sell it to small land patch farmers late at night. They normally exchange 1kg of fertilizer for 1kg of corn. The complaints of students during a starving farming mobilization initiative only get louder. The differences between wealth and class appear even in these situations; students who have parents who are party officials, law enforcement agents or wealthy individuals donate 50kg or more of corn and are exempt from work volunteering. A junior at the Industrial University, Young-Il Lee (alias), noted that "During periods of farming mobilization, only children of laborers are put to work. They say

in theory that the first duty of students is to study, but how can we do so when potato farming mobilization happens every spring and fall? I don't know if I am a student or a potato farmer." He also said that as a student who, instead of joining school after military service, moved up to the university straight from primary school and have worked on potato farms since a young age, he was disgusted when even looking at a potato plant.

### Ryanggung Province Dept. of Education, "Two Hour Evening Classes After Farm Work"

The Ryanggung Department of Education has ordered that two-hour long classes should be held after students finish their work in the fields. The students' reaction to this has been utter disbelief. This is because students, who are unable to eat regular meals, are generally too tired after working out in the fields all day to think of studying. Some students have shot back, "How can we study when the government doesn't even provide us with an hour of electricity a day?" Pak Sang Hak (alias), a second year student at Haesan City Medical College, expressed extreme displeasure with the Department of Education's decision. "Studying at night after a long day of working out in the fields doesn't make any sense for students. It is not even a given that we can complete our daily work. They only feed us powdered skull of corn ears and potatoes, and just barely at that, so how do they expect us to have enough energy to study? Those in government positions living comfortably have no idea what kind of trials students are going through without being able to get enough to eat. Their ignorance about our situation causes this kind of ridiculousness." An official at the Department of Education explained the situation saying, "This mobilization is directed by the local farms, not at the national level. Students must still follow the national education plan." However, the officials agreed with students that a variety of factors including power shortage, fatigue and hunger would make attending courses difficult. He also added, "Education during the day is simply a teacher saying a couple words during break time or at closing. They simply pretend to conduct classes. Students are all dozing during that time." 🌸



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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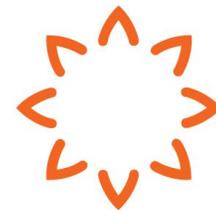
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