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1. US-DPRK Working Group Meeting

Yonhap ("U.S., NORTH KOREA TO HOLD DIPLOMATIC TALKS SEPT. 1-2 IN GENEVA", 2007-08-28) reported that the US said it will meet the DPRK this weekend for the second round of talks on diplomatic normalization but predicted a "long way" ahead as nuclear negotiations enter a critical stage toward eliminating Pyongyang's atomic programs. The two sides will meet Sept. 1-2 in Geneva, the State Department said. The two countries will talk about "potential actions" that would be integrated into overall plans for the DPRK's nuclear disablement.

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2. Japan-DPRK Working Group Meeting

Kyodo News ("JAPAN-N. KOREA WORKING GROUP TO MEET IN ULAN BATOR SEPT 5-6", 2007-0--28) reported that Japan and the DPRK will hold the second meeting of their bilateral working group on Sept. 5-6 in Ulan Bator under the framework of the six-party denuclearization talks on Pyongyang, the Japanese Foreign Ministry said. Following the ministry's announcement, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe told reporters, "I expect North Korea to take an earnest stance at the working group session in order to resolve the major bilateral issue -- the abduction."

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3. Inter-Korean Summit

Yonhap ("S. KOREA TO RAISE INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT ISSUE AT INTER-KOREAN SUMMIT: GOV'T SOURCES ", 2007-08-28) reported that the ROK is pushing to discuss infrastructure investment in the DPRK during the upcoming inter-Korean summit to help boost bilateral economic cooperation, informed sources said. But the investment will only be able to materialize after the US lifts economic sanctions on the DPRK and takes it off the US list of terrorism-sponsoring countries, they said.

(return to top) Korea Times ("GNP DEMANDS SUMMIT BE HELD AFTER ELECTION", 2007-08-28) reported that the main opposition Grand National Party (GNP) demanded that a second inter-Korean summit be delayed until after December's presidential election to minimize the summit's political impact on the Dec. 19 poll. The opposition party, who has been criticizing the timing of the summit, raised suspicion that the postponement might be a political maneuver to tip the election in favor of the liberal-minded pro-government camp. (return to top) Korea Times ("'NK HUMAN RIGHTS ON SUMMIT AGENDA'", 2007-08-28) reported that a group of 20 conservative civic organizations Tuesday urged the government to actively address DPRK human rights issues as a main agenda item during the Oct. 2-4 inter-Korean summit in Pyongyang. "If the South Korean government does not address human rights issues during the summit talks and enforce extensive and one-sided economic support, grant the legitimacy of political power in the name of peace regime on the Korean Peninsula, contempt will be brought on by the resistance of South Korean citizens and criticism by the international community which respects values of freedom," said the statement. (return to top)

4. Inter-Korean Economic Cooperation

Chosun Ilbo ("FIRST FOREIGN COMPANY ENTERS KAESONG COMPLEX", 2007-08-28) reported that a PRC company has become the first foreign firm to do business in the inter-Korean industrial complex in the DPRK city of Kaesong. The Korea Land Corporation on Monday said Dashing Diva,

the ROK branch of PRC artificial nail manufacturer Tianjin Jci Cosmetic, signed a contract to purchase a 6,000 sq. m lot in the Kaesong Industrial Complex. This is the first time a foreign company has bought a site in the inter-Korean joint venture.

(return to top) Joongang Ilbo ("HUNDREDS OF FIRMS PLAN TO OPEN IN KAESONG", 2007-08-28) reported that hundreds of companies are lining up to operate in the DPRK's Kaesong Industrial Complex, but an economist said in a seminar yesterday that the current economic cooperation with the ROK won't bring any significant changes to the DPRK. More than 200 companies have signed a contract with the Korea Land Corp. to join the 33 domestic companies currently operating in the industrial park. However, Cho Dong-ho, a professor at Ewha Womans University, said only 9.2 percent of the companies that tried to manufacture goods in Kaesong had done so for more than five years. Many companies, he said, halted their operations after one or two years. (return to top)

5. ROK Hostages in Afghanistan

Joongang Ilbo ("DEAL REACHED TO RELEASE ALL HOSTAGES", 2007-08-28) reported that the the Blue House announced last night that the Taliban and Seoul had agreed in principle on the release of all 19 remaining South Koreans being held in Afghanistan. Bringing an end to a 41-day ordeal, "the agreement was reached on the condition that South Korea withdraw all of its troops within the year and cease all missionary work in Afghanistan," Blue House spokesman Cheon Ho-seon announced.

