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United States

- 1. [US on DPRK Nuclear Program](#)
- 2. [US - DPRK Surveillance](#)
- 3. [DPRK - Pakistan Relations](#)
- 4. [Clinton on US - DPRK Relations](#)
- 5. [DPRK - US Relations](#)
- 6. [US - ROK Relations](#)
- 7. [KEDO Board Meeting](#)
- 8. [DPRK Foreign Trade](#)
- 9. [DPRK Tours](#)
- 10. [Inter - Korean Summit](#)
- 11. [Inter - Korean Relations](#)
- 12. [ROK on Inter - Korean Projects](#)
- 13. [Inter - Korean Border Dispute](#)
- 14. [Inter - Korean Talks](#)
- 15. [ROK on US - DPRK Relations](#)
- 16. [Japan on DPRK Nuclear Issue](#)
- 17. [Japan-DPRK Normalization Talks](#)
- 18. [US Troop Redeployment](#)
- 19. [US - ROK Redeployment](#)
- 20. [US on Cross Straights Relations](#)
- 21. [US - PRC Relations](#)
- 22. [PRC Leadership](#)
- 23. [PRC Intellectual Property Law](#)
- 24. [Hong Kong Pro-Democracy Movement](#)
- 25. [ROK - Japanese Relations](#)
- 26. [Abductee Reunion](#)
- 27. [Japan on Abductee Reunion](#)
- 28. [Mongolian Elections](#)

II. [Japan](#)

- 29. [Japan-Russia Pipeline Project](#)
- 30. [Japan-ROK Territorial Dispute](#)
- 31. [Sino-Japanese Wartime Slaves](#)
- 32. [Japan Defense Agency Realignment](#)

[Preceding NAPSNet Report](#)

I. United States

1. US on DPRK Nuclear Program

Washington Post ("MORE N. KOREAN BOMBS LIKELY, U.S. OFFICIAL SAYS", 2004-07-16) reported that the DPRK is likely to be producing nuclear bombs even as it conducts negotiations with the US and four other countries on ending its weapons programs, the senior U.S. official responsible for those talks told Congress yesterday. "Time is certainly a valid factor in this," said James A. Kelly, the assistant secretary of state for East Asian affairs, during testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. "We don't know the details, but it's quite possible that North Korea is proceeding along, developing additional fissionable material and possibly additional nuclear weapons." Democrats on the committee scolded the administration for waiting too long to present the DPRK with a detailed proposal for ending the crisis. "The bottom line is that we now confront a much more dangerous adversary than we did in 2001," said Sen. Joseph R. Biden Jr. (Del.), the ranking Democrat on the panel. He accused the administration of adopting a policy of "benign neglect" even after learning that Pyongyang had a clandestine nuclear effort, and then taking "more than two years to resolve its internal divisions and settle on an approach for dealing with North Korea."

[\(return to top\)](#)

2. US - DPRK Surveillance

Bloomberg ("LOCKHEED UPGRADING DESTROYERS TO MONITOR NORTH KOREA ", 2004-07-15) reported that Lockheed Martin Corp., the No. 1 defense contractor, is modifying six U.S. Navy destroyers for use in the Sea of Japan to provide early warning of DPRK nuclear missiles fired at the U.S. The modifications to radar and computer signal processors on the Aegis-class destroyers in the waters separating Japan and the Korean peninsula will allow detection and tracking of medium- and long-range missiles, Chris Myers, Lockheed's vice president of sea-based missile defense programs, said. The one-ship patrols will start in September on a rotating basis. "Having them way up forward means you can track the target longer and the more information you have the better if you have to take a shot," Myers said today in a telephone interview. The U.S. Navy confirmed in a statement that a destroyer for tracking missiles will be deployed to the Sea of Japan starting in September "and on a virtually continuous basis thereafter."

[\(return to top\)](#)

3. DPRK - Pakistan Relations

Asahi Shimbun ("UNCOVER THE ROUTES TO PAKISTAN'S NUKES ", 2004-07-19) reported that Former Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto offered a glimpse into the secret history of her nation's nuclear development race with India in her interview with The Asahi Shimbun. She also denied that smuggling of nuclear technology could have been done only by a few errant individuals. Soon after taking office for the second time in the October 1993 general election, Bhutto visited the DPRK. In Pyongyang, Bhutto met with DPRK leader Kim Il Sung, and the two leaders agreed to a missile transaction. The DPRK's economic problems were also deepening. The prospect of exporting missile technology to Pakistan must have sounded good to Pyongyang, which was looking for any possible way to obtain foreign currency. Islamabad concluded that the smuggling of nuclear technology was conducted by a few individuals. Bhutto denied that possibility. "No scientist could even travel alone abroad without being accompanied by a military security detail nor without the written permission of the government of Pakistan," Bhutto said.

