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1. Six Party Talks

Reuters ("NORTH KOREA HINTS AT FLEXIBILITY IN NUCLEAR TALKS", 2007-01-23) reported that the DPRK hinted at flexibility on its position in the six-party talks, raising hopes that a new round of negotiations could make headway. The DPRK's chief negotiator, Kim Kye-gwan, was speaking in Beijing where he met his Chinese counterpart, Wu Dawei, and RO Korean envoy Chun Yung-woo in a flurry of diplomacy surrounding the nuclear talks. "Everything can change," Kim told reporters after meeting Chun, when asked if there had been any change in the DPRK's position. He did not elaborate. Chun said Kim had been positive about what the DPRK viewed as a change in the U.S. approach following the Berlin talks. "We confirmed the possibility for progress in the next round of North Korea nuclear talks," the envoy told reporters after arriving in Seoul from Beijing. Asked if talks could resume by February 5, he said: "Talks will resume at least by then ... China will announce dates within the next two to three days."

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2. Japan NGOs on Human Rights and Six Party Talks

Japan Times ("NORTH KOREA TALKS SHOULD ALSO DISCUSS ESCAPEES, FORUM TOLD", 2007-01-23) reported that a forum sponsored by the Amnesty International Korea Team and the Osaka-based Korea NGO Center concluded that the plight of Japanese citizens and Japanese-born Koreans who voluntarily went to the DPRK in the 1960s but escaped to return to Japan is a human rights issue that needs to be included in the six-party talks. Panellists included academic experts on the DPRK, Japan-based Korean nongovernmental organizations and freelance journalists who cover Korean residents in Japan and DPRK itself.

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3. DPRK Gold

Asia Times ("NORTH KOREA BITES A GOLDEN BULLET", 2007-01-24) reported that "gold fever" is rampaging through the DPRK elite in the quest for relief from seemingly incurable economic malaise exacerbated by more than a year as a total outcast from the international financial community. Word from Pyongyang is that trading companies and even individuals are offering payments in gold for imports from across the border with the PRC and also in barter deals for products imported from elsewhere. Gold also has become a form of currency in the internal reward system of payoffs and bribes. It's well known that the US ban forced the BDA to impose a freeze on DPRK accounts totaling $24 million, but less well known that the bank also stopped purchasing gold produced by the DPRK's historic gold mines, in operation, sporadically, since the late 19th century. Output of the mines, in mountains about 160 kilometers north of Pyongyang, fell sharply in the late 1990s as a result of flood and famine but, with foreign expertise, has begun to pick up in the past few years. The impact of the ban, moreover, goes far beyond a single bank in Macau. Although the DPRK sold $38 million in gold and silver in Thailand last spring, Pyongyang has been frustrated in reviving its presence on the London bullion market, the world's largest marketplace for precious metals, amid increased US pressure on the large international banks that are the major buyers of gold. It was in the aftermath of the ban on the BDA that the DPRK's Chosun Central Bank submitted the information required by the London Bullion Markets Association (LBMA) for listing as a "good deliverer" of gold. The DPRK, from 1983 to 1993, had been in the LBMA's good graces, averaging a ton a month in sales to London buyers that included some of the world's leading banks, but had slipped off the list after failing to keep up deliveries.

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4. PRC on Anti-Satellite Weapon Test

BBC News ("CHINA CONFIRMS SATELLITE DOWNED", 2007-01-23) reported that the PRC confirmed it has carried out a test that destroyed a weather satellite. Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao said a test had been carried out but insisted the PRC was committed to the "peaceful development of outer space". "But China stresses that it has consistently advocated the peaceful development of outer space and it opposes the arming of space and military competition in space," he told a news conference.

