

DPRK BANS SOUTH KOREAN, OVERSEAS GOODS FROM MARKETS

It was revealed by Open Radio for North Korea on January 19 that DPRK authorities had handed down a decree to begin enforcing a ban the sale of imported goods in markets across the country on January 20. On January 3, North Korean authorities announced a measure to the Sinuiju Citizen Association and in the Chaeha Market banning the sale of imported goods, telling traders in the market to get rid of imported goods they had with them.

According to the report, the market management office in Sinuiju (operated under the control of the City People's Committee) posted the decree at the entrance to the Chaeha Market, emphasizing that goods manufactured overseas were banned, while goods made domestically with imported materials were allowed to be sold. The report added that among goods banned from sale, those made in South Korea would be cracked down on especially hard.

Authorities are clamping down not only on markets in the city, but are also strengthening crackdowns on homeless vagrants, known as kotjebi, or literally, 'flower swallows'. The report stated, "The Party, security office, trade association, youth association, and other organizations in Sinuiju are at the forefront of a coordinated crackdown on Kotjebi," and, "As the crackdown is currently underway, between 20 and 30 vagrants, on average, are caught each day...those captured vagrants at the jail are sentenced to around 6 hours of forced labor in quarries or farms outside of the city, and must work hard before being given food."

This same source reported that due to the Beijing Olympics last August, security on the border between North Korea and China had been tightened, and as winter rolled around and the river froze, this security was further strengthened, and, "recently, due to strengthened blockade of the border, the price of bribes to cross the river have more than doubled."

In October 2008, the number of guards along the border near Hyesan was increased, and the distance between guardposts was halved from 200 to 100 meters. In addition, not only were military border patrols dispatched to the area, civilian patrols were also set up, increasing surveillance. This led to the cost (bribe) of a river crossing to jump from 1,000-2,000 Yuan (150-300 USD) in 2008 to as much as 4000-5000 Yuan (approx. 600-800 USD) this winter.