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1. Six Party Talks

International Herald Tribune ("SEOUL SEEKS TO REOPEN DEADLOCKED ARMS TALKS ", 2006-0--17) reported that Foreign Minister Ban Ki Moon of the ROK departed Tuesday for talks in Washington at a crucial juncture in international efforts to resume stalled negotiations on ending the DPRK's nuclear weapons programs. While the outcome of Ban's discussions in Washington was by no means certain, there is a substantial chance that the six party talks may already have lapsed into what amounts to a state of semi-permanent stalemate, a number of analysts now believe. "Nothing is happening now that is major enough to cause the six-party talks to resume," said Peter Hayes, director of the California-based Nautilus Institute, a worldwide organization of experts on the DPRK nuclear crisis.

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2. DPRK on Six Party Talks

Agence France Presse ("NORTH KOREA RENEWS CALL FOR LIFTING US SANCTIONS TO REVIVE TALKS ", 2006-01-17) reported that the DPRK renewed its call on the US to lift financial sanctions on the state to pave the way for restarting stalled six party talks. "The US sanctions and pressure upon the DPRK (North Korea) are the main obstacles to the progress of the talks," the official Korean Central News Agency said in a dispatch monitored in Seoul.

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3. DPRK on KEDO Pullout

China Daily ("NORTH KOREA BLAMES US FOR BREAKDOWN OF NUCLEAR PROJECT", 2006-0--17) reported that the DPRK said Monday that the US should take full responsibility for the breakdown of a project to build a nuclear power plant in the country and that Washington should pay compensation for economic losses. The DPRK's official Rodong Sinmun newspaper made the statement in the country's first reaction since last week's complete pullout of the ROK and US personnel from the plant's construction site in the DPRK.

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4. US on Inter-Korean Relations

The Korea Times ("SEOUL SHOULD WORRY ABOUT N. KOREAN REGIME: VERSHBOW", 2006-0--17) reported that according to Alexander Vershbow, US ambassador to the ROK, RO Koreans should "worry" about the DPRK regime, which has "disturbed" US leaders by inflicting pains on its own people. 'I think all South Koreans should be worried about a regime that threatens its own people so badly, that wastes its scarce resources on nuclear weapons, and that engages in counterfeiting, drug trafficking, money laundering and the export of dangerous military technologies in order to survive," Vershbow said.

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5. Inter-Korean Cultural Cooperation

Joongang Ilbo ("FOUNDATION AND NORTH SIGN COPYRIGHT PACT ", 1006-01-16) reported that the Inter-Korean Economic and Cultural Exchange Foundation said yesterday it has obtained the publication rights for 47 works by 34 DPR Korean authors after negotiations with DPRK's copyright bureau. The foundation said it has signed contracts with four RO Korea publishers to print them. The works include historical novels, medical publications and children's novels. The cultural foundation said it would pay royalties to the North of 10 percent in most cases, and 40 percent for the publication of illustrated children's books. "We have established an easier way to negotiate the sale of publication rights between the two Koreas. South Korean publishers will be able to negotiate with us in advance," said Park Jun-young of the Inter-Korean Economic and Cultural Exchange Foundation.

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6. DPRK-US Relations

Korea Herald ("'WASHINGTON WILL CONTINUE TO SUPPRESS NORTH KOREA' ", 2006-01-17) reported that the US will continue to suppress the DPRK, by taking a hard-line policy against various issues including the DPRK's alleged counterfeiting of US currency and its nuclear program standoff, a Korean public institute said in a report released yesterday. "The Bush administration has recently raised concerns of North Korea's counterfeiting and circulation of the false currency separate from the nuclear issues. And those various pressures against North Korea are not one-off actions but will continue throughout this year," the government-funded Korea Institute for Defense Analyses said in a report.

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7. DPRK-US Trade Relations

The Korea Times ("US-NK TRADE DWINDLES TO EARLY 1990S LEVEL", 2006-01-17) reported that trade activities between the US and the DPRK were reduced to the level of a decade ago after a remarkable surge following a bilateral nuclear agreement, the latest statistics indicated Sunday. Foreign trade statistics obtained from the US Census Bureau showed US exports to the DPRK grew from $200,000 in 1994 to $11.3 million in 1999. However, the figure plunged to $2.7 million in 2000 and $700,000 in 2001. As of last November, US exports to the DPRK were tallied at $5.8 million.

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8. DPRK Refugee Status in US

Yonhap News ("U.S. TO MAKE 'PREPARATIONS' FOR N. KOREAN REFUGEES: LEFKOWITZ ", 2006-01-17) reported that the US plans to take measures to allow DPRK defectors to seek refugee status in the country, a special US envoy for DPRK human rights was quoted Tuesday as saying. The measures, according to Jay Lefkowitz, would be in line with the new US law on DPRK human rights, a ROK official quoted the US envoy as saying.

