

NORTH KOREA TODAY

No. 146 June 2008

“Research Institute for North Korean Society of Good Friends, in order to bring news of the food crisis in North Korea more accurately and quickly, will increase its e-newsletter frequency to more than one issue per week. As such, the release dates might shift. Thank you for your understanding and attention to this looming crisis. We at Good Friends hope to be a bridge between the North Korean people and the world.”

[Special Report] Increasingly Open and Candid Lectures on Agriculture for the Officials and the Public

In April 2008, the North Korean government issued a report nationwide on the farming conditions of the country. One official said that he received a tremendous shock when he saw the report for the first time. According to the official, although many government reports have been issued in North Korea since the founding of the country, there has been no reports as open and candid as this one. The official said that he believed the Central Department of Propaganda and Agitation (중앙선전선동부) was the agency that issued the report, and went on to say that he was able to surmise just how serious the current conditions are after reading the report. He went on to say that the report shows that “the government already anticipated that people would die from starvation in the spring, and that this lecture was devised in order to enhance the internal congruency. The report contains candid and open references to the current situation’s unprecedented nature. The ‘North Korea TODAY’ will present the government report entitled “Everyone Needs to Work Together to Ensure a Good Harvest” in the next five issues.

[Special Report]

Introduction of North Korea’s Nationwide Report - “Everyone Needs to Work Together in Order to Ensure a Good Harvest”

The Great Leader and Comrade Kim Jong-il has said the following.

[We must focus our efforts on farming to increase grain production and to decisively solve our food shortage problems.]

This year, the party has put all the efforts to appeal for celebrating the great victory of the 60th anniversary of our republic. Of these issues, the most critical is to focus our efforts on farming and to solve our food shortage and food supply problem. Solving today’s food problem is to protect and sustain our way of Socialism and raising the standard of living for our people. As you all are certain to know, the important grain production regions of our country suffered extensive damage from flooding and consequently, our food situation has become difficult. However, in addition to this, our enemies such as US and South Koreans are heated up with defaming the republic and are trying to exacerbate

our food problems through any methods available.

This clearly shows that we would need to prove that we could sustain our livelihood by harvesting the good production would mean to establish our nation. In a word, the answer to many of our questions is connected to how our farms perform this year and there is currently no problem more important than that of how to solve our food production and food supply problems.

The solution to our food problems, which are causing us so much anxiety, lies in only one avenue and that is to secure our food supplies by farming well and increasing grain production with our hands and our collective strength. The workers and laborers of our country know just how important our farms are this year for our country, and everyone must do his or her part to take responsibility and increase grain production. With the spring harvest underway right now, all citizens and people who need to eat, not just farmers, need to contribute their efforts and find work to increase agricultural output. The spring harvest is in its first half right now, but how we apply our efforts right now will greatly influence how over half of our year's production will end up.

[Special Report] Causes of Farming Crisis, Large Scale Flooding and US, South Korea's Anti DPRK Actions

The writings above come from the introduction to the nationwide report that was released. The North Korean government says that the entire country must focus its efforts on farming to increase grain production in order to “decisively” solve the food shortage problem, and says that solving the “food problem,” and the “food supply problem”. It sees protection and sustaining the ‘Our-Way of Communism 우리식사회주의 is a critical issue. It goes on to say that “there is no issue more important than the current food problems,” and says many times that resolving the food problems as an issue that would establish the strong nation and heightens the pride as a nation. An important point to note is that expressions such as these have never been used before in North Korea's history. This is the first time to express that the food problem was raised as the core issue to build the nation.

The introduction reveals what the causes of the serious food situation are. First, the extensive flooding that destroyed much of the grain production regions of North Korea, and second, ‘US and South Korea's anti- DPRK action to isolate the DPRK. The claim made by North Korea refer to the new Lee Myung-Bak administration's refusal to provide food aid and fertilizer to North Korea. In any case, the North Korean government claims that the cause of the country's current problems lies in the natural disasters that occurred and the actions of foreign nations. No evidence can be found that the government is reflecting on its own actions as a possible source of the current crisis. One official in the Central government 중앙당 said, “Though it is true that grain production was greatly impacted by the extensive flooding that occurred, it can't be said that South Korea's hostile policies didn't play a role. No matter what bad events occur, the United States and South Korea are always blamed. This is because this is the most convenient and easiest excuse. Even though internal structural problems played a large role in creating the current situation, it is not possible to say this.”