[\(return to top\)](#)

4. Clinton on US - DPRK Relations

Donga Ilbo ("CLINTON: NORTH KOREA MORE DANGEROUS THAN IRAQ", 2004-07-19) Former U.S. President Bill Clinton said on Saturday during a book tour that DPRK is more dangerous than Iraq. While visiting the Netherlands to promote his new biography, in an interview with the daily NRC Handelsblad, Clinton said, "North Korea is the most isolated country in the world, and it cannot properly feed its people. However, its million-strong armed forces, powerful missiles, and ability to attack South Korea are very threatening." However, the former president said the U.S. is not likely to launch a preemptive attack against the DPRK, referring to President George W. Bush and the difficulties of the preemptive U.S. attack against Iraq. "Preemptive attack is right in principle but has no satisfactory effect. Neoconservatives of Bush's administration incited preemptive attack against Iraq, but they underestimated the difficulties of securing public safety and transplanting democracy," pointed out Clinton. He added, "President Bush branded North Korea as part of an 'axis of evil,' along with Iran and Iraq, but he is recently taking an attitude of appeasement toward North Korea. It is because he wants to show that relations with North Korea have improved before the U.S. presidential election in November."

[\(return to top\)](#)

5. DPRK - US Relations

Reuters ("N KOREAN DIPLOMATS CLEARED TO ATTEND D.C. FORUM", 2004-07-17) reported that the US has granted permission for two DPRK diplomats based at the United Nations to attend a conference next week in Washington, a State Department spokeswoman said on Saturday. The DPRK's top U.N. representatives, Ambassadors Pak Gil Yon and Han Song-ryol, were given permission late on Friday to attend the Korean Peninsula Peace and Security Forum on Tuesday, spokeswoman Darla Jordan told Reuters. Because the US and DPRK do not have diplomatic ties, the DPRK's representatives to the United Nations are required to obtain State Department permission to travel more than 25 miles outside the heart of New York City.

[\(return to top\)](#)

6. US - ROK Relations

The Associated Press ("US OFFICIAL ARRIVES IN S KOREA FOR TALKS ON N KOREA", 2004-0-19) reported that a senior U.S. official arrived in the ROK Monday to discuss an international standoff over the DPRK's nuclear ambitions. The visit by U.S. Undersecretary of State John Bolton comes after nuclear talks last month in Beijing, during which Washington offered the North aid and a security guarantee in exchange for dismantling its atomic weapons program. U.S. President George W. Bush "is determined to seek a peaceful and diplomatic solution to the North Korean search for weapons of mass destruction and we're continuing to pursue that," Bolton told reporters upon arrival. During his four-day visit, Bolton is expected to meet ROK officials, including Foreign Minister Ban Ki-moon.

[\(return to top\)](#)

7. KEDO Board Meeting

Yonhap ("SUSPENDED NORTH KOREAN REACTOR PROJECT BOARD TO MEET 20 JULY ", 2004-0-17) reported that a US-led consortium for building two nuclear reactors in the DPRK will have an executive board meeting in New York next week, a top ROK delegate said Saturday (17 July). Chang Sun-sup, head of the ROK's Light-Water Reactor Project Planning Office, said he will leave for New York on Monday to attend the meeting on 20-21 July. The executive board of the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) will discuss the preservation and maintenance of materials and equipment for the suspended reactor project, Chang said. Asked whether the project will be resumed after the one-year suspension, Chang said it would depend on the results of the new six-way talks scheduled for September.

[\(return to top\)](#)

8. DPRK Foreign Trade

Yonhap ("N. KOREA'S TRADE WITH THAILAND SURGES 33 PERCENT THIS YEAR ", 2004-07-19) reported that the DPRK's trade volume with Thailand rose 32.9 percent year-on-year to US\$126 million for the first five months of this year, a ROK state agency said Saturday. During the period, the DPRK exported \$34.5 million worth of goods, such as processed oil and cathode ray tubes, to Thailand, the Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA) said.

