China/North Korea: Food Aid? (S)

recently told a visiting Japanese researcher that China had sent a huge shipment of grain—one of the experts said 500,000 tons—to North Korea in late February and early March. That same expert added that Beijing had quietly dropped its prohibition on barter trade along the border, a measure that could result in Chinese traders selling another 200,000 tons to the DPRK. (S)

COMMENT: Beijing may have concluded that the food situation is worsening in the North, requiring additional PRC assistance. Rumors persist of an increase in refugees entering China, a disturbing trend for Chinese officials. Beijing also is committed to providing enough help to prevent widespread starvation or unrest and keep the Pyongyang regime afloat. The expert's totals seem highly inflated. (S/NF)