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1. Russia on Resumption of Six Party Talks

Kyodo News ("RUSSIA HOPES FOR N. KOREA MINISTERIAL MEETING AT U.N.: REPORT", 2007-08-06) reported that Alexander Losyukov, Russian deputy foreign minister said the Six Party Talks should be called during the U.N. General Assembly session opening in New York on Sept. 19. "If the meeting is not held in New York on the sidelines of the General Assembly meeting, then the most likely time will be October," he said in Tokyo where he met with Japan's envoy Kenichiro Sasae.

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2. DPRK Energy Working Group

Forbes ("SIX NATIONS TO MEET TUESDAY ON ENERGY AID FOR NORTH KOREA", 2007-08-06) reported that talks on how to supply almost one million tons of fuel oil or equivalent aid promised to the DPRK in return for a permanent nuclear shutdown will begin on Tuesday. The two-day meeting, at the inter-Korean border village of Panmunjom, is one of several working groups meeting to follow up the shutdown last month of its Yongbyon reactor.

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3. Kaesong Wages

Voice of America ("NORTH KOREAN WORKERS GET A RAISE - FROM SOUTH KOREA", 2007-08-06) reported that ROK authorities have agreed to raise wages at a the inter-Korean Kaesong joint venture for the first time since the experimental zone was opened three years ago. The new pay rate guarantees the zone's 15,000 DPRK workers a minimum wage of $52.50 per month - a tiny fraction of what RO Korean laborers receive. The five percent increase is a compromise with the DPRK, which announced several weeks ago that the Kaesong workers would "go on strike" if their pay was not boosted by 15 percent.

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4. DPRK-Russia Talks on Debt

Associated Press ("NORTH KOREA TO SETTLE DEBTS WITH RUSSIA", 2007-08-06) reported that Russia is currently planning negotiations with the DPRK on the Korean debt settlement for the fall 2007. Russia's Deputy Finance Minister Sergei Storchak said the DPRK's debt to the former USSR is estimated at $8bn, but the debt's exact evaluation poses certain difficulties, as it is denominated in various currencies and, most importantly, Korea has not yet acknowledged Russia as a moneylender.

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5. Shots Fired Across the DMZ

Bloomberg ("NORTH KOREA, SOUTH KOREA MILITARIES FIRE SHOTS AT EACH OTHER", 2007-08-06) reported that Korean soldiers exchanged gunshots across the DMZ today, the first such incident since July 31, 2006. There were no casualties.

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6. Kim Jong Il Appearances

Agence France-Presse ("KIM JONG-IL'S RECENT PUBLIC APPEARANCES MEANT TO STRENGTHEN RULE, ANALYSTS SAY", 2007-08-06) reported that Kim Jong-il's increased his public activities in the past week aim to strengthen his rule over the regime and dispel concerns about his health.

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7. ROK Aid for DPRK Infants

Radio Free Asia ("NORTH KOREA GETS NEW AID FOR MALNOURISHED CHILDREN", 2007-08-04) reported that the ROK has pledged a total of U.S. $3.4 million in funding for a South Korean aid agency Join Together to tackle infant mortality in the DPRK which has doubled over the last decade.

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8. ROK Hostages in Afghanistan

Yonhap ("TALIBAN MAKE FRESH THREAT ON S. KOREAN HOSTAGES AMID TALKS TO MEET DIRECTLY WITH SEOUL", 2007-08-06) reported that the Taliban reportedly made a new threat to start killing 21 South Koreans held hostage in Afghanistan, saying negotiations with the ROK government have not produced enough progress. Qari Yousuf Ahmadi, a purported spokesman for the Taliban, noted Seoul's efforts to arrange a direct meeting with Taliban militants, but said the ROK government was not trying hard enough, the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) reported. It quoted Ahmadi as saying, "We can start killing the hostages at any time."

(return to top) Chosun Ilbo ("AFGHAN DOCTORS DELIVER DRUGS FOR KOREAN HOSTAGES", 2007-08-06) reported that amid mounting concerns for the health of the 21 Koreans held by the Taliban in Afghanistan, Afghan doctors delivered medicines for the hostages, Reuters reported Sunday. The head of a private clinic in the war-torn country told the news agency his team had dropped more than US$1,200 worth of antibiotics, painkillers, vitamin tablets and heart pills in the Qarabagh district of Ghazni Province, as instructed by the rebels. (return to top) Agence France-Presse ("HOSTAGE PLEADS FOR HELP AS AFGHANISTAN RULES OUT PRISONER SWAP ", 2007-08-06) reported that a purported ROK hostage made an emotional plea for help in a telephone call with AFP on Saturday as a negotiator again ruled out freeing Taliban prisoners in exchange for the 21 captives. An Afghan negotiator again ruled out Saturday an exchange of Taliban prisoners to free the 21 South Koreans. (return to top)

