

NORTH KOREA TODAY

143rd Edition 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.”

Epidemic Alert

Bird-flu Virus Emergency in North Hamgyung province

On the June 9, executives of the Emergency epidemic control of the each provincial, cities and county level to discuss about the ‘bird-flu’ at the city of Chungjin.

In the meeting, the executives made the resolution to dispatch epidemic control inspectors in the areas where the disease broke out and the vicinity rural areas. They are to observe particularly on the children patients with ages from 2 - 8years with high fever and try to confine the area as soon as the ‘bird-flu’ is suspected.

While in No.16 National Security Agency(보위부) Kwanliso (관리소;Political prisoners labor unit) several tens of magpies were found dead. Three days later, a five year-old child of the National security agent has died after suffering from high fever for three days. Two days later, two prisoners showed same symptoms and in the following day three more people have showed same symptoms. Presently, these people have been confined within the political prisoner’s labor unit and the disinfection efforts are being made with physicians, but the precise diagnosis has not been determined.

Break-out of Bird-flu in Jungpyung County, South Hamgyong Province

On the 5pm of the June 3rd, several birds have found dead in the hills of the Gosachong(고사총) Gubundae(구분대) at the Air-force Headquarter in Jungpyung county, South Hamgyong Province. Emergency epidemic control of the Hamheung city has inspected the area and determined it was the ‘bird-flu’. The provincial government of the Jungpyung county announced the disease was similar to the ‘bird-flu’, instead of announcing that it was in fact the ‘bird-flu’. Following morning, several numbers of birds were found dead in the Jungpyung County. The local government has designated the frequently used roads as the epidemic area and made a notice to the residents to look out for estranged symptoms from their livestock (poultry). There is no particular plans to combat the epidemic except the slogans that says ‘Prevent the Bird -Flu Epidemic’ in most of the public places such as factories, public enterprises.

Hand –Foot–Mouth Disease in Jangjin County, South Hamgyong

There was an outbreak of the Hand-Foot-Mouth Disease (HFMD) in Jangjin County, South Hamgyong Province. The hospitals do not have specialized treatment, but just to confine and observe for the moment. Parents of young children are not sending their children to kindergartens, but keeping them at home.

A Gun Fire on Dandong–Sinuiju Food Smuggling Ship

In early May, three men died in a gun fire incident on the border of Dandong and Sinuiju. It is reported that the gun fire was triggered by an investigation from a North Korean coast guard vessel over a smuggling boat pulling into the dock. Panicked Chinese smugglers threw out two North Korean soldiers who got on board, and the surprised North Korean coast guard fired at the three Chinese smugglers, all of whom died instantly. Chinese authorities could not protest the incident because the dead were illegal smugglers. Tension in the border areas increased and the food smuggling operations temporarily stopped. However, since mid May, food smuggling operations have resumed again.

South Hwanghae, Can't Celebrate the Founding Day of Boy Scouts

June 6th was a founding day for the Boy Scouts(소년단), and thus, each school held spring athletic games, mountaineering, and other recreational events. However, in Baechon, Ryongyeon, and Ongjin in the South Hwanghae Province, the schools did not hold any events because they decided that it would be too much pressure on the parents of the students who were all in economic distress.

School President, “Can’t Hold Any Sports Games While Watching Neighbors Starve”

On June 6th, the founding day of Boy Scouts, in Hoeryong, North Hamgyong Province, all the school were supposed to enjoy a day of recreational events including sports games. However, the Kangan Middle School did not hold any events. The school president decided not to do anything because he thought the events would put pressure on parents who were already in economic distress. Some teachers objected to the school president claiming that it might depress our students since all the other schools are planning recreational events. The school president replied, “it is much better to spend money to save starving residents than to hold recreational events. I heard that people in Hwanghae Province and Kangwon Province are starving to death, and it is unethical to enjoy a day of recreation just because we are not starving. We are better off than them thanks to our Leader, however they are so desperate to come seek food here. It is time to control ourselves more than it is in any other times”.

Thieves of Unripe Potatoes Increase

It will be a long time before the potato crop will be ripe. But, thieves are already stealing unripe potatoes. Choi Kwang-chul (67) in Cheolwon, Kangwon, had all the potatoes in his field stolen by soldiers. This incident has taken away the last hope he had, which was to eat potatoes instead of grass porridge with his wife. He reported this theft to the town

office (읍사무소). Town office found two suspect soldiers and punished them for disrupting the military – private relationship. However, Mr. Choi was weeping saying, “what is the use of punishing those soldiers, it does not recover my potatoes. I am so desperate, how can we, the elderly people, survive?” People in this town of Cheolwon, usually survive by eating grass porridge or else they will starve.

