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1. US-ROK Security Alliance

Joongang Ilbo ("U.S. AGAIN BACKS CONTROL TRANSFER", 2006-08-22) reported that US President George W. Bush gave his blessing to Seoul's bid to regain wartime command of its troops at a Pentagon meeting last week, a military source said. When asked whether Seoul was ready to take sole command of its troops, Mr. Bell confirmed that Seoul had the "capability," and the president said he agreed with that assessment.

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2. DPRK on US-ROK Military Drills

Associated Press ("NORTH KOREA PROTESTS MILITARY EXERCISES", 2006-08-22) reported that the DRPK lashed out at ongoing U.S.-ROK military drills and warned that it could take retaliatory action amid renewed concern that the nation may be preparing to test a nuclear bomb. The DPRK's latest warning came after US President Bush spoke with PRC President Hu Jintao about how to revive the deadlocked Six Party Talks. The U.S. and the ROK launched annual joint military exercises on Monday, which the DPRK has said would be considered a declaration of war.

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3. US on PRC and the Six Party Talks

Bloomberg ("BUSH ASKS CHINA TO PRESSURE NORTH KOREA TO RETURN TO TALKS", 2006-0--22) reported that US President George W. Bush asked the PRC's President Hu Jintao to put pressure on the DPRK to return to Six Party Talks. The DPRK is refusing to take part in the six-nation talks until the US lifts economic sanctions. The U.S. and PRC need "to continue to work together to send a clear message to the North Korean leader that there is a better choice for him than to continue to develop a nuclear weapon," Bush said at a news conference in Washington. "The six-party talks are an important part of our strategy of dealing with Kim Jong Il, and the Chinese president recognized that in the phone call," Bush said. "And so we talked about how we'll continue to collaborate and work together."

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4. US-ROK Trade Relations

Chosun Ilbo ("KOREAN LAWMAKERS URGE BUSH TO INCLUDE KAESONG IN FTA", 2006-08-22) reported that a group of 35 ruling-party lawmakers has written to US President George W. Bush asking him to reconsider Washington's refusal to include goods from a joint-Korean industrial park in the DPRK in the ROK-US free trade agreement. The announcement was made by the chairman of a National Assembly committee dealing with the planned FTA, Song Young-gil.

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5. Japanese Financial Sector and the DPRK

Bloomberg ("YEN MATCHES RECORD LOW AGAINST EURO ON NORTH KOREA NUCLEAR TEST", 2006-08-18) reported that the Japanese yen matched a record low against the euro on reports the DPRK may be preparing an underground test for a nuclear bomb. "Mounting regional tension raises

investment risk and prompts investors to shift funds out of Japan," said Mamoru Arai, a senior foreign exchange sales manager at Mizuho Corporate Bank in Tokyo, a unit of Japan's second-largest lender by assets. "Japan is geographically close to North Korea." The yen traded at 148.81 per euro as of 12:50 p.m. in Tokyo, from 148.76 in New York yesterday, and equaled a low of 148.90 on Aug. 16, the weakest since the European currency's debut in January 1999. Against the dollar, it traded at 116.01 from 115.98. It may fall to 149.20 per euro and 116.40 per dollar today, Arai said.

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6. DPRK Espionnage

Financial Times ("ARREST OF SUSPECTED SPY HITS KOREAN RELATIONS", 2006-08-22) reported that ROK authorities have arrested a suspected DPR Korean spy who entered the country on a forged passport and took pictures of sensitive military sites. The arrest of an alleged spy is the first under Roh Moo-hyun's administration. A 48-year-old man, named as Chung Kyung-hak, was arrested at a hotel on July 31 after he entered the ROK from the Philippines. He allegedly took pictures of military sites such as radar bases, US military bases and atomic power plants. He travelled to the ROK three times between 1996 and 1998. The case had been transferred to prosecutors, who were expected to indict him on charges of violating the country's national security law, a spokesman for the National Intelligence Service said. The news comes as fears of North Korean infiltrators ease in the South, with fewer South Koreans viewing their Northern counterparts as enemies amid increased economic and cultural exchanges.

