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I. NAPSNet

1. DPRK Nuclear Test

CNN ("U.S. PUZZLES OVER N. KOREA N-SITE SATELLITE IMAGERY AT SUSPECTED FACILITY RAISES QUESTIONS", 2006-08-18) reported that, according to U.S. military and intelligence officials, recent imagery shows a change at a suspected DPR Korean underground nuclear site, a possible indication Pyongyang is planning an underground test of a nuclear weapon. The officials emphasized, however, the development was minor and said there was no way to draw firm conclusions about what it means. The imagery detected wire bundles above ground at the site, the location of which was not disclosed. Officials also could not say whether the imagery came from a satellite or a U-2 aircraft. The bundles could be used to wire the site above ground, so that in the event of an underground nuclear test, technicians could monitor it from a distance.

(return to top) Bloomberg ("SOUTH KOREA SAYS NO NEW EVIDENCE OF NORTH KOREA NUCLEAR TEST", 2006-08-19) reported that the RO Korean Unification Minister Lee Jong Seok said he was not aware of any new evidence to support a report in U.S. media that the DPRK may be planning an underground nuclear test. A U.S. intelligence agency has detected "suspicious vehicle movement" near a suspected test site, according to ABC News, which cited U.S. officials it didn't identify. DPR Korean officials told a delegation of U.S. lawmakers visiting in January the country had developed nuclear weapons as a deterrent. "A large part of information on nuclear weapons or missiles is hypothesis and deduction," Lee said. "There is not a lot that can be confirmed as fact. We can only closely monitor activities." (return to top) Kyodo News Service ("S. KOREA ON VIGILANCE FOR NORTH'S POSSIBLE NUCLEAR TEST", 2006-08-20) reported that the ROK's Defense Ministry has been monitoring movements in the DPRK around the clock, suspicious it is preparing for an underground nuclear bomb test. "The ministry has already dispatched six skilled soldiers to the Korea Institute of Geoscience & Mineral Resources" since last Monday, Yonhap quoted an informed source as saying, referring to a state-run organization that monitors seismic tremors on the Korean Peninsula. The institute, which operates about 30 quake observation stations nationwide, could inform U.N. bodies in Vienna if it observes an artificial blast of a certain scale under the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. It recently opened a new observation station near the Demilitarized Zone, a truce line between the Koreas established in 1953 after the Korean War.
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2. DPRK Financial Sanctions

Bloomberg ("NORTH KOREA LINKED TO ASIAN BANKS", 2006-08-20) reported that the DPRK has opened bank accounts in Vietnam and other foreign countries that the United States suspects are being used to handle money in the arms trade and for other illegal activities. Stuart Levey, the U.S. under secretary for terrorism and financial intelligence, traveled to Vietnam on July 18 and 19 to warn officials from the Foreign Ministry and the central bank that the DPRK had opened 10 accounts, according to the report, which was obtained by Lee Young Hwa, a professor of economics at Japan's Kansai University. Vietnam's central bank is "seriously" investigating money transactions in the country, the report says.

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3. Aid to DPRK Flood Victims

Associated Press ("S KOREA PLEDGES $230 MN AID TO NORTH ", 2006-08-20) reported that the ROK will provide 221 billion won ($230 million) worth of relief material to flood-ravaged the DPRK.

The aid includes 100,000 tonnes of rice, 80,000 blankets, 100,000 tonnes of cement, 100 eight-tonne dump trucks, 50 excavators and emergency medical supplies. It will be sent to the DPRK starting late this month, according to Vice Unification Minister Shin Eon-sang. The relief aid comes in addition to 20 billion won ($20 million) in joint donations that the Seoul government and civic groups have already pledged.

