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1. Experts on DPRK Nuclear Test

New York Times ("NORTH KOREANS SAY THEY PLAN A NUCLEAR TEST ", 2006-10-03) reported that DPRK experts inside and outside the Bush administration said DPRK's announcement that it

plans to undertake a nuclear test was a negotiating ploy, intended to force the White House into lifting economic sanctions and holding one-on-one talks. American intelligence officials said they saw no signs that a test was imminent. But they cautioned that two weeks ago, American spy satellites picked up evidence of indeterminate activity around what is thought to be the main test site. It was unclear to them whether the activity was part of plans for a test, or perhaps a feint related to last month's visit to Washington by ROK President Roh Moo-hyun. At that meeting, Roh said the event would "change the nature" of the ROK's policy of economic engagement with the DPRK. But the two leaders did not appear to have a coordinated strategy, and a senior Asian diplomat in Washington said Tuesday that "no one is quite sure how to respond" if the test goes ahead.

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2. US on DPRK Nuclear Test

Washington Post ("N. KOREAN MOVE COMES AMID BID FOR TALKS", 2006-10-04) reported that the DPRK's announcement came just as the United States, along with the ROK, was launching a new effort to persuade the government in Pyongyang to return to talks. Top aides to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice have been shaping the new approach, which began after a summit meeting last month between President Bush and ROK President Roh Moo Hyun. But US officials said yesterday that the government in Pyongyang, which closely monitors US statements, appears to have concluded that there is no benefit in reaching a deal. Some analysts suggested that the DPRK is bluffing to force the United States to begin bilateral negotiations, something the Bush administration has rejected as being a reward for bad behavior. Instead, Pyongyang's gambit could embolden hawks in the administration who advocate confronting the DPRK with a stepped-up campaign of isolation and sanctions, perhaps even a naval blockade. Some officials have privately argued that a nuclear test by DPRK would be a clarifying event that would make the problem apparent to the rest of the world.

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3. ROK-US Intel Cooperation on DPRK Nuclear Test

Korea Herald ("SEOUL, US MONITOR TEST SITES", 2006-10-04) reported that US and ROK intelligence authorities are on alert for any signs of "provocative activities" by the DPRK following its threat to conduct a nuclear test Tuesday. Experts and media reports have focused on Gilju in North Hamgyeong Province and Hagap, Mount Mumyeong and Gimdangol in Jagang Province as the renegade state's possible underground test sites. The most feasible candidate is Gilju, which the ROK and the United States have kept under close observation since the 1990s, after recognizing the DPRK's construction of a pit in a mountainous valley. However, all acquired intelligence has been dependent on statements by DPR Korean defectors without satisfactory verification. Some analysts said the DPRK may conduct nuclear tests in an unknown place other than those widely suspected sites.

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4. Six Party Talks Diplomacy

Korea Times ("ROH TO MEET ABE, HU", 2006-10-04) reported that President Roh Moo-hyun will hold summits with Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and China's President Hu Jintao next week to discuss the DPRK nuclear threat and other international and bilateral issues. Chong Wa Dae announced Roh will meet with Abe on Oct. 9 in Seoul. Before arriving in Seoul, Abe will visit Beijing

on Oct. 8 for talks with Hu. In the upcoming summit with Hu, Roh is expected to ask the PRC to persuade the DPRK not to carry out a nuclear test and play a more active role in drawing it back to the six-party talks. Roh is also expected to make efforts to calm Japan down and try to reaffirm the previous Seoul-Tokyo agreement on a "diplomacy-first" principle when he meets with Abe.

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5. US - ROK Trade Relations

Joongang Ilbo ("INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY PART OF FTA TALKS SET FOR JEJU", 2006-10-04) reported that the ROK and the US will discuss intellectual property issues when their free trade talks resume this month, with the latter poised to demand tougher regulations to increase its profits in the ROK, cultural officials said. The intellectual property issue has shown almost no progress during the past three rounds of talks, which have focused on any of the other 15 items on the agenda such as agriculture, automobiles and pharmaceuticals.

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6. UNSG Election

Agence France-Presse ("SECURITY COUNCIL TO MEET TO ENDORSE BAN KI-MOON AS NEXT UN LEADER", 2006-10-04) reported that the United Nations Security Council will meet next Monday to formally endorse ROK Foreign Minister Ban Ki-Moon as its choice to become the next UN secretary general, its president said. Japan's UN Ambassador Kenzo Oshima, the council president for October, made the announcement.

(return to top) The Associated Press ("BAN VOWS TO REFORM U.N. IF GIVEN TOP JOB ", 2006-1--04) reported that Ban Ki-moon, the clear favorite to become the next U.N. secretary-general, vowed to pursue crucial reforms of the world body if elected and to seek a peaceful resolution to the DPRK's nuclear standoff. "The U.N. has a great task to exercise a more positive, efficient and effective leadership to manage well the challenges and tasks of the 21st century through reform," Ban said. "If I become the secretary-general, I will exert greatest efforts for this through close cooperation with the U.N. member countries." (return to top)

7. Japan - PRC, ROK Relations

Reuters ("JAPAN SAYS PM ABE TO VISIT CHINA, S.KOREA OCT 8-9", 2006-10-04) reported that Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe will visit the PRC on October 8 and the ROK the next day for talks with their leaders in a bid to repair ties frayed by disputes over their bitter wartime past, but the DPRK's nuclear threat looks set to grab a prominent place on the agenda. Abe will meet PRC President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao in Beijing on October 8 and then fly to the ROK for talks with President Roh Moo-hyun on Monday.

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8. US, PRC Maritime Competition

Agence France-Presse ("US, CHINA, INDIA FLEX MUSCLE OVER ENERGY-CRITICAL SEA LANES ", 2006-10-04) reported that the US, PRC and India are moving to assert control over the sea lanes through which they receive critical energy supplies amid fears in Beijing of a US blockade of the Malacca Strait in the event of a crisis over Taiwan, experts said. The US at present has vast control

over the major so-called "choke points" on the world's sea lanes, said experts at a recent forum. Almost all of the PRC's energy imports are obtained through sea and it is worried the US could hold its oil supply hostage.

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9. PRC Anti-Corruption Measures

The New York Times ("IN GRAFT INQUIRY, CHINESE SEE A SHAKE-UP COMING", 2006-10-04) reported that when Shanghai's party boss was detained in an anticorruption probe last week, the PRC were rattled by news of the first purge of a high-ranking Communist Party leader since 1995. But the investigation's scope and its ultimate goals are wider, as the party's two most powerful officials aim to shake up the leadership and wipe out resistance to their policy agenda, party officials and analysts say.

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