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I. NAPSNet

1. DPRK New Year's Editorial

Yonhap News Agency ("NORTH KOREA VOWS TO STRENGTHEN ITS MILITARY POWER IN NEW YEAR", 2007-01-01) reported that the DPRK published its yearly joint newspaper editorial that sums up its policy goals for the coming year. This latest editorial called for unflinching loyalty to leader Kim Jong-il who will turn 65. It also vowed to continue to uphold its military-first policy that developed nuclear weapons and strive to rebuild its economy. It made no mention of the resumed Six Party Talks.

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2. Unification Minister New Year Message

Yonhap News Agency ("UNIFICATION MINISTER CALLS FOR INCREASED ASSISTANCE TO N KOREA", 2007-01-02) reported that Unification Minister Lee Jae-joung said in a New Year's e-mail to officials that peace on the Korean Peninsula can only be achieved when the DPRK can feed its people by developing its economy, not nuclear weapons. He called for increasing economic assistance on the condition they abandon nuclear ambitions. The opposition party said the nuclear programme, not the poverty, in the DPRK is threatening peace on the Korean Peninsula. Lee should focus on convincing the North to abandon its nuclear programmes, not on helping it fight poverty, it added.

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3. Six Party Diplomacy

Yonhap News Agency ("S. KOREAN FOREIGN MINISTER ARRIVES IN U.S. FOR TALKS ON N. KOREA", 2007-01-01) reported that ROK Foreign Minister Song Min-soon arrived in the United States for talks with various U.S. officials, including Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. "I will be discussing (with Rice) how to move forward the efforts to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue and how to advance the ongoing efforts to improve the South Korea-U.S. alliance," Song told reporters in Seoul before embarking on his six-day trip. He is also to attend the funeral of the late-U.S. President Gerald R. Ford as his country's representative. His official meeting with the secretary of state, his first since taking office late last year, will be held Friday morning, following a welcoming reception by the U.S. secretary. Song is also expected to meet with National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley, Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns and Deputy Secretary of Defense Gordon England, among others, during his visit here, according to his aides.

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4. UNSG Ban Takes Office

Donga Ilbo ("EX-SOUTH KOREAN FOREIGN MINISTER TAKES HELM OF UN", 2007-01-02) reported that ROK Career diplomat Ban Ki-moon took the helm of the United Nations on New Year's Day as the world body's eighth secretary-general. Ban said that he will work to strengthen the three pillars of the U.N.: security, development and human rights to build "a more peaceful, more prosperous and more just world for succeeding generations."

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5. Japan on Constitutional Revision

Agence France-Presse ("JAPAN'S PM RENEWS PLEDGE TO REWRITE CONSTITUTION", 2007-01-) reported that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has renewed his pledge to rewrite Japan's post-World War II pacifist constitution in his New Year policy statement. Abe said his government planned to pass a national referendum bill -- the first step in the revision -- during a parliament session starting in late January.

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6. Japan Population

The Associated Press ("JAPAN BIRTHS RISE FOR 1ST TIME IN 6 YRS.", 2007-01-01) reported that Japanese births rose for the first time in six years in 2006, according to government statistics announced Monday, offering a glimmer of hope for a rapidly aging society. Despite the increase, the rate is still far below the 2.1 rate needed to keep the population steady.

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7. US-Japan Naval Drill

The Associated Press ("JAPAN'S NAVY DENIES IT HELD DRILL WITH US SIMULATING CHINESE INVASION", 2006-12-30) reported that Japan's navy denied a report that Japan and the US held a drill simulating a PRC invasion of disputed islands during recent joint naval exercises. The US and Japan sent a flotilla of warships off Japan's southern coast for a week of war games in mid-November called Annualex 18G, their largest joint naval exercise of the year. One of the drills addressed a hypothetical PRC military invasion of a group of uninhabited islands called Diaoyu in Chinese and Senkaku in Japanese that both Tokyo and Beijing claim, Kyodo News agency said, citing unidentified Japanese and US officials. Maritime Self Defense Forces spokesman Hiromitsu Hanada denied the report, saying the Annualex exercises were not directed at defending against any specific country or threat.