An Elderly Resident laments of Sinuiju, “What Happened to the Old Fame?”

A senior resident of Sinuiju, Jung Ho-keun (81), who has been living there since the time of the Japanese occupation, says that he is deeply disturbed and saddened by what he sees these days. As he was lighting a cigarette handed to him, he began to reminisce, “During the mid 40's Sinuiju was a bigger and better city than Dandong in every respect. At the time, the residents from Dandong used to flock to Sinuiju to look around, buy various things, and sample many

different local cuisines. Every visitor to our city would compliment on its beauty and cleanliness. After the railroad was built linking the city with the rest of the country, there was such a boom – you could see a new building going up in downtown area almost every day. Back then, there were smiles and rosy cheeks on people’s faces.”

“But, now, you see many high-rises going up over there in Dandong where all the lights make night time a bright noon day. You can see tourists crowding its riverside and various sizes of cruise ships dotting the river. And when it is a holiday, you hear all these fireworks going off and celebratory cannon firings. Even though you are hearing them from a far distance, your heart gets stirred up. But, in Sinuiju, we have nothing going on. Factories are closed, complete darkness rules the night, and of course, neither a cruise ship nor a tourist can be seen around here. With every passing day, the city is becoming a ghost town. And you don’t see any smile on the faces of those few who are out on the streets. We lost the pride of being the biggest city on the Chinese-Korean border. Now, it is just a passage way through which Chinese imports – food and merchandise – make their way into the country. Its fame of the yesteryears is long gone.” The old man let out a deep sigh of sadness as he was wrapping up his reminiscence of the glorious past of his beloved city which, he knew, would not likely come back any time soon. Tearfully he pleaded, “Our leaders have been telling us that we are on the verge of becoming the ‘Powerful Nation’ – but, before we become such nation, we need some help from anybody out there to prevent more people dying in hunger.”

Prolonged Weakening of Sinuiju’s Economy

The weakened state of Sinuiju’s economy is being prolonged because of the tightening of the NK border inspection in recent months. A significantly less volume of imports passing through Sinuiju, which used to be the only gateway for Chinese import goods, is also a result of higher gas prices. Any traders and merchants who used to come to Sinuiju can be seen heading to other border cities such as Rajin and Chungju. They say that a greater number of merchandise are passing through these cities making it easier for them to find and purchase what they can sell.

Hamheung City Pharmacy College Caught Producing “Ice”

At Hamheung City Pharmacy College in South Hamgyong Providence, there was a drug bust. The dean and several staff members had produced “ice (amphetamine)” and distribute it around the border areas through some students recruited from the student body at the school. The police had gathered enough evidence linking the drug to the school before making arrests and opening a hearing on the case on May 23rd. Further investigation revealed that most of the student drug traffickers got involved after they were promised to be favored during the school and placed in a good work place upon their graduation. Eight students and several staffs were tried in a public trial held at the school on the 29th. The government issued a new mandate for the surrounding area, “Cleanse all the rotten residues of Capitalism from the hearts of Hamheung and Heungnam residents so that only the sound of pure stream flowing can be heard; until then, inspect everyone and everything without ceasing!”

Six Chungjin residents were tried for belonging to Anti-Socialist Conscience groups

In early June, security agents arrested 42 Chungjin residents for dealing “ice” and sent 6 of them to a public trial. Furthermore, as they did in Hoeryung, Central Party’s security agents are focusing their investigative efforts toward those families who have luxurious residences and restaurant owners who set up their business in old government

buildings.

Several munitions workers in Eunduk County fled after selling telephone line that had been illegally cut

A report comes from Eunduk County in North Hamgyong Province – five munitions workers had illegally cut about 200 meters of telephone line from one of the lines that link Rajin and the East Sea coast, and sold it in Chungjin. They each made a profit of 150 thousand won from selling most of it. Two of them were caught by the authorities when they tried to sell the remaining 4 kg of the line. Eunduk County police received a warrant for their arrest on June 4th and is pursuing the suspects.



Good Friends: Center for Peace, Human Rights and Refugees



If you need further information, please contact

Good Friends (Korea)
E-mail: intnetwork@jungto.org
Tel: 82-2-587-8996
Fax: 82-2-587-8998

Good Friends USA (Washington, DC)
E-mail: goodfriendsusa@yahoo.co.kr
Tel: 1-202-824-0788/1-301-455-9196(D)
<http://goodfriendsusa.blogspot.com>