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1. PRC on Six Party Talks

Interfax ("BEIJING: U.S. SANCTIONS HAMPER SIX-NATION NORTH KOREA TALKS", 2006-02-14) reported that US financial sanctions against the DPRK have had a negative impact on six party talks, PRC Foreign Ministry representative Liu Jianchao said at a briefing on Tuesday. Financial sanctions have had a negative impact on the negotiations, the PRC diplomat said, stressing the need for active contacts between all parties concerned in order to promote the process.

(return to top) reported that despite the stalemate in the six party talks, inter-Korean exchange has made steady, though slower than before, progress due to Seoul's continuing aid to Pyongyang. It is generally expected that cooperation between Seoul and Pyongyang will be further stimulated by the return of a historical stone monument to the DPRK on March 1. The return of the monument, named "Pukkwandaechoppi," was agreed upon in a meeting between the delegates from the two sides in Kaesong on Monday. (return to top)

2. Inter-Korean Economic Cooperation

Korea.net ("SOUTH KOREAN DIPLOMATS TO VISIT KAESONG ", 2006-02-12) reported that ROK diplomats plan to visit the Kaesong Industrial Park in the DPRK on Feb. 18, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade said on Monday (Feb. 13). "We've planned our diplomats' visit there to enhance their understanding of the first pilot project for inter-Korean economic cooperation programs," a ministry official said.

(return to top) The Korea Times ("BILL ON INTER-KOREAN SEZ PUSHED ", 2006-02-13) reported that a group of 100 ruling and opposition party lawmakers Monday submitted a bill aimed at setting up an inter-Korean special economic zone near the heavily fortified border bisecting the two Koreas. "The bill is based on a long-term strategy to construct a joint economic community which will mutually benefit both South and North Korea," said Rep. Yim Tae-hee of the largest opposition Grand National Party (GNP). Yim said, "Invaluable lessons we learned from trials and errors of the Kaesong industrial complex in the North will surely help us carry out the plan successfully and further promote inter-Korean relations." (return to top)

3. Inter-Korean Olympic Team

Reuters ("KOREANS MARCH TOGETHER IN GAMES OPENING FOR FIRST TIME", 2006-02-07) reported that the DPRK and the ROK marched together for the first time during the Winter Olympics opening ceremony last Friday. "They will march together. They will enter the stadium as one team," a Turin Games spokesman told Reuters.

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4. ROK on DPRK Counterfeiting

Washington Post ("S.KOREA UPS PRESSURE ON NORTH ON COUNTERFEITING", 2006-02-14) reported that the ROK stepped up pressure on the DPRK to end suspected counterfeiting and money laundering, saying Pyongyang must turn its pledge of co-operation into action. In rare direct comments against the DPRK, Foreign Minister Ban Ki-moon said the ROK's concern about "the North's illegal activities" were grave and must be addressed by Pyongyang. "We believe the North must take the steps necessary to answer to international suspicion," Ban told reporters.

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5. US on DPRK-US Relations

The Korea Times ("'US WON'T RESORT TO USE OF FORCE AGAINST NK'", 2006-02-14) reported that Alexander Vershbow, Washington's top envoy to Seoul, has pledged that the US is determined to solve any future sensitive issues concerning the DPRK through peaceful diplomatic talks without resorting to any forceful measures. In an article posted on an Internet community of the US Embassy in Seoul Monday, Vershbow explained that it is a misunderstanding that many RO Koreans still believe the US intends to take unilateral measures to isolate or undermine the DPRK. The article was posted in Korean only and the US Embassy refused to provide the original script in English.

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6. ROK-US Trade Deal

Reuters ("U.S. ENVOY SAYS S.KOREA TRADE DEAL IS "WIN-WIN"", 2006-02-14) reported that the top US envoy to Seoul on Tuesday reminded RO Koreans a free trade deal would be good for both countries, a day after Seoul said it would not negotiate on rice, one of the most contentious issues in the discussions. The two are expected to officially start talks in May on what would be Washington's biggest trade negotiations in 15 years. Marking a drawing of battle lines, RO Korea's agricultural minister said on Monday Seoul did not plan to strike a deal that includes provisions to increase imports of rice. The chief US agricultural negotiator said last week Seoul must open its rice market under any deal.

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7. USFK Reorganization

Chosun Ilbo ("USFK TO SET UP BRIGADE IN CHARGE OF REINFORCEMENTS", 2006-02-14) reported that Stars and Stripes military paper said Monday the 501st Sustainment Brigade, as it will be known, will take charge of base reception and dispatch, transport to frontlines and coordinating efforts, to assist forces dispatched to the ROK from the US and elsewhere. The plan aims to boost the effectiveness of reinforcements.