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7. DPRK Point Man on Inter-Korean Relations Dies

Reuters ("NORTH KOREA'S POINT MAN ON SOUTH DEAD - KCNA", 2006-08-20) reported that the DPRK’s point man on inter-Korean relations and one of the key players in the state's warming ties with Seoul died on Sunday. The DPRK’s official KCNA news agency said Rim Tong-ok was for many years the figure believed by some to be a mastermind behind Pyongyang's spy operations. But his place in ties with the ROK was sealed with his appearance on the side of leader Kim Jong Il at a historic summit in Pyongyang with then-ROK President Kim Dae-jung six years ago that led to rapid political reconciliation. Rim was again on hand when Kim Jong Il received a high-level ROK delegation last year that broke a bitter year-long stalemate in ties over refugee issues. Rim died of an "incurable disease" at the age of 70, KCNA said. Rim was the communist Workers' Party's top policy maker on inter-Korean relations and vice chairman of the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland."

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8. DPRK Infant Mortality

The Daily NK ("NORTH KOREA'S INFANT MORTALITY REACHES 21 FOR EVERY THOUSAND", 2006-08-18) reported that infant mortality in the DPRK reaches 21 for every 1000 and is attributed to the country's poor medical system. The DPRK’s infant mortality (21 for every 1000) is far higher than that of the ROK (5 for every 1000). The primary reason for infant death in the DPRK is respiratory infection, diarrhea and serious malnutrition. DPRK Birth rate is 16 per 1000 people and death rate is 7 for every thousand, and the natural population increase is 0.9%. The average life expectancy is 71 years, 68 for men and 73 for women. Urban population rate is 60 percent. A non-profit demographic institute Population Research Bureau (PRB) reported that, as of mid-2006, the

DPRK’s population is approximately 23.1 million and it is expected to increase to 25.8 million in 2025 and 26.4 million, an increase of 14% from now, in 2050.

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9. ROK Satellite Launch

Chosun Ilbo ("KOREASAT-5 SOARS INTO ORBIT", 2006-08-22) reported that the launch of the ROK's first military-private communications satellite Koreasat-5, also known as Mugunghwa-5, went off without a hitch. Koreasat-5 will help command and control the nation's armed forces in real time, free from the restrictions of the ROK's mountainous geography and enemy attacks on communication facilities. It will boost command and control capability to a radius of 6,000 km around the Korean Peninsula, making it possible to transmit orders and battlefield information to warships and combat fighters whose communications access has traditionally been the most vulnerable.

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10. Japan Military Role

Kyodo ("ABE EYES GRIP ON DIPLOMACY WITH VERSION OF NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL", 2006-08-22) reported that Chief Cabinet Secretary Shinzo Abe, the front-runner in the race to become Japan's next premier, proposed setting up an advisory board, modeled on the US National Security Council, at the Prime Minister's Official Residence for direct, strategic dialogue with Washington. Abe, speaking at a Liberal Democratic Party convention that also featured speeches by his rivals in the party leadership race, vowed also to push ahead with revising Japan's war-renouncing Constitution.

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11. PRC Journalist Trial

The New York Times ("CHINESE COURT MAY RULE SOON ON TIMES RESEARCHER", 2006-08-22) reported that a PRC researcher for The New York Times who has been jailed for nearly two years on charges of leaking state secrets to the newspaper may learn the verdict in his case as soon as Friday, according to one of his lawyers. "It is very likely that they are going to announce a verdict, but there is nothing definite," the lawyer, Mo Shaoping, said.

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12. PRC Elder Care

Xinhua ("CHINA EXPECTS COMMUNITIES TO TAKE MORE CARE OF ELDERLY PEOPLE", 2006-0--22) reported that the PRC is encouraging communities to provide services for the elderly, as pressure grows on retirement homes and individual families. "Community services can be easily organized in neighborhoods where residents have friendly relations and tend to help each other," said Guo Ping, deputy director of the China Research Center on Aging.

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13. PRC-Venezuela Relations

Agence France-Presse ("CHAVEZ TO SEEK OIL CONTRACTS, POLITICAL SUPPORT IN CHINA", 2006-08-22) reported that Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez is due in the PRC for a visit aimed at forging closer energy and economic ties. For all its anti-American rhetoric, Venezuela exports the vast majority of its oil to the US market, making it heavily dependent on the US. The PRC offers a tempting alternative market for Venezuela, as the Asian giant looks to diversify its oil imports away from the current heavy emphasis on shipments from the volatile Middle East.

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14. PRC-Chile Trade Relations

BBC News ("CHILE AND CHINA SIGN TRADE DEAL", 2006-08-22) reported that the PRC and Chile have signed a free-trade agreement, Beijing's first in South America. The deal will give the PRC better access to Chile's extensive natural resources, such as copper, while Chile will be able to target the vast PRC market.

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