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1. Kim Jong-il's Trip to PRC

Reuters ("CHINA BLOCKS HOTEL AMID RUMORS OVER N.KOREA'S KIM", 2006-01-12) reported that the PRC authorities took over a hotel in the southern city of Guangzhou on Thursday and barred public access amid rumors DPRK leader Kim Jong-il is making a secret visit. "I am sorry, but the government has rented the whole hotel and in fact this morning we had to send our guests to other hotels," one employee told Reuters. "We will only open for regular business on the morning of the 16th." Asked if any special visitors were staying at the hotel, she said: "We don't know. We have not been told anything."

(return to top) Reuters ("KIM STILL IN NORTH KOREA - TASS REPORT", 2006-01-12) reported that according to Itar-Tass news agency, DPRK Kim Jong-il is at present in his country and the mystery person said to have crossed into the PRC may be a member of his family. Tass quoted an unnamed informed source in the Pyongyang, where the agency has a correspondent, as saying: "The leader, as far as I know, is at present in North Korea." (return to top) Donga Ilbo ("TRIP SECRECY MAY BE BOMB-FEAR RELATED ", 2006-01-12) reported that the DPRK leader Kim Jong-il arrived Shanghai in the PRC yesterday and toured the city's industrial facilities, according to news reports. "This is a really top-secret visit to China. No traces of Kim in China have been found," a RO Korean Embassy official in Beijing said. "This visit is being conducted in a more clandestine manner than ones in the past." Some say that Kim has been fearful of his safety ever since the issue of alleged DPRK counterfeiting of US currency emerged. (return to top)

2. US on Six Party Talks

Reuters ("US ENVOY IN CHINA AS RUMOURS ON N.KOREA'S KIM SWIRL", 2006-01-12) reported that the top US negotiator with the DPRK said in Beijing he would try to breathe life into stalled nuclear talks. "We're going to discuss a way forward on the six-party talks," Christopher Hill told reporters at the airport in Beijing, after holding similar talks in Seoul and Tokyo. "Obviously what we need is for all six parties to agree to a date." added Hill, who was due to meet his PRC counterpart, Wu Dawei.

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3. Clinton Aid on Six Party Talks

Washington Post ("CLINTON AIDE CALLS FOR PUSH ON N.KOREA TALKS", 2006-01-12) reported that the US needs to separate discussions on suspected DPRK illegal financial activity from its talks on ending Pyongyang's nuclear weapons programs, former senior Clinton administration official, Samuel Berger, said on Thursday. "Every responsible official in the South Korean and U.S. governments knows that North Korea has engaged in illicit activities and has a dismal record on human rights," said Berger, according to the text of a speech he was to deliver in Seoul to the East Asia Foundation. "But if we want to negotiate a resolution of the most critical security issue -- North Korea's nuclear capability and its potential to sell these weapons to terror groups around the world -- we must concentrate on that issue in the six-party talks, even as we deal with other issues which complicate and undermine the nuclear negotiation."

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4. US Intelligence Agency on DPRK

The New York Times ("NORTH KOREA AND IRAN WIN SPECIAL NOTICE AT SPY CENTER ", 2006-01-12) reported that the director of national intelligence, John D. Negroponte, has created new "mission managers" for Iran and the DPRK, adding those two countries to a short list of top-priority challenges for US intelligence agencies. The new managers for the DPRK will be responsible, among other things, for identifying and filling gaps in intelligence on those two countries, Mr. Negroponte's office said Wednesday in announcing the appointments. Joseph DeTrani, who has served most recently as the US special envoy to the six party talks, has been given the rank of ambassador and is taking on the DPRK portfolio.

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5. US on DPRK Counterfeiting

The Korea Times ("US TO PRESENT PROOF OF NK COUNTERFEITING", 2006-01-12) reported that US Treasury Department officials will soon visit Seoul to discuss the DPRK's alleged counterfeiting of US dollars, Alexander Vershbow, American ambassador to the ROK, said in Seoul on Thursday. "It is not 100 percent firm, but it's going to be probably on Jan. 22," he said at a forum hosted by the Korea Human Development Institute. The US team is expected to show Seoul the evidence, which allegedly led Washington to designate Banco Delta Asia, the bank in Macau, as the "primary money laundering concern."

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6. PRC-ROK Trade Relations

Korean Times ("KOREA-CHINA TRADE EXCEEDS $100 BILLION", 2006-01-12) reported that the ROK's merchandise trade with the PRC topped $100 billion in 2005 for the first time ever. The Korea Customs Service said Thursday combined exports and imports to and from the PRC reached $100.6 billion. The PRC maintained its status as the ROK's single biggest export market by absorbing $62 billion worth of ROK goods.

