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1. DPRK Nuclear Test

New York Times ("NEIGHBORS SAYS NORTH KOREA MAY BE PREPARING FOR 2ND NUCLEAR TEST", 2006-10-17) reported that ROK and Japanese officials said today that they believe the DPRK may be preparing for a second test. American officials on Monday confirmed for the first time that the DPRK did set off a nuclear explosion on Oct. 9, as it claimed, but that the blast was far smaller than would normally be expected, suggesting that the test may have misfired. That could give the DPRK two motives for a second test, nuclear scientists and security analysts said: To proclaim defiance of the sanctions and to show that it is capable of a successful nuclear detonation. Nuclear experts said today that the analysis of atmospheric samples taken after the test shed new light on the factors that could lead to a second demonstration. American officials who reviewed the results of atmospheric sampling said on Monday that the material used for the test appeared to have been plutonium harvested from the DPRK's small nuclear reactor. Because the material came from the reactor, which operated under international inspection between 1994 and 2003, and not from a uranium-enrichment program that the DPRK began in secret, nuclear experts said that it was easier to gauge how much weapons material it may now have on hand. Most intelligence analysts estimate that the country has enough plutonium for 6 to 10 bombs.

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2. DPRK on Nuclear Test, UN Sanctions

BBC ("N KOREA CALLS UN RESOLUTION "DECLARATION OF WAR"", 2006-10-17) reported that a spokesman for the Foreign Ministry of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea Tuesday issued a statement in KCNA which stated that the DPRK conducted a nuclear test after announcing it in advance, "something unprecedented in view of international practice." The statement also said that the DPRK as a "responsible nuclear weapons state" would never use nuclear weapons first, nor would it allow "nuclear transfer". The statement also claimed the UNSC was using the resolution to "evade the historic responsibility for having patronized (…) the division of Korea, the root cause of all misfortunes of the Korean nation." It further stated that the "Bush group" remains "oblivious of the lessons drawn from the shameful setbacks recorded in the history of the relations between the preceding US administrations and the DPRK. (…) The DPRK," ends the statement," wants peace but is not afraid of war. It wants dialogue but is always ready for confrontation."

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3. US on DPRK Sanctions

Washington Post ("RICE TRIP TO PUSH FULL SANCTIONS FOR N. KOREA", 2006-10-17) reported that US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said she will push for full implementation of U.N. sanctions against the DPRK when she makes a critical visit to Asia and Russia this week. She called on nations to "collectively isolate" North Korea, adding that it "cannot destabilize the international system and then expect to exploit elaborate financial networks built for peaceful commerce."

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4. US Human Rights Envoy on DPRK Sanctions

Associated Press ("U.S ENVOY URGES CHINA AND SOUTH KOREA TO RETHINK NORTH KOREA AID", 2006-10-17) reported that Jay Lefkowitz, U.S. envoy on DPRK human rights is urging the PRC

and RO Korea to rethink aid policies to the DPRK, saying unmonitored assistance could prop up a "criminal regime" and suggesting that the DPRK's nuclear ambitions are linked to its poor treatment of its citizens. As nations work to apply U.N. sanctions to the DPRK, Lefkowitz's comments underline U.S. worries that Chinese and RO Korean aid could be diverted to the black market or to DPRK military. Lefkowitz also questioned the inter-Korean economic project in Kaesong. Washington has not been making humanitarian contributions "because the North Koreans have not agreed to the kind of transparency in their programs that can" direct aid to the needy and not the elite, says US Secretary of State Condi Rice. Seoul maintains that the recent U.N. resolution does not require an end to the Kaesong project or to a tourism venture at Kumgang. But Lefkowitz urged the ROK to "take a hard look" at whether these projects are "promoting an improvement in the lives of all North Koreans."

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5. DPRK Banking

Korea Times ("PYONGYANG OPENED 3 BANK ACCOUNTS", 2006-10-16) reported that the DPRK has opened at least three bank accounts since its account at the Banco Delta Asia (BDA) was frozen in September last year., the reported yesterday. A report by the ROK National Intelligence Service (NIS) said that the three banks are Sberbank of Russia, Vietcombank of Vietnam and Golomt Bank of Mongolia. Stuart Levey, the U.S. Treasury Department’s undersecretary for terrorism and financial intelligence is trying to close the account in Vietnam, the report said. As of the end of August, Asian and European banks, including the Bank of China and the United Overseas Bank of Singapore, suspended the DPRK's accounts.

