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1. US on DPRK Nuclear Issue

Agence France-Presse ("NORTH KOREA NUCLEAR TALKS SLOW BUT PROGRESSING: US ENVOY", 2007-01-14) reported that international talks aimed at ending the DPRK's nuclear weapons programme are slow but progressing, top US envoy Christopher Hill said in a message posted on a Korean-English website. "It offers to refuge for those in need of instant gratification, but I do believe that we are making progress on denuclearizing the Korean peninsula."

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2. DPRK on Nuclear Test

ABS-CBNNEWS ("SECOND NORTH KOREA NUCLEAR TEST DEPENDS ON US: KYODO", 2007-0-15) reported that the DPRK's decision on whether to conduct a second nuclear test depends on the actions of the US, a DPRK official was quoted as saying by a Japanese lawmaker. Kyodo news agency reported. Taku Yamasaki, a former deputy leader of Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party, told a news conference following a five-day visit to the DPRK that the remarks were made by Song Il-ho, the DPRK's ambassador in charge of diplomatic normalization talks with Japan.

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3. US Stealth Fighter Deployment in the ROK

Chosun Ilbo ("U.S. STEALTH FIGHTERS ARRIVE IN GUNSAN", 2007-01-15) reported that a squadron of US Stealth fighter jets and airmen arrived at the US Forces Korea air base in Gunsan, North Jeolla Province Thursday. The Stealth fighters will participate in a joint drill between ROK and US forces scheduled for March. The USFK command dismissed speculations that the deployment was related to the DPRK nuclear standoff, saying it is part of the normal rotation schedule for the Air Expeditionary Forces.

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4. DPRK Security Drill

JoongAng Ilbo ("NORTH CONDUCTS EMERGENCY DRILL OF TOP SECURITY ", 2007-01-15) reported that several security organs directly in charge of the safety of the DPRK's leader, Kim Jong-il, conducted an emergency drill in Pyongyang on Friday, intelligence sources from the ROK and the US said. Military troops and tanks from the Pyongyang Defense Command were deployed rapidly while increased military communications were noted. The Escort Bureau, in charge of protecting Mr. Kim, also had a busy day. Intelligence officials in the ROK concluded that the drill was to prepare for any unforeseen changes inside the power structure of Kim Jong-il's inner circle.

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5. DPRK Leadership Succession

Donga Ilbo ("KIM JONG IL BANS SUCCESSION TALKS", 2007-01-11) reported that Kim Jong Il has banned discussions in Pyongyang's leadership concerning his successor, expressing his will to continue exercising real power as the prime leader for the long term. The report stated that late in October last year, right after the nuclear test, he proclaimed in front of the executives of the Workers' Party of Korea that "I can still work for a long time as the top leader. Even in my 80s or 90s, I still can (rule)." Mainichi Shimbun quoted an authority close to the Pyongyang regime who said that the executive members have interpreted Kim's words that he intends to stay in the frontline of decision-making for the next 15 years and wants nobody to talk about succession. The source commented that such discussions have totally disappeared afterwards. Meanwhile, the newspaper reported that in late November last year, Kim Jong Il issued orders to cancel celebration events on his own birthday (February 16) and only to commemorate his father Kim Il Sung's (April 15).

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6. Inter-Korean Relations

Donga Ilbo ("HIGH-LEVEL TALKS WITH NORTH POSSIBLE", 2007-01-15) reported that it was revealed on January 14 that the Ministry of Unification (MOU) is pushing ahead with a plan to hold inter-Korean summit talks to reach a breakthrough in inter-Korean relations, and plans to discuss the issue of abolishing the limitation on places South Koreans are able to visit in order to allow ROK people to visit facilities related to the DPRK's propaganda activities.

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7. Inter-Korean Industrial Project

Chosun Ilbo ("SEOUL REAFFIRMS INTER-KOREA BIZ COMPLEX SUPPORT", 2007-01-15) reported that the ROK's top official in charge of DPRK affairs has voiced the government's firm endorsement of a key inter-Korean project. Unification Minister Lee Jae-joung says business is good at a manufacturing base in the DPRK and talked of upcoming plans to promote the venture. Lee said, "The combined output from the Kaesong complex reached US\$89 million last year, and for the first time, monthly production broke the \$10 million mark in December."

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8. DPRK Disease Outbreak

Yonhap ("INFECTIOUS DISEASES PLAGUE N. KOREAN CITY: SOURCE", 2007-01-15) reported that four infectious diseases have stricken a DPRK city on the east coast, affecting up to 4,000 people, a source claimed. "Chongjin is overrun by scarlet fever, typhoid, typhus and paratyphoid. About 3,000 to 4,000 are suffering from the diseases," the source said, asking to remain anonymous. DPRK health authorities have halted railway operations to prevent the spread of disease and have imposed travel bans.

