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I. United States

1. ROK on DPRK Multilateral Talks

Agence France-Presse ("NUCLEAR CRISIS TALKS COULD BE DELAYED TO MID-YEAR: SEOUL," 01/06/04) reported that the ROK is saying nuclear crisis talks could be pushed back to the middle of the year as the DPRK and the US hardened their positions. "I hope the talks will be held in the first half of this year at the latest," ROK Foreign Minister Yoon Young-Kwan told journalists on his way to a cabinet meeting at the presidential office. Yoon was speaking after Washington rejected Pyongyang's latest request for significant concessions in return for a nuclear freeze and indicated how wide a gap remained to be bridged before talks can take place. The foreign minister said scheduling problems among the six participating nations effectively ruled out a hoped-for January date. But he gave no clue as to why a new round could be delayed until June or later. However, a

senior Russia diplomat who attended the initial round of talks in Beijing in August last year blamed intransigence on the part of both the US and North Korea. "The reasons are the same old ones -- mistrust and very high demands set by both sides," Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Losyukov stated.

2. US on DPRK Nuclear Offer

Agence France-Presse ("POWELL PUTS POSITIVE SPIN ON NORTH KOREA NUCLEAR OFFER," 01/06/04) reported that US Secretary of State Colin Powell said he was encouraged by the DPRK's offer not to produce or test nuclear weapons, in unusually upbeat comments which raised fresh hopes for a breakthrough in the crisis. "This is an interesting step on their part, a positive step, and we hope that it will allow us to move more rapidly to six-party framework talks," Powell told reporters. "I am encouraged, I am encouraged by the statement the North Koreans made," he said. The DPRK offered earlier to refrain from testing and producing nuclear weapons in what it said was a "bold concession" to the US. The offer came as two unofficial US delegations arrived in Pyongyang hoping for a tour of the Yongbyon nuclear complex. Powell explained, "Because we're not sitting at a table, does not mean we have not been talking to each other, and a lot of papers have gone back and forth," he said. "We are in touch with our four partners in this effort and some of our partners are directly in touch with North Korea. So we've been doing a lot." The White House was less upbeat than Powell on the DPRK's statement. "I think it would be positive for North Korea to return to those six-party talks, so we can discuss how they go about ending their nuclear weapons program," said spokesman Scott McClellan. Some observers believe that Powell's State Department is much keener to enter dialogue with the DPRK than elements of the White House and Pentagon political establishment. Bush administration officials insist they are on the same page on DPRK policy.

3. US DPRK Delegation

The Associated Press (Yusof Abdul-Rahman, "US GROUP HEADS TO NORTH KOREA," Beijing, 01/06/04) reported that an unofficial delegation of Americans flew to the DPRK on Tuesday as part of what one called a visit to increase understanding - and perhaps offset the persisting standoff between the two nations over Pyongyang's nuclear program. The visit began on the same day that the DPRK offered to refrain from testing and producing nuclear weapons as "one more bold concession" in trying to rekindle six-nation talks on the standoff. It also said it was willing to halt its nuclear activities for peaceful purposes. The American group, including a former government official and a retired academic, passed through Beijing on Tuesday morning en route to the DPRK capital for its five-day stay. "It's a very private visit. We're not representing the US government or anyone else," said Jack Pritchard, once a member of former President Bush's National Security Council staff and a one-time State Department official. "We're going in as private citizens. We'll come out Saturday and you can mob us then," Pritchard told reporters at Beijing's Capital Airport.

4. Howard Dean on Bush DPRK Policy

The Associated Press (Ron Fournier, "DEAN BLASTS BUSH ON NORTH KOREA POLICY," Des Moines, 01/06/04) reported that Howard Dean accused President Bush of pursuing a policy that will "allow North Korea to become a nuclear power" on Tuesday, as a Democratic presidential debate turned into an all-out assault on President Bush's foreign policy. While Dean hit Bush on the DPRK, Sen. John Kerry of Massachusetts said the president has failed to give enough emphasis to nuclear nonproliferation. Sen. Joe Lieberman of Connecticut said Bush has been "woefully disengaged" from efforts to reconcile India and Pakistan, two countries at dagger-point on the Asian subcontinent. For

his part, Rep. Dick Gephardt of Missouri said that if he wins the White House, he would reverse Bush's program to develop of tactical nuclear weapons and limit work on a missile defense shield to research, at least for the time being. Dean, whose early opposition to the war in Iraq helped power his rise to prominence in the race, sharply faulted Bush's handling of North Korea. By refusing to engage in direct talks with the DPRK government, he said "This president is about to allow North Korea to become a nuclear power." He said the danger is not so much that the government will develop nuclear weapons, but "they will do what Pakistan is accused of, selling technology for hard currency." "That is a major national security threat," he said. The two-hour debate in the Iowa capital unfolded less than two weeks before the state's kickoff caucuses, the first delegate-selection event of the primary nominating season.