[\(return to top\)](#)

9. DPRK Tours

National Post (Canada) ("SIX DAYS IN BEAUTIFUL NORTH KOREA, \$2,388", 2004-07-19) reported that the Antarctic is getting clogged with cruise ships, Cambodia now has four-star hotels, and even Mongolia is building the Millennium Highway across its lonely land. The world's forbidden zones are disappearing -- and now there is one less. A Toronto travel company, Royal Scenic Holidays, has become the first to sell package tours of reclusive DPRK to Westerners. The tightly controlled DPRK is slowly opening its doors to tourists to earn badly needed foreign currency. The company's six-day package features a three-day guided tour of the DPRK's Mt. Geumgang area and two nights at a hotel in the tourist zone of Haegeumgang.

[\(return to top\)](#)

10. Inter - Korean Summit

Korea Times ("US WORRIES OVER S-N SUMMIT ", 2004-07-16) reported that as negotiations on the DPRK nuclear crisis enter a crucial stage, U.S. officials are cautiously assessing rumors of a second inter-Korean summit - a development that some experts say would strengthen Pyongyang's hand at the bargaining table. Speculation of a meeting between President Roh Moo-hyun and DPRK leader Kim Jong-il has grown in recent weeks despite repeated denials by Seoul. With the DPRK showing greater signs of cooperation, Roh may be tempted to meet Kim in the hope of achieving a Korean-led solution to the nuclear standoff. But U.S. experts warn that The ROK had better be sure of making a substantial breakthrough toward DPRK nuclear dismantlement before extending its hand to the DPRK. However, Stephen Noerper, vice president at Washington-based security analysis firm Intellibridge, said there is nothing to be lost in engaging in dialogue with the DPRK. "Any Korean-led solution to forward progress on the peninsula is a good thing," he said.

[\(return to top\)](#)

11. Inter - Korean Relations

Korea Herald ("DEBATE ERUPTS ON N.K. AS 'MAIN ENEMY'", 2004-07-16) reported that the National Security Law and the label "main enemy" emerged yesterday as the hottest issues in parliament, with the ruling Uri Party preparing to try to revise or abolish the anticommunist law while the Defense Ministry considered dropping its definition of the DPRK as the country's No. 1 foe. Some members of the majority Uri Party plan to present a bill in September to remove an article in the law that defines the DPRK an "anti-state group," Rep. Yang Seung-jo said. The party will also act to change another article that makes it a crime punishable with up to seven years in prison to "praise, encourage, disseminate or cooperate with anti-state groups, or members of those under their control," seeing this as being in direct conflict with the freedom of thought and conscience. In a separate move, some of Uri's reform-minded members are trying to present a bill to parliament next month to scrap the law.

[\(return to top\)](#)

12. ROK on Inter - Korean Projects

Yonhap ("UNIFICATION MINISTRY SEEKS 500 BLN WON FOR CROSS-BORDER PROJECTS ", 2004-07-19) reported that the Unification Ministry is looking to increase a fund set aside for inter-Korean projects to at least 500 billion won (US\$432 million), a sign of Seoul's commitment to further deepening inter-Korean relations. Unification Minister Chung Dong-young made the case on Monday for the increase, saying that the ministry is short of funds to properly manage cross-border projects.

[\(return to top\)](#)

13. Inter - Korean Border Dispute

Joongang ("N. KOREAN SHIP SAME ONE THAT SUNK S. KOREAN VESSEL IN 2002 ", 2004-07-19) reported that last Wednesday, a DPRK naval vessel crossed the Northern Limit Line (NLL) and retreated after receiving warning shots from the ROK Navy. It was revealed that the DPRK ship was in fact a patrol ship that preemptively attacked a ROK vessel and claimed the lives of six ROK sailors during the West Sea Naval Conflict in 2002. An official at the Joint Chiefs of Staff said Monday that the Korean Navy had kept an eye on the DPRK patrol ship since it had left the port of Deungsan-got

in Hwanghae Province. The ship was the Deungsangot 684, which was involved in the 2002 West Sea Naval Conflict, the official said.

