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1. ROK on DPRK Funds Transfer

Joongang Ilbo ("SOHN: NORTH HOPEFUL FOR BDA SOLUTION", 2007-05-14) reported that Sohn Hak-kyu, the RO Korean presidential candidate who returned home yesterday after a three-day visit to Pyongyang said the DPRK is hopeful that it will soon find a way to transfer its money from a Macao bank to Pyongyang through the US.

2. US on Abduction Issue

Asahi Shimbun ("ABDUCTIONS NO BAR TO U.S. DELISTING OF NORTH", 2007-05-14) reported that in recent summit talks, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice informed Prime Minister Shinzo Abe that resolving the abduction issue would not be a precondition to drop the DPRK from its list of states that sponsor terrorism. Although likely encouraged by U.S. President George W. Bush's show of support in resolving the abduction issue, other officials said the summit also showed Washington is not always in lockstep with Tokyo on the matter. The mixed signals are leading some officials to worry that they could be left out of the picture during negotiations with the DPRK. If progress on the nuclear weapons issue were to lead to Pyongyang's removal, then Japan would have little leverage to exert pressure on the DPRK over the abductions.

3. Japanese Professor on Abduction Issue

Yomiuri Shimbun ("JAPAN SHOULD OFFER INCENTIVES TO NORTH KOREA, PROFESSOR SAYS", 2007-05-14) reported that Hajime Izumi, a professor at Shizuoka Prefectural University Japan, said Japan should provide incentives for the DPRK as it takes steps toward dismantling its nuclear programs, as agreed to at the last round of six-party talks in February. He said that although Japan has given top priority to settling the abduction issue when dealing with the DPRK, it should consider the denuclearization issue at least equally.

4. DPRK Cabinet Shuffle

Yonhap ("N. KOREA'S PREMIER SACKED DUE TO HIS CAPITALIST MOVE: NEWSPAPER", 2007-0--14) reported that the DPRK fired its prime minister last week holding him responsible for making a suggestion that the country introduce an incentive-based capitalistic wage system. The DPRK replaced Premier Pak Pong-ju with Transport Minister Kim Yong-il in April in a sudden reshuffle but gave no reasons for the change. Citing unidentified diplomatic sources, Japan's Mainichi Shimbun newspaper reported that Pak came under attack from party officials in January after suggesting the introduction of an incentive-based wage system to spur labor productivity. Mainichi said Pak was already at odds with the military over the coal export policy.

5. DPRK-Iran Relations

Associated Press ("IRAN ACKNOWLEDGES DEALINGS WITH NORTH KOREA", 2007-05-11) reported that Iran's Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottak said the DPRK's debts stand in the way of improving ties between Pyongyang and Tehran. It was the first time an official of either country referred to their dealings, which go back to at least the 1980s but are not publicly known. The extent of the DPRK's debts to Iran remains unknown.

6. US-ROK Trade Relations

Chosun Ilbo ("U.S. CONGRESS WANTS RENEGOTIATIONS OF FTA WITH KOREA", 2007-05-14) reported that the US Congress has written to the Bush administration urging wholesale changes in the free trade agreement with the ROK, especially on cars. The letter urged additional negotiation with the ROK on systemic barriers in automobiles, industrial products, agricultural and service markets. The letter also said that despite suggestions from both Democratic and Republican parties, the US administration has failed to make the ROK open its auto market.

7. Japan Constitutional Revision

Kyodo ("JAPAN PASSES REFERENDUM BILL, 1ST BIG STEP TO REWRITING CONSTITUTION ", 2007-05-14) reported that Japan's parliament passed a bill on Monday to set referendum procedures for constitutional amendment, establishing its first legal framework to rewrite the pacifist

Constitution since it went into force 60 years ago in 1947. Although the law will not come into force for another three years, the bill's passage will initiate other steps to boost national debate under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's plan to revise the Constitution in a move to depart from what he calls Japan's "postwar regime."

8. Japan Iraq Mission

The Associated Press ("IRAQ MISSION WINS SUPPORT IN JAPAN ", 2007-05-14) reported that a panel of Japanese lawmakers approved a two-year extension of the country's air force mission in Iraq, brushing off criticism that Tokyo should distance itself from Washington's increasingly unpopular war there. The approval was a further victory for Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who is trying to raise Japan's military profile around the world.

9. US-PRC Military Relations

The Washington Post ("PACIFIC COMMANDER STRESSES CHINA TIES", 2007-05-14) reported that the new commander of US forces in the Pacific, Adm. Timothy J. Keating, said Saturday that he wants to intensify joint exercises and other exchanges with the PRC military as quickly and broadly as the PRC government will allow. The objective, Keating said, is to learn more about the PRC military and dispel mutual suspicions to reduce chances of conflict as the PRC expands its power and influence across Asia.

10. Cross Strait Relations

Agence France-Presse ("TAIWAN ACCUSES CHINA OF BUYING FORMER ALLY SENEGAL", 2007-05-14) reported that Taiwan's new de facto envoy to the US has accused the PRC of using hundreds of millions of dollars to lure a key ally, in the latest round of diplomatic jostling between the two rivals, it was reported Sunday. "Beijing pledged 600 million dollars in aid to Senegal" as they set up diplomatic ties in October 2005. In another case, the PRC pledged 250 million dollars in aid to Grenada, prompting the Caribbean state to sever diplomatic links with Taipei in January 2005.

11. PRC Space Program

The Associated Press ("CHINA LAUNCHES NIGERIAN SATELLITE", 2007-05-14) reported that a PRC rocket blasted a Nigerian communications satellite into orbit on Monday, marking an expansion of the PRC's commercial launching services for foreign space hardware, state media said. The official Xinhua News Agency said it was the first time a foreign buyer has purchased a PRC satellite and its launching service. The launch coincides with the opening of the African Development Bank's annual board meeting in Shanghai this week, reflecting growing African-PRC ties.

12. PRC Labor Supply

Agence France-Presse ("CHINA FACES LABOUR SHORTAGE IN 2010 ", 2007-05-14) reported that the PRC's ample supply of low-cost labour, one of the mainstays of the PRC's remarkable economic transformation, could start shrinking by 2010, a state press report said Saturday. The PRC's 1.3 billion people constitute the globe's most populous country but the new study said its massive rural labour force, that has spearheaded the nation's roaring growth, may have been poorly estimated.

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Nautilus Institute
608 San Miguel Ave., Berkeley, CA 94707-1535 | Phone: (510) 423-0372 | Email: nautilus@nautilus.org