

## **Report: The Voice of the North Korean People <PART3>**

**The Domestic Attitudes towards the Missile Launch and Nuclear Test, 2006**

### **4. “The People Wouldn’t Have Known Why It Was”**

(Reported by Paek Hyang)

Female reporter Paek Hyang wanted to hear people’s opinions about the October 9th nuclear test, so on her son’s birthday, she invited people she had contact with. A forest ranger in his 40s and a cosmetics saleswoman in her 30s participated in some serious conversation.

Paek Hyang: Did the passport that was supposed to be issued arrive? Did the news about the nuclear test affect it at all?

Saleswomen: It wasn’t issued. But they should definitely do the nuclear tests. We Koreans must go ahead with the nuclear test. This is because if we don’t conduct these tests, America is sure to stomp all over Korea and will try to suppress our people.

Forest Ranger: Do you really think they’ll try to suppress us?

Paek: I’m worried that China would enforce sanctions. Their national boundary is so near.

Saleswomen: Isn’t it also good for China if North Korea has nukes? Well, if there’s a war in North Korea, China needs to support it with

resources so it's good if North Korea has nukes because China wouldn't have to provide much support.



*A typical stall-keeper woman at the market selling goods such as stationeries and cosmetics. (C)ASIAPRESS*

Paek: If North Korea has nukes, then South Korea will make them, along with Japan and Taiwan. Will China remain silent then? Will they be okay with Taiwan having nuclear weapons?

Saleswomen: Do you understand how the North Korea–China relations are? If China places economic sanctions against us, it's unfavorable for China too. People in Taiwan are always saying that they want to trade economically with us. Do you know what they say? "If things don't go well with China, then you can trade with us.

Then, we'll help feed people in Korea and we'll even help reclaim the Three Provinces of the Northeast of China."

That's what they say. The Three Provinces of the Northeast of China belonged to Kokuryo before so it's really Korean land.

"We'll reunify China and then reclaim it all!"

That's what Taiwan says to us. But there's no way that China will acknowledge Taiwan, so we can't legally refuse China. That's why we're legally trading with China. Taiwan is just trying to make connections with us. Truthfully, even when our salespeople compare Chinese products with Taiwanese products, they recognize that products from Taiwan are better, but they have no choice.

Forest Ranger: The missile test was done because Bush didn't recognize us. Didn't the U.S. already know we had nukes? They all knew. But it became a problem once North Korea said, "We have succeeded with a nuclear test. We're a country with nuclear weapons." So they finally reacted. China has no reason to place sanctions against us, because it would go against their economic interests. Issues concerning North Korea-China relations can be solved in many other ways without enforcing sanctions.

Paek: So do you think there's going to be some positive changes in people's lives?

Forest Ranger: There's no way that people's lives will become better. That kind of information is all what foreign countries are

saying. Our country is simply quoting that a lot.

Paek: Then what's going to happen?

Forest Ranger: Don't you know about the statement by the Dear General?

"As we initiated military-first politics in the Jagang Province, the people must have not understood what we were doing. We said that we would strengthen the defense to build a 'Nation of Strength' but they wouldn't have known what this means. Only now would they realize what that meant. See! The nuclear tests have succeeded."

Saleswomen: Now I understand. To become a "Nation of Strength" never meant to become an affluent nation, but it only meant to acquire nuclear weapons. I guess you can only believe in yourself. These are times when you can only trust yourself to keep food on the table.

Forest Ranger: But in the end, statements like, "We have become a 'Nation of Strength'" and "The dawn has come" are all wordplay by the Worker's Party's Department of Publicity. No one knows what'll really happen in the future. Even the Dear General's words are all tactics. If you were to do nothing but foolishly trust these words, you'd stave to death. These are really times when you can only trust yourself to keep food on the table.

(Edit: The Editorial Staff)

## **5. Malnutrition of Soldiers Continue to Grow**

(Reported by Shin Do-seuk)

A few days after the report on the October 9th nuclear test, reporter Shin Do-seuk had the opportunity to talk with a soldier serving in the North Korea's People's Army and a laborer working in a chemical factory. The three of them often talk about business and often go out to lunch together. This conversation occurred in a similar situation. While they voice self-deprecating comments about their government, they are also very careful not to go over the line when talking about their leader.

Shin Do-seuk: I hear that this nuclear test was announced in advance to the world, but no countries have any evidence of it.

Soldier and worker: Yes, that's right.