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8. ROK Candidate for UNSG

Reuters ("S.KOREAN FOREIGN MINISTER TO RUN FOR UN TOP JOB ", 2006-02-14) reported that ROK Foreign Minister Ban Ki-moon said on Tuesday he would seek the post of U.N. secretary-general, becoming one of the few declared candidates to succeed Kofi Annan. Ban, 61, has been the ROK's foreign minister since January 2004 and has also served as the country's ambassador to the United Nations.

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9. Japan on UNSG Candidates

Kyodo ("JAPAN CITES REFORM AS ELEMENT IN BACKING CANDIDATE FOR TOP U.N. POST ", 2006-02-14) reported that Japan will decide on its preferred candidate from Asia to succeed UN

Secretary General Kofi Annan at the end of this year with a view to promoting UN reform, its top government spokesman said. "We consider that the next secretary general should be elected from Asia," Chief Cabinet Secretary Shinzo Abe said.

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10. Japan-Russia Relations

The Vladivostok News ("JAPAN AND SAKHALIN INCREASE TRADE PROCEEDS ", 2006-02-14) reported that with the last year's $1 billion trade revenue between Japan and Sakhalin, Japan remains one of the region's major trading partners, stated the joint commission for developing economic cooperation between the Russian Far East and Japan on Tuesday.

(return to top) Kyodo ("RUSSIANS PICK JAPAN OVER CHINA AS 'STRATEGIC PARTNER': REPORT", 2006-02-14) reported that a recent poll has found that the Russian public considers Japan as its more important "strategic partner" than the PRC, the Interfax news agency said. Citing a survey of 1,600 people by the Russian pollster, Romir Monitoring, the report said 35 percent of the respondents said Russia should make Japan its strategic partner, topping the 28 percent who favored the PRC. (return to top)

11. PRC-Japan Relations

Agence France-Presse ("JAPAN SAYS MANAGING CRISIS WITH CHINA CRITICAL ", 2006-02-14) reported that Japan says managing its deteriorating ties with the PRC had become critical amid warnings of a potential military conflict between the neighbours that could drag in the US. "The management of the situation is extremely important," Japanese Foreign Ministry spokesman Akira Chiba said, adding that he was however "optimistic of the wisdom" of the PRC and Japanese governments in preventing the situation from worsening.

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12. PRC Web Censorship

The New York Times ("IN RARE BRIEFING, CHINA DEFENDS INTERNET CONTROLS", 2006-02-14) reported that Liu Zhengrong, who supervises Internet affairs for the information office of the PRC State Council did not dispute charges that the PRC operates a technologically sophisticated firewall to protect the ruling Communist Party against what it treats as Web-based challenges from people inside the PRC and abroad. But he sought to place the massive PRC efforts to control the Web in the best possible light, stressing repeatedly that PRC Internet minders abide strictly by laws and regulations that in some cases have been modeled on American and European statutes.

(return to top) BBC News ("PARTY ELDERS ATTACK CHINA CENSORS", 2006-02-14) reported that a group of former senior Communist party officials in the PRC have launched a scathing attack on the country's handling of the media and information. In an open letter, the group denounced the recent closure of investigative newspaper Bingdian (Freezing Point). They said strict censorship may "sow the seeds of disaster" for the PRC's political transition. (return to top)

13. PRC Rural Unrest

Reuters ("CHINA LEADERS MINE VEIN OF UNREST TO PRESS RURAL REFORM ", 2006-02-14) reported that Premier Wen Jiabao and President Hu Jintao have highlighted rural stagnation and

unrest to pressure foot-dragging officials before the PRC's National People's Congress, or parliament, convenes from March 5 to discuss a five-year national development plan, observers said.

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14. PRC Anti-Corruption

Xinhua ("CPC PUNISHED 115,143 MEMBERS LAST YEAR", 2006-02-14) reported that the discipline watchdog of the Communist Party of China (CPC) pledged heavier crackdown on corruption and other acts violating the CPC's disciplines, according to its work report released Monday. "The Central Commission for Discipline Inspection of the CPC punished 115,143 members last year, accounting for 1.7 per thousand of the party membership total," says the report on the work of the commission.

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15. Talks on Biological Weapons Ban

Agence France-Presse ("TOKYO TALKS AHEAD OF POTENTIAL BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS SHOWDOWN ", 2006-02-14) reported that twenty-six nations are discussing way to control biological weapons as they braced for a potential new showdown over US opposition to giving teeth to an international ban. The two-day talks, which wrap up on Wednesday, include the United States, other Group of Eight industrialized nations as well as India and Pakistan. The meeting will prepare for negotiations in Geneva in November on the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC).

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