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I. NAPSNet

1. DPRK Economy

Yonhap News Service (Kim Hyun, "LUNAR NEW YEAR CELEBRATED IN DPRK", Seoul, 2009/01/26) reported that DPRK citizens observed the Lunar New Year holiday on Monday, exchanging well-wishing remarks and playing folk games, as the nation continued traditional celebrations despite deep economic woes. However, rations diminished as many factories remain closed due to the shortage of electricity and resources.

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2. Inter-Korean Relations

United Press International ("DPRK SAYS SEOUL PLANS INVASION", Pyongyang, 2009/01/26) reported that DPRK has accused ROK of holding military exercises to prepare for a war against it and warned it would "wipe out" invaders. In a commentary published by the DPRK's cabinet, officials said Seoul's "severe winter training" was "aimed to deliberately get on the nerves of the army __ and people of the DPRK in a bid to invent a pretext for provoking a war of aggression against it." Seoul officials told Yonhap the winter training exercises were merely part of its military's regular training scheduled throughout the year.

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3. DPRK Leadership

Yonhap ("N. KOREAN LEADER SHOWS UP AT LUNAR NEW YEAR CONCERT", Seoul, 2009/01/27) reported that DPRK leader Kim Jong-il enjoyed a performance given by the DPRK's state merited chorus on the occasion of the lunar New Year on Monday, Korean Central News Agency reported on Tuesday. The report said that Kim Ki-nam, secretary of the Workers' Party of Korea's (WPK) Central Committee and Jang Song-thaek and Kim Yang-gon, department directors of the WPK Central Committee, were among the audience.

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4. ROK Environment

JoongAng Ilbo (Ko Hyun-kohn, Kim Sun-ha, "SEOMJIN MAY JOIN 4 RIVER PROJECT", 2009/01/24) reported that the government is considering adding the Seomjin to the sweeping four-rivers renovation project. The Seomjin River flows through three regions - South Jeolla, North Jeolla and South Gyeongsang - and passes through 15 cities and counties.The Seomjin River was left out of the initial plan, as it has seen less environmental damage than the other four rivers.

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5. ROK Energy

Korea Herald (Cho Chung-un, "SEOUL TO INVEST 6 TRILLION WON IN GREEN ENERGY", 2009/01/26) reported that the government yesterday announced a comprehensive roadmap on green energy development. The government and 73 local companies will support 15 key sectors in green energy projects to develop their technology up to that of advanced countries and to eventually create a new market for the industry. The list of green energy sectors include solar and nuclear energy sectors, wind power, greenhouse gas absorption, high tech energy storage and batteries.

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6. ROK-EU Trade Relations

Pacific Shipper ("EU REVIVES ROK TALKS", 2009/01/26) reported that ROK and the European Union have launched top-level trade talks in an effort to resolve remaining barriers to a free-trade agreement including differences over industrial tariffs, automobiles and rules of origin.

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7. ROK-New Zealand Relations

Yonhap News ("S. KOREA, NEW ZEALAND AGREE TO COOPERATE IN ENERGY, TECH, CULTURE", 2009/01/26) reported that the ROK and New Zealand agreed to strengthen cooperation in energy, technology and cultural sectors in a bid to foster more productive relations between the two countries, Seoul officials said. The agreement was made earlier between New Zealand's foreign minister Murray McCully and the ROK's Foreign Affairs and Trade Minister Yu

Myung-hwan who is currently visiting the country, according to ministry officials.

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8. Japan Comfort Women Issue

United Press International ("BILL WOULD EXTEND CLAIM OF SEX SLAVES", Seoul, 2009/01/26) reported that a bill before ROK lawmakers would let families of sex slaves from World War II continue to press the Japanese government for compensation. Under the bill, remaining ROK sex slaves could transfer their right to claim compensation to trusted relatives or civic groups who would continue to press for an apology and financial compensation from Japan.

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9. Japan-Bulgaria Relations

Kyodo News ("JAPAN, BULGARIA AGREE TO BOOST ECONOMIC TIES, COOPERATE ON CLIMATE", Tokyo, 2009/01/26) reported that Japanese Prime Minister Taro Aso and Bulgarian President Georgi Parvanov agreed Monday on the importance of boosting bilateral trade and investment, and on the need to cooperate on establishing a new framework for tackling climate change, according to Japanese Foreign Ministry officials.