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6. US-ROK Trade Relations

Yonhap ("SENIOR U.S. TRADE NEGOTIATOR WHO LED KOREA FTA TALKS TO LEAVE GOVERNMENT", 2007-08-28) reported that the senior US trade negotiator who helped seal a free trade agreement (FTA) with the ROK is leaving his post, the US Trade Representative (USTR) said. Karan Bhatia, deputy USTR in charge of Asia and Africa affairs, will leave in October and return to the private sector. His successor has not been announced, and the post may be vacant for two to three months given the nomination and confirmation process.

(return to top) Voice of America ("US LAWMAKERS SAY TRADE DEAL WITH SOUTH KOREA SHOULD PASS", 2007-08-28) reported that US Congresswoman Diane Watson says ratifying a major trade deal with the ROK this year is not Washington's highest priority. Watson says the agreement will not become law until Congress can assure US carmakers they are not getting a bad deal. There is also uneasiness in Washington about including goods made in Kaesong in the free-trade deal. The ROK's ban on US beef imports is another sensitive issue. (return to top)

7. ROK-ASEAN Trade Relations

Chosun Ilbo ("ASEAN EXPECTS FTA WITH KOREA NEXT YEAR", 2007-08-28) reported that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) expects to sign free trade agreements with six neighbors including the ROK, PRC and Japan by 2013. The Associated Press quoted ASEAN Secretary-General Ong Keng Yong as saying that the regional bloc's free trade deal with the ROK could be completed next year.

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8. Japan Cabinet Shuffle

Agence France-Presse ("JAPAN'S NEW CABINET SEES POLL BOOST BUT OPPOSITION FIRE", 2007-08-28) reported that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's cabinet enjoyed a rebound in public support after a major reshuffle, a poll showed, but his new line-up was quickly rebuffed by an emboldened opposition. In the first telephone poll taken since the reshuffle, Kyodo News said that support for Abe's cabinet rose to 40.5 percent -- still less than half the country but up 11.5 points from a month earlier.

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9. Japan SDF Indian Ocean Mission

The Asahi Shimbun ("FOREIGN, DEFENSE MINISTERS OPEN TO MODIFYING ANTI-TERRORISM LAW", 2007-08-28) reported that the new foreign and defense ministers indicated they would be open to revisions of the anti-terrorism special measures law to ensure its extension is approved by opposition Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan). Defense Minister Masahiko Komura said the government could modify the law, which expires on Nov. 1, in a bid to bring Minshuto on board.

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10. PRC Party Congress

Agence France-Presse ("CHINA'S RULING COMMUNISTS SET DATE FOR PIVOTAL CONGRESS ", 2007-08-28) reported that the PRC said it had set an October 15 start for the ruling Communist Party's pivotal congress, a five-yearly ritual during which key leadership changes are made and the nation's course is set. The PRC's incumbent leader traditionally uses the congress to solidify his control over the party and hence the nation. President Hu Jintao is widely expected to use this year's gathering to cement both his leadership and legacy.

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11. Hong Kong Party Leader

The Associated Press ("PRO-BEIJING PARTY CHOOSES NEW LEADER", 2007-08-28) reported that a veteran unionist was chosen to head Hong Kong's leading pro-Beijing party, inheriting the task of polishing the party's image, which was tarnished by his predecessor's comments that the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown was not a massacre. Tam Yiu-chung was the only nominee and was named the new leader of the DAB party, said party vice chairman Ip Kwok-him.

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12. PRC Internet Control

The Associated Press ("BEIJING POLICE LAUNCH VIRTUAL WEB PATROL", 2007-08-28) reported that police in the PRC's capital said they will start patrolling the Web using animated beat officers that pop up on a user's browser and walk, bike or drive across the screen warning them to stay away from illegal Internet content. Starting Sept. 1, the cartoon alerts will appear every half hour on 13 of China's top portals, including Sohu and Sina, and by the end of the year will appear on all Web sites registered with Beijing servers, the Beijing Public Security Ministry said in a statement.

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