[\(return to top\)](#) RIA Novosti ("N. KOREA'S KIM JONG-IL OPOSED TO HANDSHAKES AS ALIEN, UNHYGIENIC", 2007-01-15) reported that the DPRK intends to disabuse its citizens of handshakes as a practice alien to Koreans, replacing it with a slight bow instead, a nationwide newspaper reported. Rodong Simnun quoted the country's leader as criticizing handshakes. He said a slight bow of the head is a more civilized and hygienic form of greeting in the DPRK. [\(return to top\)](#)

9. ASEAN on Energy, DPRK

Agence France-Presse ("ASIAN LEADERS MOVE ON TRADE, ENERGY ", 2007-01-15) reported that Asian leaders have agreed to push for freer trade and more secure energy supplies across the region, wrapping up a week of high-level diplomacy on everything from terrorism to the DPRK. The energy accord commits countries to reducing reliance on fossil fuels, opening up energy markets and trying to cut greenhouse gas emissions. Japan offered two billion dollars in aid to help nations with energy conservation. The 16 leaders also found common ground in an especially strong statement on the DPRK, saying the defiant regime needed to address international concern about food shortages and its past abductions of Japanese and other nationals.

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10. US-ROK Security Alliance

Chosun Ilbo ("KOREA WANTED IMMEDIATE TROOP CONTROL HANDOVER ", 2007-01-15) reported that the ROK government originally wanted to take over wartime operational command of ROK troops from the US immediately, a lawmaker has quoted the US Forces Korea commander as saying. But when the two countries started discussing the timetable for the control transfer, the US said both nations need time to prepare. However, when the US said that it could hand over full operational control in three years, the ROK changed its tune and insisted on leaving it until 2012.

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11. US-ROK Trade Relations

Reuters ("U.S.-SOUTH KOREA BATTLE CLOCK, PROTESTS OVER TRADE DEAL", 2007-01-15) reported that ROK and US negotiators, facing heated street protests, a history of troubled discussions and a ticking clock, started talks on Monday aimed at striking a bilateral free trade deal. The discussions on a free trade agreement (FTA) between the two with annual trade of about \$72 billion a year could be at a make-or-break stage, analysts said. The talks got off to a rough start with Seoul suspending discussions in key areas of US concern including automobiles and pharmaceuticals due to what it sees as Washington's lack of progress on easing its anti-dumping rules.

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12. ROK-Japan-PRC Relations

Agence France-Presse ("CHINA, JAPAN AND SKOREA SUMMIT FINDS COMMON GROUND ", 2007-01-15) reported that the PRC, Japan and the ROK have held their first summit together in two years, finding common ground on the DPRK and on mending their own fractured relations. "The three leaders expressed satisfaction with the recent development of relations," the statement said Sunday. It said the three had agreed to improve "coordination on major political and diplomatic issues involving the three countries as well as international and regional issues."

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13. Japan Defense Policy

Agence France-Presse ("JAPAN WON'T BECOME MILITARY POWER: DEFENCE MINISTER ", 2007-01-15) reported that Japan's defence minister has brushed aside concerns that the launch of its first full-fledged defence ministry since World War II would lead to the country becoming a military power. "There is a concern that military conscription would be introduced or [Japan] would become a military power," Fumio Kyuma, the nation's first post-war defence minister, told a television program. "But there is misunderstanding among people. Such things should never happen under the current constitution," he said. "There is no major change in our defence policies."

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14. Japan Bird Flu Outbreak

Agence France-Presse ("JAPAN BURNS 12,000 CHICKENS FOLLOWING BIRD FLU OUTBREAK", 2007-01-15) reported that local authorities in southwestern Japan have begun incinerating 12,000 dead chickens on a farm as part of efforts to stop the spread of a recent bird flu outbreak. On Saturday, the government confirmed the outbreak after 3,900 chickens were found dead at the farm in the prefecture, some 900 kilometers southwest of Tokyo.

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15. Japan Space Program

Agence France-Presse ("JAPAN SET TO CANCEL DELAYED MOON PROBE MISSION ", 2007-01-15) reported that Japan's space agency said it has recommended cancelling a much-delayed unmanned mission to the moon in the latest setback to the nation's ambitions to explore the final frontier. The Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) planned to call off its Lunar-A mission, which was intended to shed light on the moon's origin and evolution using a module to land on its surface, a spokesman said. "The mother ship was built 10 years ago and over the years it has been deteriorating, and it has come to a point where it can no longer be used," project manager Takashi Nakajima told AFP.

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