9. US-Japan Relations

Reuters ("JAPAN OPPOSITION RISKS U.S. IRE OVER AFGHAN MISSION", 2007-08-06) reported that Japan's main opposition Democratic Party and its allies agreed to oppose extending support for US-led operations in Afghanistan, a move that could sour security ties with the US. The decision by the opposition -- who won a majority in last week's election for parliament's upper house -- also risks deepening divisions within the Democratic Party, a sometimes fractious amalgam of former ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) members, ex-socialists and hawkish younger conservatives.

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10. Japan Nuclear Policy

The Associated Press ("ABE REAFFIRMS JAPAN'S COMMITMENT TO NONNUCLEAR POLICY", 2007-08-06) reported that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said that Japan was committed to its non-nuclear policy and would work toward the abolition of nuclear weapons as Hiroshima marked the 62nd anniversary of the world's first atomic bomb attack, which killed more than 140,000 people in this city. "We will take an initiative in the international community and devote ourselves wholeheartedly toward the abolition of nuclear weapons and realization of peace," Abe said.

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11. Japan Nuclear Plant

The Associated Press ("UN INSPECTORS ASSESS JAPAN NUKE PLANT", 2007-08-06) reported that a team of U.N. nuclear inspectors began a four-day assessment of a nuclear power plant severely damaged by an earthquake last month. The magnitude-6.8 quake in Niigata caused malfunctions and leaks at the plant and raised concerns about safety at Japan's nuclear power stations. The International Atomic Energy Agency team, led by Philippe Jamet, its Nuclear Installation Safety Division director, started examining the plant Monday morning.

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12. Japan Election

The Yomiuri Shimbun ("ABE TO REJIG CABINET ON AUG. 27 / EXTRAORDINARY DIET SESSION TO START AUG. 31", 2007-08-06) reported that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe plans to reshuffle his Cabinet and the Liberal Democratic Party's key executive posts on Aug. 27 and convene an extraordinary Diet session on Aug. 31, government and LDP sources said. Abe has begun coordinating on the matter with the ruling parties, the sources said.

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13. Shanghai Cooperation Organization Drill

Itar-Tass ("SCO NOT OPPOSED TO ANYBODY – COMMANDER", 2007-08-06) reported that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) cannot be considered as a structure opposed to other states, the commander of SCO exercises Peace Mission-2007, Colonel-General Vladimir Moltensky, said. "The SCO was established for solving security problems in the Eurasian region for the struggle against terrorism, extremism and crossborder crime, for establishing borders of good neighborliness and friendship between its participants. It is not aimed against some country or a group of countries, including the US," he told ITAR-TASS.

(return to top) United Press International ("RUSSIA, CHINA JOIN IN MILITARY EXERCISE", 2007-08-06) reported that thousands of Russian and PRC soldiers began massing for joint military exercises in Russia's Chelyabinsk region. At least 500 combat vehicles and aircraft were scheduled to begin the operation on Tuesday as part of an unprecedented move by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The SCO was originally launched as a non-military alliance in 2001 to combat drugs and weapons smuggling, but the military exercise is viewed by some strategists as being a way to show defiance against NATO, the Times said. (return to top)

14. PRC Media Control

The Associated Press ("REPORT: CHINA CURBS FOREIGN SATELLITE TV ", 2007-08-06) reported that the PRC is cracking down on cable television operators who offer unauthorized foreign satellite broadcasts — the PRC's latest bid to maintain its monopoly on information, a newspaper reported. The PRC's TV regulator last month ordered local authorities to root out operators that provide PRC homes with foreign channels, which are officially restricted to tourist hotels and compounds where foreigners work and live, Hong Kong's South China Morning Post newspaper reported.

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15. PRC One Child Policy

The Associated Press ("CHINA BANS CRUDE BIRTH CONTROL SLOGANS ", 2007-08-06) reported that the PRC has banned crude and insensitive slogans promoting the country's 'one-child' family planning policy, such as "Raise fewer babies but more piggies," which have stoked anger in rural areas, state media said Sunday. The policy continues to engender anger and resentment, especially among farmers in the countryside, because of the sometimes brutal methods used to enforce it, such as heavy fines and the seizure of property. Local authorities themselves face demotions, criticism or the loss of jobs if they fail to hit population targets.

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