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7. Japanese Relations with the PRC, ROK

Kyodo ("JAPAN TO RESUME SUBCABINET-LEVEL TALKS WITH S. KOREA, CHINA", 2006-01-12) reported that Japan and the ROK have reached a broad agreement to resume subcabinet-level talks later this month to pave the way for realizing a visit to Japan by ROK President Roh Moo Hyun. Japan is also likely to resume subcabinet-level talks with the PRC in Tokyo sometime in February and hopes to lead the talks toward improving bilateral ties, the sources said.

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8. Japan Unmanned Spy Planes

The Associated Press ("REPORT: JAPAN PLANS TO INTRODUCE UNMANNED SPY PLANES IN FISCAL 2007", 2006-01-12) reported that Japan is planning to introduce unmanned spy planes as early as April 2007 to gather intelligence about a possible ballistic missile launch by the DPRK, a report said Thursday. Defense Agency chief Fukushiro Nukaga said officials will travel to the US, Germany and Italy to examine difference types of the unmanned vehicles before deciding which type to buy, Kyodo News agency reported.

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9. Japan and Cross Strait Relations

Reuters ("CHINA WARNS JAPAN ABOUT TAIWAN VISIT ", 2006-01-12) reported that the PRC warned Japan on Thursday that a possible visit by former Taiwan president Lee Teng-hui could further raise tensions between Beijing and Tokyo. A Tokyo newspaper said on Wednesday Lee planned to travel to Japan in May, and Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Shinzo Abe said the government had yet to decide whether to grant him a visa.

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10. US, PRC, EU, Russia Meet on Iran Nuclear Issue

Reuters ("EU3, CHINA, RUSSIA, US TO MEET ON IRAN: UK ", 2006-01-12) reported that officials from Britain, France and Germany will meet counterparts from the PRC, Russia and the US in London next week to discuss how to deal with Iran's nuclear ambitions, a UK government spokesman said on Thursday.

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11. Sino-Indian Energy Cooperation

Agence France-Presse ("INDIA, CHINA SIGN LANDMARK ENERGY AGREEMENT ", 2006-01-12) reported that the PRC and India signed a landmark agreement here on developing a joint strategy to secure global energy assets for the world's two biggest nations. Indian Oil Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar inked the "Memorandum for Enhancing Cooperation in the Field of Oil and Natural Gas" with the PRC's economic planning chief Ma Kai, the minister of the National Development and Reform Commission.

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12. PRC Chemical Spill

Agence France-Presse ("UN FAULTS CHINA FOR SLOW RESPONSE TO TOXIC SPILL ", 2006-0--12) reported that the United Nations criticized the PRC for its poor initial response to a toxic benzene spill that contaminated a river and cut off water supplies to Chinese and Russians across the border. The Nairobi-based UN Environment Programme (UNEP), which sent a team to the PRC's northeast to investigate damage to the Songhua River and surrounding areas caused by the November spill, said PRC authorities had reacted too slowly to inform the public of the dangers.

(return to top) The Washington Post ("CHINA CHEMICAL SPILLS SPUR PLAN TO GUARD WATER SUPPLY", 2006-01-12) reported that two major chemical spills have forced PRC officials in distant regions to take emergency precautions to protect water supplies for millions of people in the latest examples of the environmental and public health threats posed by the nation's industrial pollution. Last Sunday, the State Council, China's cabinet, announced a new national emergency response plan, partly because of the Songhua controversy. (return to top)

13. PRC Environment

The New York Times ("CHINA PROPOSES FEWER DAMS IN POWER PROJECT TO AID

ENVIRONMENT", 2006-01-12) reported that a government environmental review has recommended reducing the number of dams included in a controversial hydropower proposal on the Nu River in southwestern PRC in order to limit environmental damage and decrease the number of people who would be resettled, a Hong Kong newspaper has reported. The newspaper, Wen Wei Po, which has ties to the Communist Party, reported on Wednesday that the recommendation called for 4 dams instead the 13 in the original Nu proposal.

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14. Mongolian Protest

The Associated Press ("PROTESTERS STORM MONGOLIAN PARTY BUILDING ", 2006-01-12) reported that hundreds of protesters stormed the headquarters of Mongolia's biggest political party on Thursday, reportedly forcing the party to reconsider its decision to withdraw from the ruling coalition, a move that would topple the government. About 1,500 protesters, who had earlier gathered in the city's central square for a rally, shattered the glass doors and windows of the headquarters of the Mongolian People's Revolution Party as they entered the building. No party leaders were in the building and no injuries were reported.

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