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9. DPRK Abductee Issue

Joongang Ilbo ("BLUE HOUSE: TAKING STEPS ON ABDUCTEES TO THE NORTH ", 2006-01-16) reported that the Blue House yesterday responded to a posting on its web site from Choi Wu-yeong, the daughter of a fisherman who was kidnapped by DPRK agents, asking for more attention to the abductee issue, by extending its condolences and saying it is taking diverse steps to solve the problem. "Solving the problem [of South Koreans kidnapped by North Korea] is the government's basic responsibility and there has been some progress, although it may seem trivial to the families of the missing persons. We will make efforts to utilize opportunities such as ministerial talks in the future to address the problem more aggressively," Blue House spokesman Kim Man-soo told reporters.

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10. DPRK Leadership

Reuters ("N.KOREAN CADRES HANG PICTURES OF KIM'S SON-REPORT", 2006-01-17) reported that a former senior DPRK official says cadres in the DPRK are hanging up pictures of leader Kim Jong-il's second son, indicating he is a possible successor, a ROK newspaper said on Tuesday. The newspaper, Chosun Ilbo, said the DPRK senior official, who defected to the ROK, had said many party officials were hanging the picture of Kim's second son Kim Jong-chol alongside his father's and the picture of Kim Il-sung, the North's eternal president and Kim Jong-il's late father. "He is receiving an education to become the successor," the defector told the paper.

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11. Mongolia Government

Agence France-Presse ("NEW MONGOLIAN PREMIER CHOSEN, AS INCOMING GOVT STRESSES US ALLIANCE ", 2006-01-17) reported that Mongolia's ex-communists have moved closer to governing after nominating their new prime minister, as they stressed the nation would maintain its military alliance with the US. Miyeegombo Enkhbold, a former Ulan Bator mayor, was chosen by his Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP), winning 187 votes at a party conference with just one against, said Otgonbayar, the party's permanent secretary.

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12. Russia, PRC on Iran Nuclear Issue

Financial Times ("RUSSIA AND CHINA CAUGHT ON THE IRANIAN ISSUE", 2006-01-17) reported that the US and European governments on Monday step up efforts to forge an international consensus on Iran, seeking Russian and PRC support for a referral of Tehran’s nuclear dispute to the UN Security Council. The PRC has expressed concern about Iran’s nuclear programme and has said it is willing to discuss means to prevent it, but it has also shown reservations about using the UN Security Council to resolve the dispute.

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13. PRC-Saudi Arabian Relations

The Associated Press ("SAUDI KING TO VISIT CHINA TO DISCUSS OIL ", 2006-01-17) reported that Saudi King Abdullah will visit the PRC and is expected to discuss possible cooperation in oil and energy security, PRC Foreign Ministry said Tuesday. Next week's visit will be the first to the PRC by a Saudi ruler since the two countries formed diplomatic relations in 1990, said Foreign Ministry spokesman Kong Quan.

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14. PRC African Diplomacy

Agence France-Presse ("CHINA UNVEILS NEW 'WIN-WIN' PARTNERSHIP WITH AFRICA ", 2006-01-17) reported that the PRC unveiled plans to boost its ties with Africa, outlining a new relationship with the continent based on a "win-win" concept of economic and military cooperation. "China plans to establish and develop a 'new type of strategic partnership with Africa' characterized by equality and mutual trust on the political front, cooperation conducted on the basis of "win-win" economics with reinforced cultural exchanges," according to a document released in the Malian capital, Bamako, at the end of a visit by Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing.

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15. Taiwan Leadership

The Associated Press ("TAIWAN'S PRIME MINISTER TO STEP DOWN ", 2006-01-17) reported that Taiwan's prime minister announced his resignation on Tuesday, paving the way for a Cabinet reshuffle. Premier Frank Hsieh, the island's No. 3 leader, has come under pressure to resign since the ruling Democratic Progressive Party lost local elections on Dec. 3.Hsieh has been hurt by by scandals surrounding the construction of a subway system in the southern city of Kaohsiung.

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16. PRC Rural Unrest

The Associated Press ("CHINESE POLICE, VILLAGERS REPORTEDLY CLASH ", 2006-01-17) reported that police brandishing electric batons clashed with protesting villagers in southern PRC over the weekend, and several people were injured, villagers and Hong Kong media reported. State media blamed villagers for inciting the violence in Guangdong province. There were unconfirmed reports that a teenage girl died in the clash and that the village of Panlong was sealed off.

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17. PRC Mine Closures

China Daily ("NEW FIGURES CAST DOUBT ON MINE CLOSURES ", 2006-01-17) reported that the PRC's attempts to shut down illegal and unsafe coal mines have met with mixed success, the nation's safety watchdog has revealed. Only around 40 per cent of the pits on the government's 2005 closure list had stopped mining by the end of last year, according to a document released by the National Development and Reform Commission (NRDC).

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18. PRC Health Care

The New York Times ("WEALTH GROWS, BUT HEALTH CARE WITHERS IN CHINA", 2006-01-17) reported that the PRC's economic reforms have turned an almost uniformly poor nation into an increasingly prosperous one in the space of a mere generation. But the collapse of socialized medicine and staggering cost increases have opened a yawning gap between health care in the cities and the rural areas, where the former system of free clinics has disintegrated.

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