Worker: Even though we announced that we were going to do the test in advance, no country was able to catch any sign of radioactive substances. This time, even the US gave up finding it. That's why they took a peaceful approach through dialogue and negotiation. This means that nuclear armament solved the problem that couldn't be solved by conventional weapons.

Soldier: Anyway, the People's Army is ragged and miserable. Just look at us. We couldn't go to war.

Shin: What do you mean by ragged? Are you trying to say that you've got too much time on your hands?

Soldier: Haha. It's worth seeing the situation of the "Gongsangun (Communist Army)" When Dear General was given the report of the army's current situation, he simply denied it by saying, "I have no such armies." You can get the picture. How could soldiers suffering from malnutrition prepare for war? They say that the army works at the construction sites, at farms to till decayed soil, but all they're really doing is running a business and stealing. Hahaha. The preparation for war is just an act. The US is probably monitoring our motions with their satellites and they've probably already seen this. But the US military are cowards so they're probably shaking in fear even if they see our ragged army.

<#1> Gongsangun(Communist Army) : According to the materials for the social class and reformation education published by North Korea, "Gongsangun" was a synonym of fear used by "enemies" such as South Korea and the US to point out the People's Army. Until the 80's, the People's Army had been an "army of the people" adhering to the principle of the "army for the people." However, this meaning completely changed after the army witnessed a serious shortness of goods and food. Furthermore, the military-first politics eventually made this army more fearsome to the people of North Korea than to its foreign "enemies" and the People's Army became to be seen as the enemy of the people From this time on, people started to call the People's Army "Gongsnagun" which is now becoming the derogatory term for the People's Army.

Shin: By the way, why do you know that war won't break out?

Soldier: We couldn't start a war, but we still have to show that we are preparing for war. In case of emergency, we'll wear a gas mask and go into the driftway. The US will be monitoring our actions because they are not fools. And they will be cautious and think, "They are in a state of tension. So we should be careful not to stir them." This time was the same. When we dared to go

forward declaring "if you try to provoke a war, we will use nuclear weapons," and they were scared. A few years ago when we launched a missile as a bluff, they all got nervous. The US is a powerful nation, right? But it couldn't even manipulate a small country like North Korea. But actually, the problem is Japan. It is instigating the US to go to war.

Worker: What? Japan is doing that?



*A picture from video taken on August 15th, 2006, just after the missiles were launched. Soldiers rest on the grass, exhausted and sleeping. The reporter Lee Jun says "these soldiers don't have any energy because of malnutrition." (Chongjin, North Hamkyung Province. Taken by Lee Jun) (C)ASIAPRESS*

Soldier: That's right. Those Japanese are trying to do that. But the US doesn't want to, so that's why they have been suggesting the six-party talks over and over. I heard that Japan bought the US Army from the US. We learn these things during our military training, all about their mental state and their lifestyle.

Shin: The enemy won't be able to invade us.

Soldier: If the enemy invades us, they wouldn't attack from the 38th parallel, but the China-North Korea border area. The Supreme Command now believes that the China-North Korea border will become the front-line<#2>.

<#2> What is meant here is that in the past, the 38th Parallel Line was battle line, but now if another war were to occur, the China-North Korea border area where the refugees will escape and the enemies will enter will become the place which will need the most security.

Shin : What? Why is that?

Soldier: You see, Bush met Hu Jintao, right? I think Bush had a talk with Hu Jintao. They have a close relationship and I heard that Bush asked him, "If we wage a war with North Korea, what would you do?" Hu Jintao slipped his tongue by saying "Even if you attack North Korea, we will not interfere." You might be thinking, why will China say that they won't interfere? But China has a lot of debt to the US. If they have to return all of their debts to the US, everybody in China will go bankrupt. That's why they said that they wouldn't



interfere. This is why our people said, “Dear General, if war breaks out, our people will become one with you and we will fight with all our heart.” And so the Dear General was encouraged by the people and was able to move forward.

Shin: Hey, you guys can continue to work for the “Gongsangun.” It’s about time you give us citizens some guns.

Together: Hahaha.

Worker: One of the executives also said at the lecture that it was because the People’s Army had become useless due to malnutrition that the government prepared for the nuclear test under the name of building a “Nation of Strength” while even using the living expenses for the people by saying it was a unification expenditure. Everybody who heard this got frustrated and said, “If the Great Leader Kim Il-sung had conducted the test in the time when he was alive, he could have unified the two Koreans.”



