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1. DPRK Missile Test

Yonhap News ("N. KOREA FIRES MISSILE INTO EAST SEA", 2007-06-19) reported that the DPRK test-launched a missile again as international efforts to end the nation's nuclear program began showing signs of progress. "North Korea fired a short-range missile in what appeared to be part of a military drill," a Japanese Defense Ministry official was quoted as saying. RO Korean defense officials virtually confirmed the DPRK's missile test. "We don't deny that North Korea fired a missile," Army Col. Ha Doo-chul, spokesman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told Yonhap News Agency. "If it did, we regard it as a routine exercise."

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2. US on DPRK Nuclear Program

Korea Herald ("SEOUL, WASHINGTON PRESS N.K. FOR EARLY SHUTDOWN ", 2007-06-19) reported that the top US negotiator to the six-party talks while visiting Seoul yesterday urged the DPRK to speed up its denuclearization process. "We are going to really have to pick up the pace if we were to get back on timelines and get through this very crucial phase of disablement," Christopher Hill told reporters.

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3. Japan on DPRK Nuclear Program

Bloomberg ("NORTH KOREA INSPECTOR INVITE COMES TOO LATE, ASO SAYS ", 2007-06-19) reported that the DPRK's invitation to UN nuclear inspectors back into the country comes too late, Japan's Foreign Minister Taro Aso said. "The move can't be taken as positive," Aso said today at a regular press conference in Tokyo. "It's behind schedule and just a beginning." Japan is closely watching the DPRK's move toward dismantling its nuclear weapons program, Aso said.

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4. US Aid to DPRK

Yonhap News ("U.S. DENIES REPORT OF PLANNED HUMANITARIAN AID TO NORTH KOREA ", 2007-06-19) reported that the US is not yet considering a resumption of humanitarian aid to the DPRK, the State Department said. Department spokesman Sean McCormack said he did not know of any plans to give aid to Pyongyang and reiterated Washington's policy that any humanitarian-based assistance would go through the UN World Food Program (WFP).

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5. ROK Bans US Beef Imports

Reuters ("SOUTH KOREA BANS MORE BEEF FROM TYSON PLANTS", 2007-06-19) reported that the ROK halted beef imports from two more plants owned by Tyson Foods Inc. after finding they wrongly shipped meat produced for US sale only, the Agriculture Ministry said. The US Department of Agriculture confirmed that the 130 kg (286.6 lb) of beef Tyson shipped to the ROK on June 2 were actually intended for US sale, the ministry said. The ROK will return the beef and will temporarily ban imports from the two Tyson plants. The country has already suspended some imports from

Cargill [CARG.UL] for sending beef containing short bones and from two other Tyson plants for shipping meat that should have been sold only for domestic consumption.

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6. ROK Elections

Korea Herald ("GNP RIVALS DIVIDED OVER N.K., U.S. IN DEBATE ", 2007-06-19) reported that five presidential candidates of the conservative Grand National Party yesterday in a primary debate offered divided views on Seoul's engagement policy towards the DPRK and the alliance with the US. Two leading aspirants -- former Seoul mayor Lee Myung-bak and former GNP leader Park Geun-hye -- called for the adjustment of the ROK's lenient stance towards its neighbor, chiding the Roh Moo-hyun administration for its policy of providing economic and humanitarian aid to the DPRK. "We had exerted our utmost effort, but (the North) returned with (the test of) atomic weapons. Now the nation should shift to a principled engagement policy so as to induce the North to reform and open up," he said at the discussion held in Daejeon. Park displayed more conservative color than Lee, calling for a "reciprocal approach based on principles." Underdog presidential hopeful Hong Joon-pyo was also critical of the so-called Sunshine Policy. "Shoveling unconditional aid to the North only resulted in (the explosion of) the atomic bomb," the outspoken politician said. Two other minor runners -- Won Hee-ryong and Go Jin-hwa -- advocated the engagement policy. All candidates except for Hong called for amicable relations with the US. "South Korea is the world's 11th largest economy in terms of gross domestic product. To befit the nation's status, Korea should strengthen its independent policy line on the United States," Hong said. Park underscored the importance of strong ties with the US. She called for "new security declaration" between Seoul and Washington in an effort to restore relations with the United States, which critics say have soured under the Roh administration.