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8. Japan on Sino-Japanese Relations

The Associated Press ("IN JAPAN, TALK OF 'TRUST'", 2007-01-02) reported that Japan and the PRC are moving toward a strategic relationship based on trust, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said in his New Year's statement, promising to mend strained ties and reduce bitterness between the countries. "I plan to build forward-looking relations based on trust" with the PRC, as well as with the ROK, Mr. Abe said.

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9. PRC Military

Washington Post ("CHINA OFFERS GLIMPSE OF RATIONALE BEHIND ITS MILITARY POLICIES", 2006-12-29) reported that the PRC warned that the military landscape in northeast Asia is getting "more complicated and serious" because of the DPRK's nuclear weapons program and tighter defense cooperation between Japan and the US. The paper said the PRC's military improvements are

part of the country's overall modernization and economic expansion. Moving from infantry to high-tech naval and aerial warfare has been a major goal of the PRC's military modernization.

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10. PRC Anti-Corruption Measures

Washington Post ("CHINA'S CRACKDOWN ON CORRUPTION STILL LARGELY SECRET", 2006-1--31) reported that Du Shicheng was stripped of his posts as deputy party secretary of Shandong province and party secretary of Qingdao city because of a "serious discipline violation." Du's firing was another chapter in President Hu Jintao's crackdown on the bribery and embezzlement that have become a big part of the PRC's economic expansion. But it also illustrated the limits of Hu's anti-corruption drive. Despite repeated vows to weed out corrupt officials, the government's campaign remains a self-cleansing operation by the Communist Party's own bureaucracy, without monitoring by an independent judicial system or a free press.

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11. PRC Energy Supply

The Associated Press ("CITIC OF CHINA BUYS KAZAKHSTAN OIL ASSETS", 2007-01-01) reported that the PRC, which is aggressively seeking overseas energy assets to run its booming economy, said that one of its biggest conglomerates had bought the Kazakhstan oil assets of a Canadian company for $1.91 billion. The CITIC Group of the PRC bought the oil assets of the Nations Energy Company of Canada and granted KazMunaiGas, Kazakhstan's state-owned oil company, an option to a 50 percent interest in Nations Energy, the official Xinhua Agency said.

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12. Cross Strait Relations

Agence France-Presse ("TAIWAN'S CHEN RAMPS UP SOVEREIGNTY RHETORIC", 2007-01-01) reported that Taiwan's independence-leaning President Chen Shui-bian has insisted that the island's sovereignty lies in its own hands, rejecting Beijing's "one-China" policy in his New Year's message. "Hereby we must stress that Taiwan is our country. Taiwan's sovereignty belongs to 23 million people. It definitely does not belong to the People's Republic of China," Chen said after a national flag-hoisting ceremony.

(return to top) Agence France-Presse ("CHINA SAYS TAIWAN'S LEADER TRYING TO RUIN TIES", 2007-01-01) reported that the PRC government has said Taiwan President Chen Shui-bian is trying to ruin bilateral ties, as it reacted angrily to his New Year message insisting the island was not part of the PRC, according to state media reports. An unnamed spokesman from the Beijing's Taiwan Affairs Office also reiterated that China would never allow the island, separated from the mainland by the narrow Taiwan Strait, to formally break away, the People's Daily reported. (return to top)

13. PRC, ROK, Japan Space Programs

SPACE.com ("YEAR OF THE MOON: CHINA, JAPAN READY LUNAR PROBES FOR '07 ", 2007-01-02) reported that this year, the PRC is set to launch its first lunar orbiter, followed by the summer sendoff of a mega-powerful mooncraft from Japan. Both nations are kick-starting a barrage of robotic survey ships that shoot for the Moon. Over the next 10 years, PRC space officials have called for a

lunar rover, followed by a lunar sample return mission. This summer, the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) plans to launch that nation's lunar orbiter. In sketching out its long-range lunar plans, JAXA envisions a "Deep Space Harbor" at the Moon. More lunar exploration and possible use of the Moon's resources are also on the agenda.

(return to top) Chosun Ilbo ("KOREA TO COMPLETE OWN SPACE CENTER SOON", 2007-01-02) reported that in a small village at the tip of the Oe Naro Island, a beachhead for space exploration is under construction by the Korea Aerospace Research Institute. The Naro Space Center is to launch a rocket made with the ROK's own technology in 2008. The first launch will be of a 100 kg satellite scheduled at the end of 2008, which will make the ROK the ninth member of the "Space Club". (return to top)

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