A young soldier sells seaweed at the marketplace. This is also one of the realities of North Korea’s military-first government. (June 2006. Chongjin. Taken by Lee Jun)  
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Shin: That's crazy. Are you saying that we would fire a nuclear missile in order to unify South Korea? And if that's the case, wouldn't that be saying that Great Leader's authority was mistaken? This is really hopeless.

(Edit: The Editorial Staff)

### **PROFILE:**

#### **Paek Hyang**

Paek, a mother of two in her forties, lives in the northern part of North Korea. She began her work as a journalist in 2005 after meeting Ishimaru during a brief border crossing into China. She says she wants to show the outside world North Korean society from a woman's perspective.

## 6. The “Special Nuke” Fired for the Recognition of Our Country

(Reported by Shin Do-seuk)

A month after the nuclear test, reporter Shin Do-seuk met with his friend in his mid-30s who sold hardware and who often secretly listened to South Korea’s KBS Radio Station, and asked him how he felt about the October 9th nuclear test.

Shin Do-seuk: With the nuclear test, the UN is saying that they will place economic sanctions against us but what effect will that have? We’ve always been sanctioned.



*Shin Do-seuk (left) as he interviews the citizen on the issue concerning the nuclear test. (November 2006)*

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Salesman: That’s just a famous line from a newspaper. By stating that we’re a nation with nuclear weapons

is the same thing as saying that we want to be placed on the same level as high-ranking states of the UN Council. So it means that we’re trying to be a country that can influence the world. But does that even make sense? If we were to control the world, then the

world would starve. No one in the world, except for the Dear General, would allow this. So we requested that people recognize “North Korea as a country armed with nuclear missiles” but we only received economic sanctions as a result.

Of course the effects of the economic sanctions could be little. It is because our country is too isolated to begin with. It's funny. The fact the effects of the economic sanctions are minor only indicates that there are no resources in this country. Compared to other countries that could be sanctioned, our resources are a lot smaller. But then again, the effects are apparent. See, the price of used Japanese bicycles is rising. The price of crab merchant ships<#1> is also rising and the Japanese yen is falling.

<#1> Crab merchant ships: Ships that carry exported products to Japan include seafood beginning with crabs as the main exported item.

Shin: So, how do you feel about these missile tests?

Salesman: Well it was a special nuclear test conducted in order to get our country recognized to the world. It was a show to have US and Japan recognize us.

Shin: Do you really think that such subtle trickery would get us recognized?

Salesman: I don't know. But there is a chance. North Koreans have never considered human lives important – even the presidents<#2>.

<#2> It has become a usual thing for people to call their rulers "Presidents." Here it refers to Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il.

There's not much value to life. Because they've never experienced a good life, rather than wanting to continue this kind of life, they think "we might as well just have a war."

Even the president educates his citizens in this way by saying, "There's nothing to be afraid of once you are willing to die." But, when you shout something like this, you should at least pretend that you want war, but it's a shame that the enemies aren't even responding. North Korea alone can't pretend to play war games. We need America as our enemy.

Even we blast missiles and explode "nukes," no one is that shocked. There's no war and only economic sanctions were placed against us. For them, that's more effective. North Korea wished that there would be a war but the other nations weren't lured into it and rather they just keep on giving and taking away food. The reverse is happening and we're getting drawn in to their tactics. If they continue sanctions for a long term of 10 or 15 years, North Korea will really be crushed. This is because our country really doesn't have a sustainable economy.

"Even with the socialist market before, North Korea depended on it and was able to live only by relying on that." Didn't the Dear General say this too? Right now these foreign countries are controlling food resources by giving and taking away food aid, just enough so that we don't collapse. It's the same now as it was before.

Even this time, the UN sanction was issued to make us give up the nukes that we're messing around with. But couldn't we use this opportunity to make things more favorable for us? Rather than trying to start a war, we can sincerely try to reach a compromise through dialogue, which will be viewed favorably by the world. There's even a saying that says, "After a fight, you get friendlier."

Shin: I thought you're only interested in selling metal products but it seems like you're a true patriot.

Salesman: These days, diplomats can speak foreign languages, but that's about it. They wouldn't even be able to bargain at a market. With a translator, I'd be a lot better than them.

(Edit: The Editorial Staff)

#### **PROFILE:**

##### **Shin Do-seuk**

Shin Do-seuk is in his thirties and resides in South Hamkyung Province.

After served 10 years in military near the area of military demarcation line, he begun to work at secretary in the factory.

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