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7. PRC Economy

Bloomberg ("CHINA CUTS EXPORT TARIFFS TO CLOSE RECORD TRADE GAP ", 2007-06-19) reported that the PRC said it will reduce export rebates on 2,831 products to curb the country's record trade surplus, ease friction with other countries and spur industries to use less energy. From July 1, rebates will be removed on 553 types of goods that require a lot of energy to produce and are polluting, including fertilizers, cement, salt and leather, the Ministry of Finance said today on its Web site. Rebates will be pared for 2,268 other exports while 10 products will be made tax-free. The world's fourth-largest economy may export more than any other nation next year, boosting its 2008 trade surplus by 45 percent to a record $257 billion, according to an April estimate by the Asian Development Bank. The US Congress, labor unions and some manufacturers have accused the PRC of spurring exports by keeping its currency weak against the dollar and giving rebates. "The trade surplus is not merely an economic issue, it's also a political problem," said Wang Yuanhong, an economist at the State Information Center in Beijing, a unit of the government's top planning agency. "China must adjust its cost of production, including the cost of labor, resources and the environmental impact, to rein in the trade gap."

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8. PRC Olympics

Associated Press ("CHINA PLANS HIGHWAY ON MOUNT EVEREST", 2007-06-19) reported that the

PRC plans to build a highway on the side of Mount Everest to ease the Olympic torch's journey to the peak of the world's tallest mountain before the 2008 Beijing Games, state media reported. Construction of the road, budgeted at $19.7 million would turn a 67-mile rough path from the foot of the mountain to a base camp at 17,060 feet "into a blacktop highway fenced by undulating guardrails," the Xinhua News Agency said. Xinhua said construction, which would start next week, would take about four months. The new highway would become a major route for tourists and mountaineers, it said. In April, organizers for the Beijing Summer Olympics announced ambitious plans for the longest torch relay in Olympic history — an 85,000-mile, 130-day route that would cross five continents and reach the 29,035-foot summit of Everest. Taking the Olympic torch to the top of the mountain, seen by some as a way for Beijing to underscore its claims to Tibet, is expected to be one of the relay's highlights.

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9. Sino-Russian Relations

Agence France Presse ("RUSSIA'S FIRST NUCLEAR POWER REACTOR GOES INTO OPERATION IN CHINA", 2007-06-19) reported that Russia's first nuclear reactor in PRC has finally gone into commercial operation after numerous delays and a second will begin production by year's end, Russian officials said Tuesday. "The Tianwan nuclear power plant is a very big Russian-Chinese project," Ivan Kamenskikh, vice head of the Federal Atomic Energy Agency of Russia, told journalists. The two nations agreed to build the 3.3-billion-dollar pressurised water nuclear plant in eastern China's Jiangsu province in 1997. The second phase of the project, also to include two 1,000 megawatt reactors, is currently under discussion, Kamenskikh said.

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10. Sino-US Trade Relations

Reuters ("CHINA CRITICIZES TIGHTER U.S. HIGH-TECH EXPORT RULES ", 2007-06-19) reported that Beijing expressed "regret and concern" on Tuesday over a tightening of US restrictions on high-technology exports to PRC and warned of potential damage to Sino-US trade. New regulations go into effect on Tuesday that tighten controls on exports of certain aircraft and engines, lasers and space communications systems that the US says could be used by the PRC to modernize its military. A spokesman for the PRC's Ministry of Commerce, Yao Shenhong, said the rules would seriously dampen business confidence in high-technology trade and increase costs for both countries. "It is inappropriate for the U.S. side to launch the new rules without fully listening to the Chinese side, and it is against the sprit of cooperation," Yao said in a statement.

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11. Sino-Iraqi Relations

China Daily ("CHINA INVITED TO EXPLORE IRAQI OIL", 2007-06-19) reported that the PRC is welcome to explore oil resources in Iraq as a new law is set to open its oilfields to international companies, the Iraqi ambassador to PRC said yesterday. "We encourage Chinese enterprises to join the multinational competition for exploration of Iraqi oilfields," said Mohammad Sabir Ismail.

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12. Taiwan's UN Bid

Bloomberg ("TAIWAN'S CHEN PLEDGES REFERENDUM ON 'TAIWAN' UN BID ", 2007-06-19) reported that Taiwan president Chen Shui-bian pledged to hold a referendum on whether to apply for UN membership under the name “Taiwan.” PRC said the plan was designed to ‘stir up trouble.’ The island will hold the referendum on the same day as national elections, according to a June 18 statement on the presidential office Web site. Taiwan is due to hold legislative elections on Jan. 12 and a presidential ballot before Chen steps down in May.

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