[\(return to top\)](#)

14. Inter - Korean Talks

The Associated Press ("NORTH-SOUTH KOREA MILITARY TALKS CANCELED", 2004-07-18) reported that a round of military talks between the DPRK and ROK that had been scheduled for Monday was called off after the ROK accused the DPRK of violating a sea border, the ROK said. It was unclear if the border dispute caused the cancellation, announced in Seoul after the DPRK failed to respond to Seoul's request for the meeting. "As we have agreed to hold working-level talks to verify dismantling of propaganda signboards along the Demilitarized Zone, we suggested on July 13 that we negotiate the schedule and the venue of the talks on July 19," the ROK's Defense Ministry said in a statement. "However, the meeting apparently was canceled due to the North's lack of response to our request," the statement said.

[\(return to top\)](#)

15. ROK on US - DPRK Relations

Yonhap ("U.S. TO ULTIMATELY JOIN IN PROVIDING ENERGY AID TO N. KOREA: BAN ", 2004-0-16) reported that the ROK's foreign minister said Friday he believes the US will ultimately join other countries in providing energy aid to the DPRK in the course of resolving the standoff over Pyongyang's nuclear arms ambitions. At last month's six-party talks on the nuclear dispute, the US offered to address the North's energy needs if the state freezes all of its nuclear programs and eventually dismantles them.

[\(return to top\)](#)

16. Japan on DPRK Nuclear Issue

Yomiuri Shimbun ("JAPAN URGED U.S. TO GIVE ENERGY AID TO NORTH KOREA", 2004-07-17) reported that Foreign Minister Yoriko Kawaguchi urged the US to join Japan and three other nations in providing energy aid to the DPRK if Pyongyang freezes its nuclear programs when she met with U.S. national security adviser Condoleezza Rice earlier this month, it was learned Friday. Kawaguchi is believed to have made the request in a bid to draw further concessions from the DPRK by persuading the other participants in six-way talks on Pyongyang's nuclear programs to provide energy aid to the country. Rice is believed to have left some room for maneuvering on the matter, saying the US had not ruled out any options.

[\(return to top\)](#)

17. Japan-DPRK Normalization Talks

The Asahi Shimbun ("N. KOREAN TALKS, AID SLATED FOR AUGUST", 2004-07-10) reported that the Japanese government said it would prepare to resume normalization talks with the DPRK shortly. The process has been stalled since October 2002. Sources said meantime that Japan will offer promised humanitarian aid to the DPRK this month. "Until now, circumstances did not allow a resumption (of talks), but things have changed," Chief Cabinet Secretary Hiroyuki Hosoda told reporters. He was referring to the reunion in Jakarta of repatriated abductee Hitomi Soga and her

family from the DPRK. A bilateral working-level meeting is set for August to prepare for negotiations on establishing diplomatic relations. "I expect the twin issues of the 10 missing Japanese (believed to have been abducted by Pyongyang) and the North's nuclear development programs, as well as other matters, will be discussed in depth," Hosoda said. He said these issues, along with a perceived threat of missile strikes, must first be resolved before bilateral ties are normalized.

[\(return to top\)](#)

18. US Troop Redeployment

The Associated Press ("U.S. MOVING WEAPONS OUT OF SOUTH KOREA ", 2004-07-17) reported that around-the-clock train and truck convoys are moving military hardware from the tense border with the DPRK as the U.S. Army prepares to redeploy 3,600 troops to Iraq. The massive logistical feat began July 7 and is moving hundreds of Abrams tanks, Bradley fighting vehicles, Humvees and artillery pieces to the southern port city of Busan to be shipped out under tight security. About 3,600 troops from the U.S. Army's 2nd Infantry Division, dug into encampments between Seoul and the heavily fortified border with the DPRK, will follow their equipment to Iraq. The redeployment was announced in May and signals the first significant change of U.S. troop levels in the ROK since the early 1990s. It underscores how the U.S. military is stretched to provide enough forces to cope with spiraling violence in Iraq while also meeting its other commitments.

[\(return to top\)](#)

19. US - ROK Redeployment

Donga Ilbo ("USFK REDUCTION COULD BE PUT OFF", 2004-07-16) On July 14, senior U.S. government officials signaled that the USFK reduction plan, slated to be completed by the end of next year, could be put off through discussions, according to assemblymen of the Korea-U.S. Inter-Parliamentary Council currently in Washington. At a press conference with correspondents in Washington, Representative Yoo Jay-kun of the Uri Party and the Korean delegation leader of the council cited, "U.S. administrative officials expressed satisfaction at the current Korea-U.S. relations. A U.S. national security official, in particular, said that the USFK reduction plan, which proposes to reduce 12,500 U.S. soldiers in Korea by the end of next year, will be fixed after negotiations with Korea." Rep. Yoo added, "U.S. authorities displayed an active attitude in resolving the North Korea nuclear issue well, in anyway they can. Though viewing it undesirable to provide unconditional aid to the North, the U.S. is in favor of strong economic cooperation between the two Koreas, including the establishment of the Gaesung Industrial Complex."

