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I. United States

1. US Missile Defense Developments

The Associated Press (Matt Kelley, "US OFFICIAL: NO PLANS TO USE NUCLEAR-TIPPED MISSILE-DEFENSE SYSTEM," Washington, 04/17/02) reported that the US has no plans to arm anti-missile interceptors with nuclear explosives, a defense official told Congress on Wednesday, but he acknowledged that "some people are thinking about it." A top science adviser to the Pentagon has said that scientists are studying the idea of using nuclear explosions to wipe out incoming missiles. Air Force Lieutenant General Ronald Kadish, director of the US Missile Defense Agency, said his agency has no current plans to use nuclear weapons. "We have no part of our program that involves nuclear-tipped interceptors," Kadish told a committee of Congress. William Schneider Jr., a top science adviser to the Pentagon as chairman of the Defense Science Board, told the Washington Post last week that US Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld had approved studies of nuclear-tipped missile interceptors.

2. Japan Domestic Opposition to Defense Bills

Agence France-Presse ("JAPAN'S OPPOSITION SLAMS BILLS TO BOOST DEFENSE IN EMERGENCY," 04/17/02) reported that faced with strong resistance from the opposition, the Japanese government submitted legislation to beef up military authority in case the country is attacked. Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi presented a set of three bills to the Diet, or Japanese parliament, a day after his cabinet approved the documents at a special meeting. With a majority in parliament, the three ruling parties -- Koizumi's Liberal Democratic Party, the New Komeito Party and the Conservative Party -- hope to pass the bills during the current Diet session, which ends June 19. But most opposition parties have vowed to abolish the bills, saying they will unnecessarily broaden the authority of the prime minister and restrict people's human rights protected under the nation's post-war constitution. "We are facing a moment when our pacifist constitution is disgraced openly," Takako Doi, head of the opposition Social Democratic Party, told a news conference. "There is no way but abolish the bills," Doi said.

3. Taiwan WHO Membership

Agence France-Presse ("TAIWAN TAKES BATTLE FOR WHO MEMBERSHIP TO US," 04/18/02) reported that Taiwan took its battle for inclusion in the World Health Organization (WHO) to Washington, hoping to enlist firm US support for an intensifying campaign that has upset the PRC. The island's Health Minister Lee Ming-liang met senior US officials during his visit, including Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson, ahead of next month's World Health Assembly, the WHO's most important meeting. Taiwan is expected to press for inclusion in the UN body as an observer under the legal designation "health entity." The World Health Assembly is the highest gathering of the WHO -- and Taiwan is barred from participating, as it is only open to sovereign states recognized by the United Nations.

4. Bush Renews Calls Against "Axis of Evil"

Reuters ("BUSH RENEWS CALL TO ACT ON 'AXIS OF EVIL' STATES," Lexington, 04/17/02) reported that US President George W. Bush on Wednesday renewed his call for action against "axis of evil" states that produce weapons of mass destruction and support terrorism, saying "the world must confront them." Bush said the world faced a great threat from "a small number of outlaw regimes" which own or develop biological, chemical or nuclear weapons. "In their threat to peace, in their mad ambitions, in their destructive potential and in the repression of their own people these regimes constitute an axis of evil and the world must confront them," he said. However, Bush did not name any of the countries directly.

5. ROK Presidential Nomination

Agence France-Presse ("FORMER DISSIDENT GIVEN CLEAR PATH TO PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION," 04/17/02) reported that former dissident Roh Moo-Hyun virtually secured the presidential nomination of the ROK's ruling party after his main rival withdrew from the race. Roh came from nowhere in recent weeks to overtake Rhee In-Je in the Millennium Democratic Party (MDP) primaries, forcing Rhee to announce his withdrawal from the race on national television earlier Wednesday. "Today, I decided to fold up my dreams of winning the MDP's nomination for the presidential election," Rhee said. The ROK is to hold a presidential election in December.

6. Taiwan's View of Cross-Strait Relations

The Associated Press (William Foreman, "TAIWANESE ENVOY TO CHINA URGES BEIJING TO

LEARN FROM THE KOREAS AND RESTART TALKS WITH TAIWAN," Taipei, 04/17/02) reported that Taiwanese envoy to the PRC Koo Chen-fu expressed that the PRC and Taiwan should follow the example of the Koreas and restart long-stalled talks. In a speech marking the ninth anniversary of a historic PRC-Taiwan meeting in Singapore, Koo noted that earlier this month the DPRK offered to renew talks with the ROK. "North and South Korea are ready to start a new round of contacts and dialogue," Koo said. "I think we should seize this and urge the two sides of the Taiwan Strait to be just like the Koreas and leave this low point behind us." Koo heads the Straits Exchange Association, a semiofficial body that handles Taiwan's contacts with the PRC.

7. Japan-DPRK Abduction Talks

Reuters ("JAPAN AND NORTH KOREA MAY HOLD 'ABDUCTION' TALKS SOON," Tokyo, 04/17/02) reported that Japan said on Wednesday that it is trying to arrange talks with the DPRK for later this month on the issue of abducted Japanese nationals. Asked whether Japanese and DPRK Red Cross officials would hold talks on the issue by the end of this month, top government spokesman Yasuo Fukuda told reporters: "Yes, we are making adjustments in that direction."

II. Japan

1. East Asia Free Trade Area

The Japan Times ("JAPAN CONSIDERING CREATION OF EAST ASIA FREE-TRADE AREA BEFORE 2010," Tokyo, 04/14/02) reported that Japan is considering establishing an East Asia free-trade zone well ahead of 2010, Japanese trade ministry officials said Saturday. The envisioned free-trade zone would encompass Japan and the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations, as well as the PRC, the ROK, Hong Kong and Taiwan. While some circles in Japan see the PRC's rapidly expanding economy as a threat, Japanese manufacturers have been moving to locate parts of their operations in the PRC, and bilateral platforms for dialogue to prevent friction have developed, notably in relation to the recent dispute over farm produce. In the future, the area could be extended to Australia and New Zealand, as well as the US, with which Japan has strong economic and security ties, the officials said. Japan will first aim to strike a consensus with the 12 economies by the time their leaders meet in Cambodia in November under the ASEAN-plus-three framework, the officials said.

2. MSDF and Mystery Ship

The Japan Times ("LEGAL SHIFT EYED FOR SDF VESSELS," Tokyo, 04/16/02) reported that the Japanese Defense Agency plans to change the legal framework under which the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) vessels are dispatched to investigate unidentified ships, agency sources said Monday. The legal basis for preparatory acts of sea patrol is being shifted so that it falls under Article 82 of the SDF Law, instead of Article 5 of the Defense Agency Establishment Law, which controls the dispatch of SDF ships for "research purposes," the sources said. Article 82 governs SDF sea patrols. The move is an attempt to avoid criticism that the agency has excessively broadened its interpretation of "research purposes" under which SDF vessels have been dispatched. It is also aimed at ensuring they can be promptly dispatched in emergencies. The agency opted not to seek amendment of the SDF Law to obtain the new legal basis for dispatch of SDF vessels, though some agency officials are in favor of such an amendment to provide a stronger legal framework for the SDF action, the sources said.

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