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4. DPRK-PRC Relations

Joong Ang Ilbo ("TIES SOUR AT NORTH'S CHINA BORDER", 2006-08-21) reported that signs of discontent between the PRC and the DPRK, have begun to appear. Some suggestions of those cooling ties can be seen in Dandung, the Chinese border city. Recently, about 40 DPR Korean women were waiting in front of the customs office in preparation for returning to the DPRK. One of the women said Chinese authorities had ordered the women, who had worked at a stuffed-toy factory, out of the country. In all, about 300 DPR Koreans have been told to leave Dandung for their homeland. An ROK trader with ties to both the PRC and the DPRK said that custom checks at the border have increased, resulting in longer delays in shipping goods. The Dandung Customs Office said concerns about drug trafficking was the reason for stepped-up measures, but residents say this has no precedent.

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5. DPRK Defector-Refugees in the USA

Yonhap News Agency ("ABOUT 120 NORTH KOREANS SAID SEEKING ASYLUM IN USA", 2006-0--18) reported that about 120 DPRK refugees staying in third countries, not the ROK, have applied for asylum in the United States. Judith Wood, president of the Los Angeles-based Human Rights Project, revealed the figure in a phone interview with Voice of America (VOA) and said the number of DPR Koreans to be allowed to settle in the US permanently would increase. The United States adopted a DPR Korean human rights law in 2004 aimed at facilitating the defection of DPR Koreans. The law opened the way for them to seek asylum in the US, but it is not meant to apply to those who have already settled in the ROK. However, confusion has risen after a US court reportedly approved recently asylum for two DPR Koreans who had acquired RO Korean citizenship. The Seoul government has made inquires with the US about the two cases. The same sources said about 20 similar cases are pending in US courts.

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6. DPRK Airline Crashes

Agence France-Presse ("AIR KORYO PLANE CRASHES IN PYONGYANG, NO INJURIES: DIPLOMATS", 2006-08-18) reported that a DPR Korean plane carrying around 50 passengers, including Western tourists, crash-landed at Pyongyang's airport this week without seriously injuring anyone. The accident happened on Tuesday as Air Koryo flight JS152 from the Chinese capital of Beijing came into land at Pyongyang. It has not been publicly acknowledged by the DPRK government, however one diplomat in Pyongyang said embassies had been given some scarce details. "The government has confirmed that the front wheel axle was broken and part of a wing came off and landed in a paddy field," a diplomat said. Another diplomat, who talked to one of the passengers after the incident, said the plane landed in the field after the first landing attempt failed. There were three British nationals and one German man known to have been on board, all of whom

were unharmed, according to the diplomats. The airline uses mostly former Soviet Union Tupolev or Ilyushin class planes. Earlier this year Air Koryo joined a list of 92 international carriers blacklisted by the European Union from flying in EU airspace.

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7. DPRK Counterfeit Cigarettes

Joong Ang Ilbo ("FAKE SMOKES CALLED BIG NORTH CASH COW", 2006-08-18) reported that the DPRK is believed to earn $500-700 million per year by making and selling fake American and Japanese cigarettes. "Counterfeit tobacco is one of the largest, probably the largest, single source of income for the North Korean regime," David Asher said in an interview with the Washington-based Radio Free Asia. Mr. Asher, who until July 2005 worked for James Kelly, then the assistant secretary of state for East Asia and Pacific affairs at the State Department, said the North's communist regime operates perhaps 10 plants to make the fake cigarettes. He said those plants are scattered throughout the DPRK.

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8. US-ROK Joint Military Exercises

Agence France-Presse ("SKOREA, US LAUNCH JOINT MILITARY EXERCISES DESPITE PROTESTS", 2006-08-21) reported that the ROK and the US launched joint military exercises despite protests from the DPRK. Some 9,000 US troops and an undisclosed number of ROK military soldiers were taking part in the annual military drills, according to military officials from both sides. "The Ulchi Focus Lens exercises began today as scheduled to run until September 1," a ROK defense ministry spokesman said.