[\(return to top\)](#)

20. US on Cross Straights Relations

Reuters ("PENTAGON WAR GAME BASED ON CHINA THREAT TO TAIWAN", 2004-07-15) reported that a crisis-simulation drill based on a growing PRC military threat to Taiwan was played out this week by U.S. decision makers, Pentagon officials said on Thursday. The exercise, called Dragon's Thunder, was held on Monday at the Pentagon's National Defense University, or NDU, even as the PRC prepared to stage a mock invasion of the self-governing island. Pentagon officials cautioned against reading anything into the timing of the strategy drill or into the deployment of seven U.S. aircraft carrier strike groups worldwide simultaneously. "Neither the deployment of carrier strike groups worldwide nor this NDU tabletop exercise should be seen as sending a signal to any specific country," said Navy Lt. Cmdr. Flex Plexico, a Pentagon spokesman. The scenario in the U.S.

exercises, ninth in a series prompted by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, "specifically examined responses to an increasing possibility of military action by China against Taiwan," the National Defense University said.

[\(return to top\)](#)

21. US - PRC Relations

The Associated Press ("U.S. TO WITHHOLD \$34M TO U.N. FUND ", 2004-07-17) reported that the Bush administration will withhold \$34 million in congressionally approved assistance to the U.N. Population Fund because of the fund's connection to the PRC and forced abortions, Secretary of State Colin Powell said Friday. The State Department said it was convinced the fund helped the PRC manage programs that involved forced abortions. Powell said in a letter to Congress that the administration would continue to help women and children around the world through other programs. The fund called the U.S. allegation baseless. "UNFPA has not, does not and will not ever condone or support coercive activities of any kind, anywhere," said Thoraya Ahmed Obaid, the executive director. The U.N. group estimated the money blocked by the Bush administration could have helped prevent 2 million unwanted pregnancies and nearly 800,000 abortions, 4,700 mothers' deaths in childbirth and more than 77,000 infant and child deaths.

[\(return to top\)](#)

22. PRC Leadership

New York Times ("FORMER LEADER IS STILL A POWER IN CHINA'S LIFE", 2004-07-16) reported that Jiang Zemin, who handed the titles of Communist Party chief and president to Hu Jintao in 2002, still holds ultimate power in the PRC and has no immediate plans to give up his remaining position as head of the military. Some members of the party elite had expressed a desire that he do so this fall, when the party convenes its fourth plenum, or national planning session. The consequences of Mr. Jiang's prolonged reign are substantial, party officials, editors and political analysts say. Mr. Jiang has retained final say on the most delicate foreign policy issues, as well as some prickly domestic disputes, even though he no longer holds the PRC's top government and party posts. PRC party officials and Western experts say split leadership has contributed to increased political repression at home and heightened chances of military conflict with Taiwan, while raising the specter of a power struggle down the road.

[\(return to top\)](#)

23. PRC Intellectual Property Law

The Associated Press ("PFIZER LASHES OUT AT CHINA PATENT DECISION", 2004-07-16) reported that Pfizer Inc., the world's largest drug company, lashed out Friday at PRC regulators' recent decision to overturn its local patent for Viagra, warning that it might cut future investment in the world's most populous country. "We are extremely disappointed. The basis of fair trade is respecting intellectual property," Chairman and Chief Executive Henry McKinnell said in Singapore, where he was opening a new manufacturing plant. Pfizer is appealing a decision by the PRC's State Intellectual Property Office to overturn the anti-impotence drug's local patent because it didn't meet Chinese patent law specifications. Asked if the dispute might dissuade Pfizer, whose operations span the globe, from further investments in the PRC, McKinnell replied: "Absolutely."