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10. Japan Politics

The Financial Times ("JAPAN'S PM SUFFERS FRESH POLL BLOW", 2009/01/26) reported that Taro Aso, Japan's beleaguered prime minister, suffered a further blow to his leadership when an opinion poll reported nearly twice as many people planned to vote for the opposition Democratic Party of Japan as would back his long-ruling Liberal Democrats. The poll by the Nikkei business newspaper and TV Tokyo found 40 per cent of voters intended to back the DPJ over the LDP in the next general election – which Mr Aso must call by September – compared with just 21 per cent for the LDP.

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11. Japan Government

Kyodo News ("JCP INCREASING MEMBERSHIP AMID SLUMPING EMPLOYMENT SITUATION", Tokyo, 2009/01/26) reported that the number of Japanese Communist Party members increased in December 2008 for the 14th straight month, possibly due to its efforts to help workers and unemployed people struggling in the slumping employment situation, an executive of the party said Monday.

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12. Japan Whaling Issue

Associated Press (Rod McGuirk, "OFFICIALS CONFIRM TALKS ON JAPANESE WHALING DEAL", Canberra, 2009/01/27) reported that the International Whaling Commission is considering a plan to allow Japan to hunt whales locally in return for scaling back its activities in the Antarctic Ocean , officials said Tuesday. Australian Foreign Minister Stephen Smith confirmed that his government was involved in discussions on the plan. He added, however, that Australia was "a long way" from accepting the deal. "Our long-term objective is for the Japanese to cease whaling altogether," Smith told Australian Broadcasting Corp. television.

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13. Japan-US Relations

United Press International ("SOURCES: NYE TO BE NAMED U.S. JAPAN ENVOY", Tokyo, 2009/01/25) reported that former U.S. Assistant Defense Secretary Joseph Nye __ has been informally designated as the next U.S. ambassador to Japan, sources say. Nye has reportedly said he would accept the post. Nye is a proponent of the "soft power" diplomatic approach, which places importance on taking into account different cultures and values.

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14. Sino-Japan Relations

Kyodo News ("JAPAN'S TOP DEFENSE OFFICIAL URGES PRC TO WORK ON TRANSPARENCY", Tokyo,) reported that Japan's top Defense Ministry bureaucrat on Monday urged PRC to make its defense policy more transparent, saying that doing so would help peace and stability in the region.The official noted that he still sees as insufficient details in the biennial paper, such as defense-budget breakdowns, equipment quantities and procurement plans.''While there may have been measured progress overall, it is still a far cry from what we have disclosed,'' he told a regular news conference.

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15. Sino-EU Relations

Reuters (Chris Buckley , "PRC PREMIER'S GIFTS TO EUROPE COME WITH PRICE-TAGS", Beijing, 2009/01/26) reported that PRC's Premier flies to Europe on Tuesday bearing vows of support for its crisis-rattled economies, in a bridge-mending visit that shows Beijing's potential to use its financial muscle for diplomatic sway. "China wants to show it's ready for a fresh start after the recent troubles, ready to expand communication and coordination, especially over the financial crisis."

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16. Sino-US Trade Relations

Agence France Press ("WTO BACKS US IN COPYRIGHT DISPUTE WITH PRC", Geneva, 2009/01/26) reported that the World Trade Organization on Monday ruled against PRC in a copyright protection dispute with the United States -- a move hailed by Washington as "an important victory." "The

Panel recommends ... that China bring the Copyright Law and the Customs measures into conformity with its obligations," the WTO dispute settlement panel said in the ruling.

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17. PRC Arms Trade

Korea Times (Andrei Chang, "PRC EXPANDING AFRICAN ARMS SALES", Hong Kong, 2009/01/26) reported that increasing quantities of PRC-made military equipment have been finding their way to Africa, traded for oil, mineral resources and even fishing rights. Among the most popular PRC military exports to Africa are the J-7, K-8 and Y-12 aircraft, which are relatively inexpensive and easy to operate.

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18. PRC Humanitarian Operations

The Washington Times (Chris O'Brien, "CHINA TRIES 'SOFT POWER' WITH AID SHIP", 2009/01/26) reported that the PRC's military has a new weapon in the country's soft-power arsenal that copies a technique long used by the United States - a 10,000-ton hospital ship to be deployed for humanitarian purposes in Asia and beyond. The vessel, dubbed Ship 866, is meant to soften the PRC's image overseas and allay concerns among its neighbors over its navy's growing strength, while at the same time adding to its military capabilities, analysts say.

