NICARAGUA/
ECONOMY

BROKAW: The mining did work. Nine ships, including Dutch, Soviet and Japanese vessels have been damaged in the last two months, and it was damaging in other ways as well. Mike Boettcher tells us how from Managua tonight.

BOETTCHER: Explosive mines remained just below the surface of Nicaragua's port of Corinto. Nicaraguan officials say that during the time freighters have been risking being hit by mines in their harbors, their country's economy, which was already unhealthy, became even sicker. Just how sick can be seen at the local grocery store. A line formed in front of the meat counter. The shoppers would get their ration of meat, but they would have to wait to buy chicken. There was plenty of Bulgarian china, but no toilet paper or toothpaste. Bottles of beer filled the shelves, but there was no baby formula. Shopping is frustrating in Nicaragua, but there were shortages before the harbors were mined, Every since the U.S. imposed economic boycott. One Nicaraguan woman blames it on the economic policies of the Marxist led Sandinista government. UNIDENTIFIED WOMAN: The people here has more poverty than before. We just worse than Somosa now.

BOETTCHER: This woman went to eight pharmacies before she could find the medicine she needed for her mother. One of the druggists she visited called the mining operation and President Reagan, inhumane. UNIDENTIFIED PHARMACIST: ...Inhumano.

BOETTCHER: Thirty three freighters were scheduled to dock at Nicaraguan ports in March, 25 did. Eight others stayed away at the height of the CIA supported mining operation. Nicaraguan officials say those ships were bringing machinery, powdered milk and spare parts. Exports that could have brought badly needed dollars to Nicaragua's economy, piled up on the docks because the ships to haul it never arrived. The mines didn't shut down Nicaragua's ports, but they were the most publicized part of the CIA-sponsored anti-government rebels campaign to isolate Nicargua's economy. Mike Boettcher, NBC News, Manaugua, Nicaragua.