

## **MARKET ACTIVITY FLOURISHES IN THE DPRK**

The March issue of “Rimjingang”, a magazine publishing stories on life inside North Korea as reported by defectors and those still inside the DPRK, contains an eye-opening report on activities in North Korea’s markets.

Since 2003, North Korean authorities have legalized DPRK markets throughout the country. The previously existing farmers’ markets were remodeled into ‘combined’ general markets and all traders were permitted to sell their wares. After the legislation was passed, even in Pyongyang general markets emerged in each neighborhood.

According to the magazine, more than 60 markets have been set up, with each market housing around 50 traders. The use of mannequins at clothing stores and attractive price tags used to catch the eye of the shopper are in force. These days, it is not even surprising to hear cassette players extolling the virtues of a particular vendor’s goods. Sellers here do not speak abruptly to customers as they might in a State-run store. In markets, one can hear respectful language used even to children. These are not ideas taught by the labor bureau, but rather independent ideas put to use by the sellers.

Stalls selling a variety of seafood can also be found in a number of markets. Mackerel, squid and flatfish from the East Sea are among the surprisingly fresh products on display. This seafood is not on display courtesy of the North Korean government, but rather is delivered by private entrepreneurs running refrigerated trucks from the coast to Pyongyang. According to the magazine, a number of delivery services are in operation, providing goods to the highest level of North Korean society.

Around Pyongyang, a number of flower sellers have also popped up in the capitalist markets. It is custom to give flowers whenever there is an event in honor of Kim Il-sung or Kim Jong-il; but these days it is also popular for couples to give each other flowers as gifts. Even before the emergence of these markets, there was nothing that couldn't be found in Pyongyang as long as someone had the money to purchase it.

Currently, women under the age of 39 are prohibited from working in markets, and efforts to extend this restriction to women under 49 have raised tension with many women trading in the markets. 'Good Friends', an organization aiding North Korea, has reported that recently thousands of women have organized in protest against security forces in the farmers' market in Chungjin.