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19. PRC Holiday Travel

The Los Angeles Times (Barbara Demick , "CORRUPTION DERAILS TRAVEL PLANS FOR MANY CHINESE", Wuhan, 2009/01/26) reported the railroad ticket business remains corrupt and staggeringly inefficient. Its dysfunction is most glaring at this time of year, when 200 million Chinese head to their hometowns for the Lunar New Year, which begins today. It is one of the biggest migrations in the world. Of all the forms of corruption in the PRC, the trade in train tickets is one of those that most frustrates ordinary people. It is not uncommon for people to spend two or three days at the station trying to buy tickets.

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20. PRC Climate Change

Associated Press (Joe McDonald and Charles J. Hanley , "PRC DAMS REVEAL FLAWS IN CLIMATE-CHANGE WEAPON", Xiaoxi, PRC, 2009/01/26) reported that the Xiaoxi hydroelectric dam is supposed to help a power company in distant Germany contribute to saving the climate — while putting lucrative "carbon credits" into the pockets of PRC developers. Companies thousands of miles away, such as Germany's coal-burning, carbon dioxide-spewing RWE electric utility, accomplish this by buying carbon credits the U.N. issues to clean-energy projects like Xiaoxi's. As critics point out, however, if those projects were going to be built anyway, the climate doesn't gain, but loses.

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21. PRC Earthquake

Reuters (Lucy Hornby, "THOUSANDS DISPLACED BY QUAKE IN XINJIANG, PRC", Beijing, 2009/01/26) reported that thousands of people have been made homeless by an earthquake on Sunday in remote Qapqal, in PRC's far western region of Xinjiang near the Kazakh border, the Xinhua news agency said on Monday. The earthquake, which measured 5.0 on the Richter scale, destroyed nearly 200 homes and damaged nearly 3,000 buildings on Sunday morning.

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22. PRC Energy

Xinhua News ("PRC TO STEP UP SOLAR ENERGY RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT", 2009/01/26) reported that the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) has launched an initiative to boost the development of solar energy technology, in a bid to turn it into a major energy source in PRC by 2050.

University of Leeds (Clare Elsley, "LEEDS-PRC COLLABORATION TO TACKLE ENERGY ISSUES", Leeds, UK, 2009/01/26) reported that the University of Leeds has announced a strategic research alliance with one of PRC's leading universities, Zhejiang University, to focus on some of today's key energy challenges. The alliance will operate under the name UoL-ZJU International Centre for Sustainable Energy Sciences and Technologies, addressing issues such as clean coal utilization, pollution control, carbon capture and sequestration, alternative fuels and development of new energy-related technologies .

Xinhua News ("ADB TO HELP PRC WITH CLEANER ENERGY", 2009/01/23) reported that the Asian Development Bank will provide three technical assistance grants totaling 2.8 million U.S. dollars to support PRC's efforts to reduce sulfur dioxide gas emissions, increase energy savings, and strengthen a fund that supports clean energy projects.

Xinhua News ("PRC TO SUBSIDIZE USE OF ENERGY-EFFICIENT VEHICLES IN PUBLIC SECTOR", Beijing, 2009/01/26) reported that PRC is to promote the use of energy-efficient and new-energy vehicles in public sector in 13 cities, the Ministry of Finance said Monday. The central government will offer one-off subsidy for the purchase of mixed-power, electric and fuel-cell vehicles.

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23. PRC Freedom of Religion

United Press International ("PASTORS SAY PRC EASING UP ON CHURCHES", Beijing, 2009/01/26) reported that Protestant pastors in PRC say they are negotiating a reconciliation with the government that would allow "house churches" to operate openly.

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24. PRC Population

Asian News International ("BEIJING POPULATION NEARS 17 MILLION, ONE IN FOUR ARE MIGRANTS", Beijing, 2009/01/26) reported that Beijing's population is nearing the 17 million mark, and according to demographic experts, one in four residents is a migrant from another country.

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25. PRC Bird Flu Outbreak

CNN ("CHINA CONFIRMS SIXTH BIRD FLU CASE THIS MONTH", 2009/01/26) reported that a 29-year-old man in southwest PRC is in critical condition after testing positive for bird flu, making him the country's sixth confirmed case of the virus this month, state media said. The man fell ill on January 15 in Guizhou province, and tested positive for the H5N1 virus on Sunday, the Xinhua news agency said.

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