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Brief

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DPRK/PRC: "Refugee" Roundup? (C)



See also map showing routes of North Korean refugee flows into China.

Despite recent reports that the food situation has temporarily stabilized, deteriorating living conditions in North Korea and a relaxation of Pyongyang's internal security controls have caused a wandering population of mostly rural residents periodically to look to China for a respite from food shortages. But the burden of increasing numbers of illegal DPRK migrants crossing into China--and a parallel increase in crime--may be forcing some Chinese officials to be more aggressive in rounding up "refugees." (C/NF)

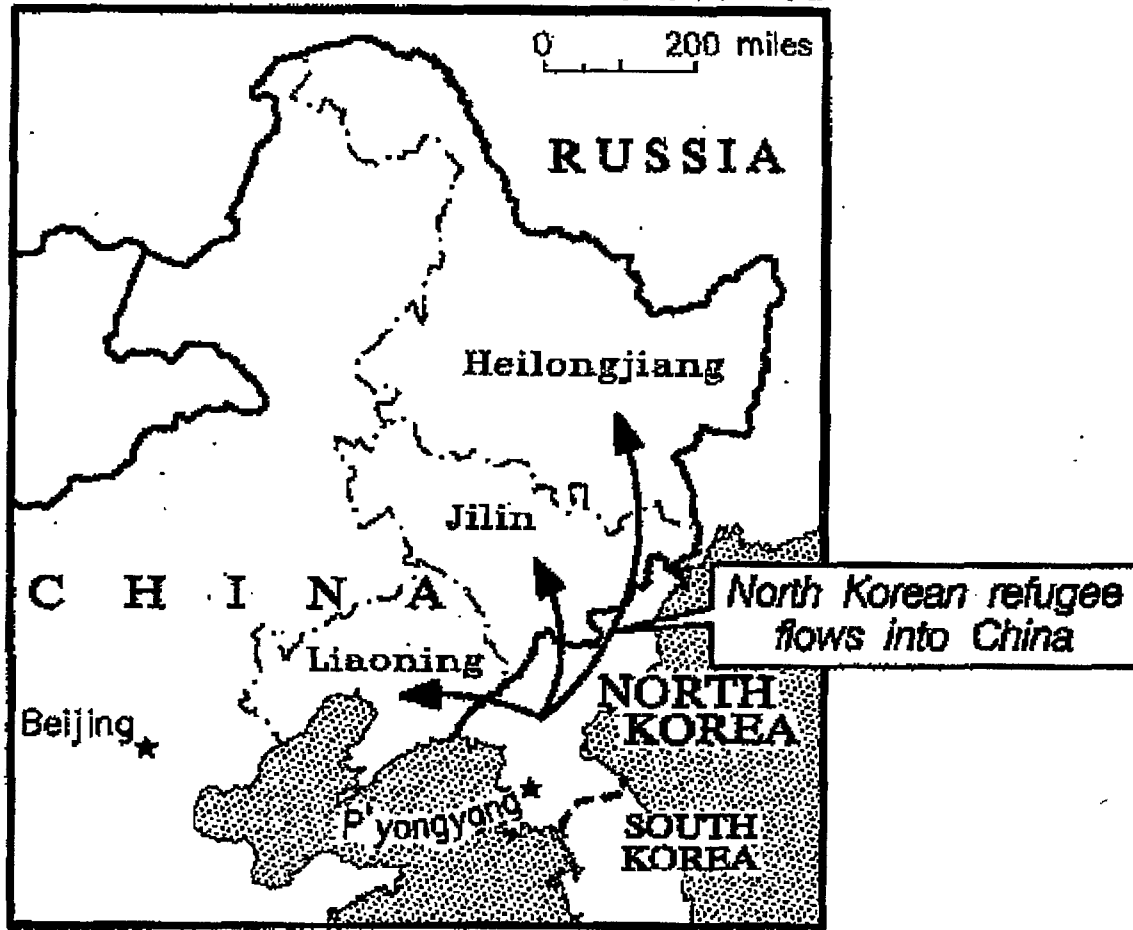
Chinese police reportedly are conducting house-to-house searches near the border as part of a policy of forced repatriation; fines for harboring DPRK "refugees" have been increased. A Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman recently said Beijing had taken "appropriate measures" to contend with the influx of DPRK migrants, though she refused to provide numbers and played down the possibility of a mass migration to China. (C)

Illegal DPRK migrants easily blend with and find support from some three million ethnic Koreans living in China's border provinces, suggesting that whatever Beijing's estimates are, they still may be substantially lower than the actual number of people who cross each year. Though house-to-house searches and roundups in China are not new, firmer measures to stem unauthorized crossings might be in store if Beijing determines that DPRK migrants are destabilizing the border area. (C/NF)

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