In Pyongsung, Armed Robbers Are At Large

In Pyongsung, the police are on emergency alert because it is reported that a group of robbers armed with guns and anesthetic have attacked people. They usually rob train passengers. A business man drank a juice they gave him and was robbed of his merchandise and 1,700,000 won. Some people ran into the armed robbers while riding a bike and was threatened with a gun to give everything they had to the robbers. Due to this rumor, citizens of Pyongsung are not going outside at night. The Party directed the city to report such incidents and the city started an investigation of these robbery reports.

In Shinyang County, Movement to Pick Herbs

In Shinyang County, South Pyongan Province, a movement to pick wild grass (herbs) to survive is in progress. The mountains and fields were covered by people picking dandelions and wild vegetables. They have started picking them because after the *Dano* festival (단오절; on the fifth of the fifth month of the year according to the lunar calendar), the toxin of herbs will be stronger. They think that herbs are better to digest than rice root. However, even after the *Dano* festival, mountains are still crowded with people picking herbs.

“Since Reforms, Even Dogs Are Eating White Rice in China”

People are voicing their complaints of the Party all the while pretending to be praising them. The general opinion is that it is not reasonable to summon people to every Party meeting in the pretense of loyalty reinforcement, while there is a food crisis that has been going on for over 10 years.

Koh Chung-duk (43) expressed a strong antagonism against the high officials, justice officials and military officers saying that they are only focusing on how to rob their people. He added, “in China, through reforms, they have found resolutions to basic living problems. Even dogs are eating white rice(흰밥) there. It sounds like a dream. When can we witness such a society?” He also said, “it is because our officials can’t reform our society, and therefore, we are living worse than dogs.”

100~150 Thousand won For Taking Out One’s Child from Farming Mobilization

The farming mobilization term for this year lasts for 70 days from May 15 to July 25. Students are mobilized for one month during this term and should work from 8AM to 7PM, which is very hard labor for young students. Some rich parents give money to teachers or associated officers (regardless of the amount of the money) to exempt their children from the farming mobilization. Officials or rich parents give money, in amounts as much as 100~150 thousand won to take their children out of the mobilization. Jang Cheol-Nam (49) who sends his child to Pohang Middle School in Chungjin City pointed

out the change in social conditions, saying “For teachers, this term is a chance for them to make money. It is easy to get a certificate of participation on various mobilizations or training sessions if you pay the right person. Every parent’s concern and want to care for their children is the same whether they have money or not. So if they are able, all parents would take out their children from the mobilization, and so no one blames those parents for it.”

Forced Investigation on Suspicion of Trying To Cross the Border into South Korea

On May 28, one ship used for squid fishing (낙지잡이) was taken in Heungnam Port, South Hamgyong Province by a North Korean coast guard vessel. Five workers in the ship were taken on suspicion of trying to go to South Korea. They were handed over to the National Security Agency and have been under investigation until now. They are said to have stated that they have never even dreamed of crossing the border into South Korea. Their neighbors all expressed shock for why this would happen, saying “It cannot be true. Their families are all living here, and especially Mr. Lee has a new-born baby. We don’t know why this unreasonable thing happened. We hope that the misunderstanding is cleared up so that they can be released.”

This is the season to start squid fishing, but in the east coast region including Hamheung, the number of ships used for squid fishing is reduced compared to last year. This is because the authorities do not grant a sea admission certificate very easily. Regarding this increase in restrictions by the authorities, Kim Cheol-yeon (43) in Hamheung said, “I remember that one family crossed the border into South Korea from Songpyong District in Chungjin City last August. Since then, their restrictions became stricter. Ryeo Min-goo (47) in Chungjin also said, “In the east sea district, last year, several people crossed the border into South Korea by using the ships used for squid fishing. Therefore, many ships used for squid fishing were recalled in Chungjin or Hamheung. And those who do not have a clear identification are prohibited from coming and going to the sea and their vessels are recalled. Even now, they still keep recalling the ships.”

The regulation on the ships for squid fishing by the authorities was made by the special order from the National Security Agency. After the event of the one family who crossed the border into South Korea in Chungjin, North Hamgyong Province last year, the authorities have repeatedly revealed their will to blockade any attempts at border crossing this year. The guard posts regulating ships in the East Sea will pay more attention on the movement of ships for fishing. In addition, they regulate those who go out to sea by the amount of fuel they have for the vessel, and prevent fishermen from other regions from going out to sea. If a defector is reported, the chief of the corresponding guard post and those who worked that day must take all responsibilities. From this news, people in Chungjin worried that if they couldn’t go out to sea for fishing squid, they couldn’t make their living.

Arrest of Counterfeit Note Maker

On May 23, Cha Seong-cheol (36) living in Pyongsung-dong, Pyongsung City, South Pyongan Province and his two co-workers were arrested on suspicion of making and

circulating counterfeit notes. It is said that they bought a printer from China and made and circulated five thousand won bills. They were caught this time in the by the National Security Agency who has been looking for the source of the counterfeit money.



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