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I. NAPSNet

1. Six Party Working Groups

Hankoryeh ("U.S.-N. KOREA NORMALIZATION TALKS LIKELY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA", 2007-08-02) reported that U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill said he and his DPRK counterpart Kim Kye-gwan have already discussed resuming talks. The ROK, the chair of a working group on energy assistance, has proposed to host a new round of meetings next week at the truce village of Panmunjeom. The PRC has proposed to hold the separate working group on the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula beginning next Friday, but Hill said he wanted it to start on Aug. 13. The Russians, heading the six-party working group on establishing a new peace mechanism for Northeast Asia, have said a new round will be held in the second week of this month.

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2. DPRK-Japan Relations

Associated Press ("JAPAN, NORTH KOREA TRADE CRITICISM AT ASIAN SECURITY FORUM", 2007-08-02) reported that Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Aso asked participants in the ASEAN Regional Forum for their support in resolving the DPRK's past abductions of Japanese citizens, while the DPRK accused Japan of hostility and criticized its domestic and defence policies.

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3. DPRK Special Economic Zone

Chosun Ilbo ("N.KOREA STARTS CLEARING SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONE", 2007-08-02) reported that the DPRK this year declared Shinuiju, a border town in North Pyongan Province, a special economic zone. Some 3,000 "ideologically prepared" households in Pyongyang are to be relocated to Shinuiju under an urban development project launched there in June. Some will be assigned as workers to an industrial complex, who will be joined by officials from the Ministry of Public Security and the State Security Department, and police officers and their families.

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4. Inter-Korean Manufacturing

Chosun Ilbo ("PYEONGHWA MOTORS TO MANUFACTURE CARS IN NORTH KOREA", 2007-08-02) reported that Pyeonghwa Motors, the first Korean automaker to establish a joint venture car company in the DPRK, will be manufacturing trucks there starting this year, based on the demands of DPRK consumers. Last year, the carmaker sold about 700 vehicles locally.

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5. ROK Hostages in Afghanistan

Korea Times ("HOSTAGE CRISIS TESTS KOREA-US ALLIANCE", 2007-08-02) reported that ROK-US relations face a fresh test over the prolonged hostage crisis in Afghanistan. As negotiations over ROK hostages have made little headway with two captives already being killed, the Seoul government is desperately looking for the US to help in the release of the remaining 21 hostages by pushing the Afghan government to free jailed Taliban fighters. But the Taliban's demand is unacceptable to the US government which has maintained a policy of "no concessions to terrorists".

[\(return to top\)](#) Joongang Ilbo ("TALIBAN WILLING TO MEET KOREANS FOR DIRECT TALKS", 2007-08-02) reported that the Taliban has agreed to face-to-face negotiations with the ROK's ambassador in Kabul if a suitable meeting place can be found. The fate of the 21 surviving hostages remained uncertain, while Taliban spokesman Yousuf Ahmadi said the group "want to negotiate directly" with the ROK government. [\(return to top\)](#) Korea Herald ("SEOUL, WASHINGTON RULE OUT MILITARY ACTION IN AFGHANISTAN", 2007-08-02) reported that the ROK and the US agreed to rule out military action to save 21 ROK hostages in Afghanistan, Foreign Minister Song Min-soon said, amid reports of an imminent military operation against the Taliban in the war-torn country. Song also said he and Negroponte agreed that they will continue to work for the safe release of the hostages. [\(return to top\)](#) Chosun Ilbo ("HOSTAGES 'ALIVE' AS DEADLINE PASSES", 2007-08-02) reported that the latest deadline expired at 4:30 p.m. Wednesday, 14 days after 23 Korean were kidnapped by the Islamist militants in Afghanistan. Purported Taliban spokesman Qari Yousuf Ahmadi told wire agencies the remaining 21 hostages are alive but militant leaders ordered the killing of all ROK hostages if military operations are launched to rescue them. He told the Chosun Ilbo by phone there was no deadline for the killing of the ROK hostages but they could be killed "any time." [\(return to top\)](#)

6. Comfort Women Issue

The Asahi Shimbun ("ABE: MUST CLARIFY VIEWS ON 'COMFORT WOMEN'", 2007-08-02) reported that Embattled Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, reacting to a US Congress resolution urging a full apology to wartime "comfort women," said that Japan must more clearly explain its position on this highly charged issue. The US House of Representatives on Monday adopted the nonbinding resolution by acclamation, with no dissenters. "I think it important to continue explaining (Japan's position) fully," Abe said.

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7. US-Japan Relations

Japan Times ("HOUSE PANEL OKS RESOLUTION PRAISING JAPAN AS KEY U.S. ALLY", 2007-0-02) reported that the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee unanimously adopted a resolution eulogizing Japan as a vital ally of the US. The latest resolution, authored by Republican Rep Jim Saxton from New Jersey and cosponsored by 36 lawmakers, says the lower chamber "recognizes that Japan is one of the most reliable security partners of the United States." It also says the House "commends the government of Japan for its role in enhancing stability in the Asia-Pacific region" and "expresses appreciation for its efforts in the global war against terrorism."

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8. Japan SDF Deployment

Kyodo ("U.S. HOPES JAPAN EXTENDS ANTITERROR LAW TO CONTINUE REFUELING MISSION", 2007-08-02) reported that the US State Department expressed hope that Japan will extend a law for its Maritime Self-Defense Force ships to continue refueling US-led coalition forces in the Indian Ocean. Meanwhile, the Financial Times reported the same day that US Ambassador to Japan Thomas Schieffer is seeking an urgent meeting with Ichiro Ozawa, leader of the main opposition Democratic Party of Japan, to persuade him not to block extension of the law. The DPJ has voted against the law's extension in the past and Ozawa said after the election that his party will continue to do so.

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9. US-PRC Trade Relations

Reuters ("U.S. TREASURY SAYS LAW ON CHINA FOREX COULD BACKFIRE", 2007-08-02) reported that the Bush administration warned Congress that a legislative drive to force the PRC into letting its currency rise in value more quickly could backfire and damage the US economy. Deputy Assistant Treasury Secretary Mark Sobel warned a House of Representative trade subcommittee that US lawmakers risked creating an economically damaging perception abroad that the US is becoming "an isolationist nation."

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10. PRC Military

Agence France-Presse ("CHINA DEFENDS 'PEACEFUL' MILITARY BUILD-UP ", 2007-08-02) reported that the PRC took a swipe at efforts to counter its dramatic military rise, taking centre stage at Asia's main security forum to insist it would be a force for peace and stability. At closed-door talks in Manila, PRC Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi criticised what he called a "Cold War mentality" aimed at gaining military superiority at the expense of mutual cooperation. The PRC has the world's largest armed forces, with 2.3 million men and women in uniform. In March, it approved a 2007 defence budget of 46 billion dollars, a 17.8 percent increase over the year before.

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11. PRC Anti-Corruption Drive

Agence France-Presse ("CHINA DEFENDS DEATH PENALTY AS WEAPON IN WAR ON GRAFT ", 2007-08-02) reported that the PRC defended its use of the death penalty to punish corrupt officials, just weeks after the former head of the food and drug administration was executed for graft. "China has so far kept the death penalty system, and the death penalty is applicable to serious economic crimes," said Gan Yisheng, spokesman of the Communist Party's discipline commission, one of the top graft-busting agencies.

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