



## DPRK RESTRICTS PRIVATE CAR USE, RATTLES MARKETS

The North Korean Ministry of People's Security (MPS) recently issued an order restricting the use of automobiles and warning that any car or truck used to earn private income would be confiscated by the State. There were a few cases of authorities cracking down on the use of private buses in the mid-2000s, but this is the first time there has been a widespread crackdown on the private use of all vehicles.

According to a report from the Daily NK, a source from North Hamgyeong Province has revealed that **“on an order from the MPS, a crackdown on privately-owned cars, buses, and 1.5-2 ton small trucks began last month,”** and, **“all traffic police were mobilized and are checking all registrations, car-use permits, and driving licenses.”** According to the source, each regional transportation authority is filing comprehensive situation reports, which show that with the exception of cars used by the elite, all illegally-used cars are being confiscated. Even cars used by military-run foreign capital organizations are subject to inspection by police.

In North Korea, the lack of electricity has led, since the mid~2000s, to the sharp drop in the use of trains and a rise in reliance on the so-called ‘service car’ as the primary method of moving people and goods around the country. This crackdown on service cars will be carried out in two phases: Phase 1 will



run until the end of the year, then Phase 2 will be carried out until April 2011. The ownership and use of cars by organizations and businesses will also be investigated, while other cars will be inspected one at a time as they travel the roads. If any illegal use is discovered, the car will be impounded.

This kind of measure appears to be one aspect of North Korean authorities' on-going battle against "anti-socialism." Cars and other government property being put to private use is problematic, but a crackdown of this size indicates that organizations and government workers are abusing the rules on such a scale that the government can no longer tolerate their corruption. In order for these service cars to exist, authorities must break laws, forge documents, and pay bribes to get a car registered, purchase gas, and handle profits.

However, a crackdown on these cars is expected to have many side-effects. Service cars began replacing trains in 2004, but the people's reliance on them grew so quickly that they are now the primary means of transportation throughout North Korea.

Ultimately, the North can not avoid significant aftershocks of the measure; without service cars, not only will businesses suffer production problems, those people who make their living through wholesale and retail markets will suffer, and the standard of living for people across the country will take a hit.