[\(return to top\)](#)

24. Hong Kong Pro-Democracy Movement

Reuters ("SUPPORT FOR HK DEMOCRATIC PARTY UP AHEAD OF POLLS", 2004-07-19) reported that support for Hong Kong's biggest pro-democracy party is rising ahead of major legislative elections in September, after a protest march drew attention to winning more voting rights, a newspaper survey showed on Monday. About 42.7 percent of respondents in the Ming Pao Daily News poll said they would vote for Democratic Party members in September, up from 39.4 percent in the last poll in May. The poll surveyed 980 people between July 15 and 17. Fifteen percent said they planned to vote for candidates of the biggest pro-Beijing party, the Democratic Alliance for Betterment of Hong Kong, and 9.6 percent intended to vote for the main pro-business party, the Liberal Party. The two parties' support rates were unchanged from May. Some academics believed the hot topic of politics would continue to help the Democratic Party, the newspaper said.

[\(return to top\)](#)

25. ROK - Japanese Relations

Chosun Ilbo ("REGULAR KOREA-JAPAN SUMMIT PLAN PROPOSED", 2004-07-16) reported that the Asahi Shimbun reported Friday that the Korean and Japanese leaders would regularly visit each other's countries once a year, leading to two summits a year. Both governments are expecting to hold summit meetings starting next Wednesday at Jeju Island. During that meeting, President Roh Moo-hyun and Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi will officially decide on the issue of having the summit take place annually and they have already agreed that two summits per year would be adequate. According to the newspaper's report, the summit plan was unofficially raised by a high-ranking Cheong Wa Dae official, and the governments of both nations have been considering it.

[\(return to top\)](#)

26. Abductee Reunion

Yomiuri Shimbun ("JENKINS' MINDERS RETURN TO N. KOREA WITH LITTLE FUSS", 2004-07-19) reported that the DPRK government, apparently out of a desire to use the reunion of Charles Jenkins, repatriated abductee Hitomi Soga and their two daughters as leverage to gain economic assistance and other benefits from Japan, observed the family's 10-day sojourn in Indonesia without interfering. Jenkins and his two daughters were accompanied from Pyongyang by three DPRK officials, whose leader was introduced as a Foreign Ministry research fellow, a title that is usually one of convenience given to rank-and-file officials when they travel abroad, according to diplomatic sources. Since none of the officials ranked high enough to make decisions in negotiations with the Japanese government, Pyongyang had apparently decided not to try to exert any influence over the family in deciding where they would go when it allowed Jenkins and his two daughters to leave the DPRK, according to the sources. The three officials left the Jakarta hotel where the family was staying on Saturday, the day after Jenkins told them he intended to go to Japan. They did not hang around to see the family leave Indonesia on Sunday.

[\(return to top\)](#)

27. Japan on Abductee Reunion

Reuters ("JAPAN PM TO SEEK U.S. 'CONSIDERATION' FOR JENKINS ", 2004-07-19) reported that Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi said on Monday he plans to seek special consideration

from Washington for an accused U.S. Army deserter who married a Japanese woman during their long stay in the DPRK. Washington accuses Charles Robert Jenkins, who arrived in Japan on Sunday with his wife, Hitomi Soga, and their two daughters, of deserting to the communist North 39 years ago. He met Soga after she was abducted by Pyongyang agents in the 1970s. "I think we have to negotiate with the United States while he is being treated for his illness and, if possible, seek special consideration," Koizumi told reporters on a visit to Niigata, northwest of Tokyo, which has been hit by severe flooding. "For the time being, we want to create a situation where he can focus on his treatment," Kyodo news agency quoted Koizumi as adding. Jenkins, 64, has been admitted to a Tokyo hospital where he is to be examined by Japanese doctors on Tuesday. The US has repeatedly said it would have the right to request custody of Jenkins if he came to Japan.

[\(return to top\)](#)

28. Mongolian Elections

The Associated Press ("MONGOLIAN VOTERS PROTEST, RETURN TO POLLS", 2004-07-17) reported that amid angry opposition protests, Mongolians in one district voted Saturday in a court-ordered second election for a disputed parliamentary seat that could determine who controls the country's next government. Up to 5,000 voters of district polling station number 18 lined up for the 7 a.m. opening of the polls after a court on Friday found evidence of fraud in the June 27 election. The investigation was launched after both the ruling Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party and the opposition Democrats complained. Early Saturday, a mob of angry Democrats, locked arm-in-arm, blocked the front of the polling station while music and anti-election propaganda blared from a van outside the building. The demonstrators scuffled with police and held up banners that read "MPRP, stop violating the constitution" and "MPRP, accept your defeat."