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6. Rise of DPRK Military Influence

Joong Ang Ilbo ("IN SHADOWS, KIM JONG-IL ADVISORS PUSH A HARD LINE", 2006-10-16) reported that ROK intelligence sources and DPRK experts say hardline military officials have continued to gain power in the DPRK, while diplomats who focused on international negotiations have been pushed out. Sources named three officials as possibly leading the nuclear brinkmanship: Pak Jae-kyong, deputy political bureau chief of the North Korean People's Army; Hyon Chol-hae, another deputy chief in the politburo of the military and Lee Myong-su, deputy operations bureau chief. "To maintain the regime, they argue that the North must possess nuclear weapons programs, escalating the nuclear crisis," suggests Nam Sung-wook, a professor of North Korea studies at Korea University. "After creating the atmosphere, they probably got the confirmation from Mr. Kim," Mr. Nam said. Mr. Pak and Mr. Hyon gained prominence by assisting Mr. Kim in his bid to gain full control over the military. The military gained more power after the United States strengthened its financial sanctions on the DPRK. Foreign Ministry diplomats have been questioned about their responsibility, DPRK watchers said. Han Song-ryol, who served as the DPRK deputy ambassador at the United Nations and also led negotiations with the United States, was called back to his homeland late last month. Observers said the abrupt return of Mr. Han could indicate the subsiding influence of the doves. Selig Harrison, director of the Asia Program at the Center for International Policy, recently visited the DPRK, and he said the hardliners gained power after the U.S.-imposed financial sanctions. He said such a change worsened the peaceful resolution of the nuclear crisis.

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7. ROK Debate over Inter-Korean Spending

Joong Ang Ilbo ("MINISTRY: NORTH GOT $1 BILLION SINCE 1998", 2006-10-18) reported that the ROK Unification Ministry defended itself against accusations that the Roh Moo-hyun administration and its predecessor, that of Kim Dae-jung, were at least partly responsible for giving the North the cash it needed to fund its nuclear weapons programs. Ministry data released yesterday said that the ROK Korea sent nearly $1 billion in cash to the DPRK from March 1998 until August of this year. The ministry said those payments were in connection with "legitimate economic activities," including the Kumgang tourism project, Kaesong related ventures and contributions to the KEDO Light Water Reactors. The Roh administration is in bitter dispute with opposition over the exact numbers and whether there was any way to truly control how the DPRK "spent the money."

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8. ROK-Russia Energy Trade

Joongang Ilbo ("KOREA TURNS TO RUSSIA TO SHORE UP GAS SUPPLY", 2006-10-17) reported that the ROK and Russia yesterday were set to sign an agreement that would lead to increased sales of natural gas to the ROK and cooperation on joint projects between the two nations, the energy ministry in Seoul said. OAO Gazprom, the world's biggest natural gas producer, and Korea Gas Corp., the world's biggest buyer of LNG, have agreed to work out details of the accord, the ministry said in a statement.

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9. Nuclear Weapons Proliferation

The Associated Press ("30 MORE STATES COULD OPT FOR NUCLEAR ARMS", 2006-10-17) reported that the head of the U.N. nuclear agency warned that as many as about 30 additional countries could soon have technology that would let them produce atomic weapons "in a very short time," joining the nine states known or suspected to have such arms. Speaking at a conference on tightening controls against nuclear proliferation, International Atomic Energy Agency chief Mohamed ElBaradei said more nations were "hedging their bets" by developing technology that is at the core of peaceful nuclear energy programs but could be switched to making weapons.

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10. Japan Environment

Reuters ("JAPAN'S KYOTO GAP WIDENS AS EMISSIONS RISE ", 2006-10-17) reported that Japan's greenhouse gas emissions rose 0.6 percent in the fiscal year to March as oil consumption for heating climbed, taking it further from its Kyoto Protocol target to cut pollution, the government said. The increase may be a further blow to the global pact to cut emissions of greenhouse gases that are blamed for global warming, as most European countries are lagging Kyoto targets, and may be an embarrassment to Japan, where the pact was signed.

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11. PRC Web Control

The Associated Press ("CHINESE CITY TO FINE WEB SATIRISTS", 2006-10-17) reported that a major PRC city is threatening to fine Web surfers up to $625 for online defamation amid a surge in short satirical Internet films, an official news report said. The new rules enacted in Chongqing, an industrial city in the PRC's southwest, are against "online defamation". The rules target Web users "who spread information or remarks defaming others, launch personal attacks or damage others' reputations online," the official Xinhua News Agency said.

(return to top) The New York Times ("CHINESE GOVERNMENT RELAXES ITS TOTAL BAN ON WIKIPEDIA", 2006-10-17) reported that the PRC government last week appeared to lift its block on the English-language version of the online encyclopedia Wikipedia, an unexpected move that comes almost a year to the day when access was first denied. The Chinese-language site, however, remains blocked within the PRC. (return to top)

12. PRC AIDS Issue

Reuters ("CHINA BECOMING "LIKE AFRICA" WITH AIDS SCOURGE ", 2006-10-17) reported that AIDS in the PRC has spread beyond high risk groups such as injecting drug users, prostitutes and homosexuals and the country is becoming "like Africa" in how the virus is transmitted, a senior health official says. "There are 190 new HIV infections every day ... and one percent of all pregnant women in China are infected," said Hao Yang, deputy director general of the bureau of diseases prevention and control at the Ministry of Health. "That is a very high percentage. It is a generalized epidemic," he told Reuters.

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