(return to top) Chosun Ilbo ("RETIRED OFFICERS TO SPEAK OUT AGAINST WARTIME CONTROL", 2006-08-21) reported that organizations of retired military officers will issue a statement denouncing President Roh Moo-hyun and the government's plan to take over sole wartime operational control of ROK troops from the US at a meeting on Tuesday morning. Participants include some 70 representatives from nine retired officers' organizations, including graduates of the Korea Military Academy, the Republic of Korea Naval Academy and the Air Force Academy. (return to top)

9. Yasukuni Shrine Issue

Agence France-Presse ("JAPANESE SUPPORT GROWS FOR SHRINE VISITS AFTER KOIZUMI", 2006-08-21) reported that Japanese support has grown for Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's successor to visit a war shrine after the outgoing leader's defiant final pilgrimage, according to a new poll. Some 43 percent of Japanese voters said they believe the next premier should go to the shrine, while 39 percent were opposed, said a poll by the Nihon Keizai Shimbun.

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10. Japan-PRC Relations

Reuters ("CHINA TELLS JAPAN SHRINE VISITS BLOCK TIES ", 2006-08-21) reported that the PRC's relations with Japan would remain at low ebb as long as Japanese leaders continued visiting a Tokyo shrine for war dead, a senior PRC diplomat said on Sunday, driving home Beijing's displeasure. State Councilor Tang Jiaxuan repeated that criticism but leavened it with offers of warmer ties -- if

Japanese leaders drop the shrine visits.

(return to top) Reuters ("JAPAN'S ASO VOWS TO IMPROVE TIES WITH CHINA", 2006-08-21) reported that Foreign Minister Taro Aso, a dark horse candidate to become Japan's next prime minister, said on Monday he would seek to mend fences with the PRC and ROK if he became the nation's leader. "Having no meetings between leaders at all is a distorted form of diplomacy and we must correct this," Aso told reporters after formally declaring his candidacy to become prime minister. (return to top)

11. Japan-Russia Territorial Dispute

The Associated Press ("RUSSIA HANDS OVER FISHERMAN'S BODY", 2006-08-21) reported that Russia handed over the body of a Japanese fisherman killed by a Russian patrol boat that opened fire in disputed waters, sparking a diplomatic feud. After the shooting Moscow accused the crew of illegal fishing, seized their boat, and took the three surviving crewmen to Russia. Yamanaka told reporters in Nemuro that she believed two crew men, but not the captain, will be released soon.

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12. PRC-Venezuela Relations

Reuters ("CHAVEZ SEEKS CHINESE SUPPORT, BEIJING WANTS OIL", 2006-08-21) reported that Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez will be seeking political support as well as energy deals when he visits the PRC from Tuesday, but Beijing is keen to stick to business and avoid antagonizing Washington, analysts say. The globe-trotting populist leader will spend nearly a week in the PRC on his fourth visit there and hopes to secure investment in oil production and shipping.

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13. PRC Environment

International Herald Tribune ("CORRUPTION IS LINKED TO POLLUTION IN CHINA ", 2006-08-21) reported that the PRC has blamed fraud in project approvals and failure to apply emission control measures for rising pollution, state media reported Monday, as the authorities grapple with the environmental impact of headlong economic growth. The PRC's senior environmental official said a government investigation into pollution control approvals for construction projects worth more than $12.5 million had found violations in almost 40 percent of cases, according to the report.

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14. PRC-Kazakhstan Joint Military Drill

Kyodo ("CHINESE, KAZAKH SECURITY OFFICIALS TO HOLD JOINT ANTI-TERROR DRILL ", 2006-08-21) reported that the PRC and Kazakh law enforcement and security officials will hold a joint exercise against terrorism from Thursday to Saturday, China's state-run media reported Monday. The drill will be held in Kazakhstan's eastern Almaty and the PRC's Yining in the western Xinjiang region.

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15. Mongolia Peacekeeping Exercise

The Associated Press ("MONGOLIA HOSTS PEACEKEEPING EXERCISES", 2006-08-21) reported that Mongolia is hosting its first multinational peacekeeping training exercises. The exercises are being conducted with heavy support from the US military, underscoring the burgeoning trust and friendship between the two nations along with Mongolia's growing involvement in peacekeeping activities.

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