

DPRK MARKETS CLOSE FOR RICE PLANTING MOBILIZATION

In order to meet the requirements of the ‘rice planting mobilization period’ beginning in early May, traditional North Korean markets have been shut down. According to an informed source contacted on May 30, this has struck a huge blow to those living in the cities. Authorities have not only shut down markets, but also cracked down on vendors setting up street stalls and selling out of baskets on the sides of the road.

In line with the ‘battle’ to support agricultural communities, markets across North Korea are only open from 5:00 p.m. until sunset each day, meaning that traders can work, at best, three hours per day. Because North Korea shuts down markets each year during this mobilization period, many residents stock up on rice and corn in advance; however, there are still untold numbers that are having difficulty making ends meet during the one-month period.

According to North Korean residents, because rations have been made available since April, no one really talks of relocation these days. Still, people are just surviving, and they only hope that the cost of rice and corn doesn’t rise. At the beginning of May, rice sold for 850 won, but has risen 50 won, while corn has remained at 300 won per kilogram.

Since the beginning of March, North Korea has been in its ‘lean spring’ season. Many North Koreans live off of nothing more than leftovers and scraps from the end of May to the middle of June. Usually, as North Koreans enter March, they begin to exhaust grain supplies stored up throughout the year. As May arrives, many residents begin to tap resources such as kimchi and other food prepared for June, while most begin to harvest grasses and herbs from mountains and

fields. As barley begins to grow from the middle of June, this lean season eases off. Those living inland suffer more hardships than those living in other regions during these times.

In recent times, as markets have become more commonplace, most North Koreans have not faced starvation. Previously, North Koreans believed that even though they faced starvation, economic embargos by the United States caused their hardship. These days, more and more North Koreans are coming to the realization that their own government is the culprit.