5. PRC-Japan Relations

Agence France-Presse ("PRC RHETORIC ON JAPAN'S WAR GUILT MIXES EMOTIONS, COOL CALCULATION," 01/06/03) reported that more than 58 years after the cessation of hostilities, resentment against the Japanese runs deep in China, and the government in Beijing often takes the lead in reminding the island nation of its imperialist history. It is as much about China's concern that Japan is becoming a more active player in East Asia, as it is about the 1937-45 war, which Beijing says claimed the lives of 35 million PRC. "Much of the invective that comes out of Beijing over the development of Japan's power has to with the future rather than the past," said Robert Karniol, Asia-Pacific editor for Jane's Defence Weekly. Signs are that a growing number of PRC scholars and diplomats are getting frustrated with the constant focus on history at a time when more urgent matters should be dealt with in the Sino-Japanese relationship. Several recent incidents highlight the focus on history in relations between the two countries. The PRC's reaction was immediate and hard-hitting after Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi spent New Year's Day visiting Tokyo's Yasukuni shrine, which honors the nation's war dead, including 14 Class A war criminals. Only hours afterwards, the PRC's foreign ministry summoned Japan's charge d'affaires, warning him bilateral ties could be hurt. This comes on top of other issues, such as an orgy in south PRC involving hundreds of Japanese tourists and local prostitutes which took place on a sensitive war anniversary. "From the PRC perspective, there's a feeling that the Japanese don't understand how seriously the historical issues are taken by the PRC," said Brian Bridges, a political scientist at Hong Kong's Lingnan University. "The feeling is very strong in the PRC leadership that the Japanese need to apologize properly and behave properly." Lecturing the Japanese about their wartime guilt seems to have little impact in Tokyo -- it was Koizumi's fourth visit to the shrine as prime minister -- but it may lead to more tangible political gain in other parts of Asia. "It provides ways in which China can demonstrate to the rest of the region that Japan is not fit for the leadership role," said Bridges. But the constant focus on single issues seems to upset some professionals in the PRC's foreign service. "It's a basic characteristic of Sino-Japanese ties that they have to progress amid constant noise and interference," Yang Zhenya, former PRC ambassador to Japan said in an interview with China Youth Daily. "We should realize that some of the events that get play in the newspapers do not really reflect the broad development of ties," he said.

6. PRC Government-Media Relations

Agence France-Presse ("CHINA TO BE MORE RESPONSIVE TO DOMESTIC, INTERNATIONAL MEDIA: GOVERNMENT," 01/05/03) reported that the PRC's cabinet plans to usher in a new era of responsiveness to the news media by designating more government spokespersons and holding more press conferences. The State Council's Information Office (SCIO) will this year set up a three-tier system which will feature spokespersons for the State Council, as well as all central government ministries and provincial governments, the China Daily said. "We'll strive to see that the SCIO will

strengthen guidance on the effort nationwide and train more spokespersons from ministries and provincial governments this year to help increase the number, quality and authority of news conferences at the three levels," said Zhao Qizheng, minister of the SCIO. Domestic and international media, however, still face difficulties trying to obtain government information on anything ranging from the SARS disease to the recent launch of the PRC's first manned space flight. The government however is starting to recognize the need to disseminate information in a timely manner, often to dispel rumors and control public perceptions. Zhao said the spokespersons should treat journalists "decently" -- not as "subordinates," "friends or enemies" but as "challengers in a tennis game." Police departments nationwide will also begin issuing news releases and meeting with reporters, with those in the provincial level to hold press conferences at least once a month, the Xinhua news agency announced last week.

7. PRC Domestic Economy

Reuters (James Kynge ("CHINA TO INJECT $45BN TO PROP UP STATE BANKS," Beijing, 01/06/04) reported that in Beijing, the PRC has begun an aggressive program to recapitalise its insolvent state banks, injecting $45bn from its vast stash of foreign exchange reserves into two large banks that are preparing to list on stock markets overseas next year. Officials said the capital injection, announced on Tuesday but completed in secret on December 31, was the first step in a strategy that envisages more than $100bn in state funds being spent on strengthening the "big four" state banks - the weakest link in China's booming economy. "The proposal was for more than $100bn to be earmarked for recapitalisation," one senior financial official told the Financial Times. He added that by injecting money from its $403bn in foreign reserves, the PRC was killing two birds with one stone - reviving its banks and undermining arguments for a revaluation of the renminbi, the PRC currency. The two banks to benefit are China Construction Bank (CCB) and Bank of China (BOC), each of which received $22.5bn.