[\(return to top\)](#)

29. Japan-Russia Pipeline Project

The Japan Times ("JAPAN TO PROVIDE 8.4 BILLION YEN FOR PIPELINE STUDY", 2004-07-11) reported that Japan is ready to provide Russia with 8.4 billion yen to help it study the feasibility of a pipeline project sought by Tokyo. The funds will be used to study the amount of crude oil reserves in untapped fields in eastern Siberia. The move is intended to encourage Russia to start building a Japan-proposed pipeline route ahead of a competing Chinese plan, the sources said. Japan has urged Russia to build a pipeline from Angarsk near Lake Baikal to Nakhodka on the Sea of Japan, a route that would allow Russia to ship oil not only to Japan but to other Asian countries and the US. The PRC wants the pipeline to run to Daqing, an inland city in Heilongjiang Province that is closer to Angarsk than Nakhodka, arguing this would save construction costs.

[\(return to top\)](#)

30. Japan-ROK Territorial Dispute

Kyodo ("SOUTH KOREAN SHIP KICKED OUT OF EEZ", 2004-07-10) reported that a Japanese patrol boat sent a warning on July 9 to a South Korean research vessel after the ship was spotted in Japan's exclusive economic zone off Takeshima Island in Shimane Prefecture, Japan's Coast Guard officials said. The vessel, which was conducting a marine survey without permission, left Japanese waters after receiving the warning, according to the 8th Regional Coast Guard Headquarters based in Maizuru, Kyoto Prefecture. The ROK had not submitted a request to enter the EEZ, the Coast Guard said.

[\(return to top\)](#)

31. Sino-Japanese Wartime Slaves

Kyodo ("SLAVE LABORERS WIN DAMAGES ON APPEAL", 2004-07-10) reported that the Hiroshima High Court on July 9 overturned a lower court ruling and awarded damages in full to a group of Chinese wartime slave laborers. The laborers in question were forced to work under severe conditions at a construction site in Hiroshima Prefecture during World War II. The high court overturned a July 2002 ruling by the Hiroshima District Court that rejected the lawsuit brought by Shao Yicheng, 78, and four other plaintiffs four years earlier against Nishimatsu Construction Co., a Tokyo-based construction firm. It is the first time in a series of lawsuits involving slave laborers that a high court has ordered the defendant to pay damages to the plaintiffs. Nishimatsu immediately filed an appeal with the Supreme Court. In handing down the ruling, presiding Judge Satoshi Suzuki rejected Nishimatsu's argument that the statute of limitations had expired on the firm's violation of its obligation to ensure the safety of its workers. "Forcibly taking people to Japan and making them work is a serious violation of human rights, and the argument (by Nishimatsu) that brings up the (10-year) statute of limitations runs counter to (the course of) justice," Suzuki said. The judge awarded the plaintiffs, who included relatives of now-deceased laborers, the full amount they had demanded -- 5.5 million yen each -- when they filed the suit with the Hiroshima District Court in January 1998. The judge also criticized the fact that Nishimatsu had continued to prosper after the war, thanks to measures such as government compensation, even though the slave laborers continued to suffer even after returning to China.

[\(return to top\)](#)

32. Japan Defense Agency Realignment

The Asahi Shimbun ("UNIFORMED OFFICERS WANT MORE POWER", 2004-07-03) reported that Japan's top uniformed military officers proposed increasing their decision-making power concerning defense matters, a move that would require rewriting the postwar system that prioritizes civilian control over the Self-Defense Forces. Koichi Furusho, chief of staff of the Maritime Self-Defense Force, said uniformed officers and civilian officials should be on equal status in the Defense Agency's hierarchy, sources said. The proposal was made at a meeting on June 16 attended by Defense Agency Director-General Shigeru Ishiba and the top commissioned officers of the ground, air and maritime arms of the SDF. The leaders of the SDF branches backed Furusho's proposal. Furusho's paper on "support for the agency director-general" said the defense counselor system, which is designed to prohibit direct communication between top uniformed officers and the agency chief, should be scrapped. He said the current arrangement is "not appropriate from the standpoint of sound and smooth assistance to the Defense Agency director-general" now that the SDF is more than 50 years old. Furusho also touched on plans to create in fiscal 2005 a new post, "chairman of joint staff," as the top position for uniformed officers in the SDF.

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Nautilus Institute

608 San Miguel Ave., Berkeley, CA 94707-1535 | Phone: (510) 423-0372 | Email:

nautilus@nautilus.org