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5. Hill on PRC Anti-Satellite Test and Six Party Talks

Washington Times ("NUKE TALKS UNENCUMBERED", 2007-01-23) reported that Christopher Hill said that the resumption of six-party talks in Beijing should not be affected by U.S. concerns over the PRC's test of an anti-satellite missile. "We've certainly conveyed [concern] to the Chinese, but I would say the six-party talks are on a different track," Hill told reporters. Hill acknowledged having "private discussions" Sunday night with his Chinese counterpart, Vice Foreign Minister Wu Dawei, about the Jan. 11 test in which the PRC shot down an obsolete satellite with a ballistic missile. He referred further questions to other State Department officials and the Pentagon, saying, "I don't want to be the spokesman on it today."

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6. Japan, US on PRC Anti-Satellite Weapon Test

Voice of America ("US, JAPAN CRITICIZE CHINA OVER SPACE TEST", 2007-01-23) reported that several countries including the US and Japan criticized the PRC strongly for its failure to tell other nations about the test in advance, and delaying confirming the test after the fact. The Japanese government said it is still seeking a fuller explanation from the PRC. A Japanese spokesman said the information from the PRC to date has not been sufficient to ease Tokyo's "great concerns" over the test.

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7. Sino-Japanese Nuclear Cooperation

Kyodo News ("JAPAN AND CHINA TO PURSUE NUCLEAR-POWER COOPERATION", 2007-01-23) reported that Japan and the PRC are considering compiling an action plan by the end of this year for full-fledged cooperation on nuclear power for civilian purposes, including preventing technology from being diverted to third parties, government sources in Tokyo said. The plan is aimed at paving the way for Japanese companies involved in nuclear power to do business in the PRC, where reactor construction is expected to increase to meet mounting energy demands.

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8. PRC African Diplomacy

People's Daily ("CHINESE PRESIDENT TO VISIT 8 AFRICAN NATIONS", 2007-01-23) reports that

the PRC President Hu Jintao will pay a state visit to eight African nations from Jan. 30 to Feb. 10. "This tour will be another major diplomatic move by China toward African nations since the Beijing summit was held last November," Liu told a regular press conference. During the upcoming African visit, President Hu is expected to meet leaders of the eight nations, and will exchange views with them on bilateral relationship and issues of common concern.

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9. Japan on Cross Strait Relations

The Asahi Shimbun ("TOP COURT TO RULE IN CASE PITTING CHINA VS. TAIWAN", 2007-01-23) reported that the Japanese Supreme Court appears set to resume proceedings on a sensitive case dating back 40 years and buried two decades ago so as to avoid a diplomatic brouhaha. The case, involving a dormitory for foreign students in Kyoto's Sakyo Ward, revolves around whether the PRC or Taiwan is the rightful owner of the site. Analysts said the latest documents sent out by the Supreme Court suggest it is not much interested in the question of rightful owner, but rather was more concerned about whether the lawsuit submitted by a government that represented China at the time was still being pursued by the legitimate government of the PRC.

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10. PRC-Vatican Relations

China Post ("VATICAN TO SET UP CHINA AFFAIRS BODY: CARDINAL", 2007-01-23) reported that the Vatican will set up a permanent commission to handle PRC affairs, a day after the Holy See said it hoped to restore diplomatic ties with the PRC. Details of the new inter departmental commission have yet to be announced.

(return to top) China Daily ("CHINA WILLING TO IMPROVE TIES WITH VATICAN ON TWO CONDITIONS", 2007-01-23) reported that according to PRC Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao the PRC is willing to maintain dialogue and explore ways to improve bilateral relations with the Vatican on the basis of two principles: the Vatican should cut off its "diplomatic relationship" with Taiwan and stop interfering the PRC's internal affairs under the excuse of religious affairs.
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11. PRC One Child Policy

The Associated Press ("CHINA WON'T RELAX 1-CHILD POLICY ", 2007-01-23) reported that the PRC has decided not to relax its one-child policy, although a top family planning official acknowledged the policy has accelerated the nation's growing gender gap. At least 118 boys were born for every 100 girls in 2005, said Zhang Weiqing, minister of the National Population and Family Planning Commission.

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Nautilus Institute

608 San Miguel Ave., Berkeley, CA 94707-1535 | Phone: (510) 423-0372 | Email: nautilus@nautilus.org