8. PRC SARS Outbreak

Agence France-Presse ("CHINA SLAUGHTERS CIVET CATS AS PATIENT IN NEW SARS OUTBREAK RECOVERS," 01/06/04) reported that the patient confirmed as the PRC's first SARS case in six months was declared fully recovered as a mass slaughter of the civet cats suspected of transmitting the disease to humans got underway. A 32-year-old television researcher had been officially confirmed as having contracted Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) on Monday after being hospitalised in the southern city of Guangzhou in late December. Xinhua cited officials as saying the patient's condition had improved and he now met three key criteria for being released, with no symptoms, no fever for more than a week, and x-rays revealing no shadows in the lung area. The case baffled PRC and international experts, who conducted a battery of tests at foreign and domestic laboratories before finally confirming the case as SARS. Scientists had earlier discovered civet cats -- which are eaten as a culinary delicacy in parts of China -- had a similar virus to the victim in the latest confirmed case, and on Monday ordered a cull of the animals. A mass slaughter of civets was in full swing Tuesday despite concern from the World Health Organisation (WHO) the killings could increase rather than stop the spread of the disease. Hundreds of the weasel-like animals -- confiscated from farms, wildlife markets and restaurants in southern China's Guangdong province -- were being put into vats filled with disinfectant and drowned before being burned.

9. Japan Domestic Politics

Agence France-Presse ("JAPANESE PARLIAMENT SESSION TO START JANUARY 19; ELECTION

LIKELY ON JULY 11," 01/06/04) reported that the ordinary session of Japan's parliament, known as the Diet, will convene on January 19 and run until June 16. "The decision was made at a meeting of the government and the ruling coalition parties," spokeswoman at the Prime Minister's Official Residence said. Parliamentary debate is likely to focus on dispatching of Japanese troops to Iraq, the upcoming fiscal 2004 budget and a supplementary budget for the current year to March, local reports said. The cabinet of Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi will officially discuss the decision and is expected to approve it, the spokeswoman said. "I do not think we can extend (the scheduled term for the session) because of the upcoming upper house election," Koizumi was quoted as telling the meeting of the government and ruling coalition officials. Given the scheduled parliament session, the election for 121 of the 247 seats in the legislative upper house is likely to be held on July 11, local media reported.

10. Japan Military Cuts

Agence France-Presse ("JAPAN MULLING 30PCT CUT IN NUMBER OF TANKS, ARTILLERY: REPORT," 01/06/04) reported that the Japanese government is considering a cut of about 30 percent in the number of tanks and artillery, while boosting ground forces personnel by more than 5,000, a news report says. In the new framework of the National Defense Program Outline, the government is also considering dispensing with the guideline under which Japan possesses the minimum necessary defense capability, the Yomiuri Shimbun newspaper said, citing a government source. Japan currently has about 148,000 ground troops, and "we are trying to adjust the number so that we can effectively deal with new types of security concerns", an army spokesman said, without commenting directly on the Yomiuri report. Since its establishment in 1954, the military has been organized and equipped primarily to counter the threat of Soviet invasion. The official said the Ground Self Defense Force, as the army is officially termed, has about 1,080 tanks along with 900 artillery pieces. Under the new defense framework, those would be cut to about 600 to 650 each, the Yomiuri said. Defense Agency officials also declined to comment on the Yomiuri report. International co-operative tasks, such as UN peacekeeping operations, will be promoted from incidental duties of Japanese soldiers to their primary duties under the new framework, the Yomiuri said. "These changes signify the most drastic review of the duties of the SDF (Self Defense Forces) since it was established in 1954," the Yomiuri said. Japanese defense officials plan to seek 4.96 trillion yen (46 billion dollars) -- equivalent to roughly one percent of gross domestic product -- in overall defense spending for the year to March 2005, including the navy and air force. The figure also includes 142.3 billion yen as part of a four-year plan to build up the ballistic missile defense system.

11. Japan on Iraq Reconstruction

Agence France-Presse ("KOIZUMI PRIORITIZES IRAQ RECONSTRUCTION, DOMESTIC REFORM," 01/06/04) reported that Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi said in his New Year address that Japan would do its utmost to help build a democratic Iraq, while pushing ahead with economic reforms in the coming year. "Japan will help the Iraqi people build a democratic government as soon as possible with their own hands. Japan will give as much help as we can to realize that goal," Koizumi told a news conference Monday. "We will provide our assistance based on the view that stability in the Middle East will lead to global peace and stability," he added. A 15-member team from Japan's air force has been in Kuwait since late December, to pave the way for shipment of goods and humanitarian aid to southern Iraq as part of the overall estimated 1,000-strong deployment to the region. The government is considering sending an advance party from the army on January 16 to prepare for Japan's first dispatch of troops since World War II to a country where fighting is still underway, the Yomiuri Shimbun newspaper said, citing a government source.

The NAPSNet Daily Report aims to serve as a forum for dialogue and exchange among peace and security specialists. Conventions for readers and a list of acronyms and abbreviations are available to all recipients. For descriptions of the world wide web sites used to gather information for this report, or for more information on web sites with related information, see the collection of other NAPSNet resources.
We invite you to reply to today's report, and we welcome commentary or papers for distribution to the network.

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