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1. Six Party Talks

Associated Press ("ENVOYS FAIL TO BRING NORTH KOREA BACK TO NUCLEAR TALKS", 2006-0--12) reported that envoys gave up hope of immediately bringing the DPRK back to talks on its nuclear program, going home empty-handed after coming together for a private initiative in Japan. The DPRK sent a negotiator to a closed-door security conference in Tokyo but failed to win a one-o--one meeting with the US, which insists the regime commit to resuming formal negotiations. "It's really not our job to get them back to the talks. It's their job to get back to the talks," said Christopher Hill, the US chief envoy to the stalled negotiations, who was due later Wednesday in Seoul. "Once the DPRK comes back to the talks, then we can look back and say we made progress in Tokyo," Hill told reporters. Wu Dawei, chief envoy of Pyongyang's main ally the PRC, said six-way talks hosted by Beijing would not resume this month. "I don't think it will be possible," Wu said, adding however that talks would resume in "due course."

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2. ROK on Six Party Talks

Yonhap News ("N. KOREA WARNED OVER ITS BOYCOTT OF NUCLEAR TALKS", 2006-04-12) reported that the ROK's chief nuclear envoy on Wednesday urged the DPRK to stop boycotting the six-way talks over its nuclear weapons program. In an interview with Yonhap News Agency shortly before flying back to Seoul from Japan, Chun Young-woo said that, "South Korea, China, and Japan sent the same message to North Korea. And the United States also delivered a clear message by not having talks with North Korea." DPRK delegates will relay the message to the country's leaders, and it is up to Pyongyang to digest the message and draw up measures, Chun said. Despite the failure to organize bilateral talks between Pyongyang and Washington, Chun said, the Tokyo forum was not entirely meaningless. "It provided related countries with an opportunity to review the current situation and get a clearer understanding," he said. "It is part of the long process of the six-way talks."

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3. Inter-Korean Visit Proposal

JoongAng Ilbo ("FORMER PRESIDENT KIM ASKED TO VISIT NORTH ", 2006-04-12) reported that a legislator from the Grand National Party made an unusual request yesterday: that former President Kim Dae-jung visit the DPRK. "Former President Kim needs to make a breakthrough to improve stalled inter-Korean relations," Kwon Oh-eul said at a special session of the National Assembly yesterday. He said the ROK government should give "active support" to such a visit. In response to Mr. Kwon, Unification Minister Lee Jong-seok said, "We have never been told of North Korea's position on the inter-Korean summit talk." He also said the government would not have any agenda for a possible Pyongyang visit by former President Kim.

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4. Japan on Abductees

Chosun Ilbo ("JAPAN SAYS BALL IS IN KOREA'S COURT ON ABDUCTEE DISPUTE ", 2006-04-12) reported that popular Japanese newspapers called on the ROK on Wednesday to join the country in its bid to resolve the long-standing dispute over their nationals abducted by the DPRK decades ago, as the results of a DNA investigation by Japan to ascertain the identity of the husband of Japanese abductee Megumi Yokota show that he is none other than Kim Young-nam, a RO Korean who disappeared in 1978. The Asahi Shimbun, along with various other Japanese press, called for the ROK's support in aggressively putting forth a united front to solve the issue. "The kidnapping issue is not a Japan-North Korea issue, but has spread to a Japan-North Korea-South Korea issue," echoed the vernacular daily Yomiuri newspaper.

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5. US Visit to Kaesong

Yonhap News ("U.S. CONGRESSIONAL AIDES VISIT KAESONG INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX ", 2006-0--12) reported that an eight-member US congressional aide delegation visited an inter-Korean industrial complex on Tuesday to look at the nature of the economic relationship between the DPRK and the ROK, the ROK Embassy here said Wednesday. The delegation, made up of bipartisan, bicameral staff members, has been in Seoul from Sunday to meet with ROK government, parliamentary and economic organization officials to discuss political and trade issues, the embassy said.

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6. DPRK Budget

Associated Press ("NORTH KOREA EYES COMPUTER SOFTWARE, MILITARY HARDWARE ", 2006-04-12) reported that the DPRK unveiled a new economic blueprint this week that sets the state the target of becoming a high-technology powerhouse within two decades. Military spending remains the biggest budget item and a top priority for the DPRK, one of the world's poorest countries that fields the fifth biggest army. Next comes agriculture and the goal of feeding its people, a target that the DPRK has missed every year for more than a decade. Adding a new priority, scientific and technological development was adopted Tuesday by the DPRK's legislature as one of the country's top three key national goals for the future. Choe Thae Bok, chairman of the Supreme People's Assembly, called for a long-term strategy to turn the country into a software superpower by 2022.

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7. DPRK Human Rights Rally

Korea Times ("US ENVOY TO SPEAK AT NK RIGHTS RALLY ", 2006-04-11) reported that the US envoy to the UN John Bolton will speak at a DPRK human rights rally here later this month, the rally organizer said Monday. The "North Korea Freedom Day Rally" is scheduled for April 28 at the Capitol with speakers including Bolton, US special envoy for DPRK human rights Jay Lefkowitz and Rep. Ed Royce.

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8. Underground Tunnel Debate

JoongAng Ilbo ("COURT ORDERS THE TRUTH TO BE DUG UP ", 2006-04-12) reported that a local court ruled yesterday that there's only one way to find out if an underground tunnel was made by the DPR Koreans or a natural phenomenon: dig it up. At stake is a 100 million won ($104,745) reward offered by the Ministry of National Defense given to people who find an infiltration tunnel. While an alliance of civic groups has argued that the tunnel was manmade, the government has been rejecting the claim, saying the tunnel was created naturally.

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9. Trans-Asian Railway

Kyodo ("U.N. MEETING ADOPTS RESOLUTION ON TRANS-ASIAN RAILWAY NETWORK", 2006-0--12) reported that a UN meeting adopted Wednesday a resolution on an agreement to construct the ambitious Trans-Asian Railway Network connecting 28 countries from Asia to Europe, paving the way for its signing in November. The adoption of the resolution on the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Trans-Asian Railway Network was made by ministers and officials attending the 62nd annual meeting of the Bangkok-based UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

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10. USFJ Realignment

The Japan Times ("LDP PANEL WANTS NAGO WON OVER BEFORE BASE MOVE", 2006-04-05) reported that a Liberal Democratic Party panel said it will not accept any final agreement between the Japanese and US governments on the relocation of the US Marine Corps Futenma Air Station in Okinawa without first gaining local consent.

(return to top) The Japan Times ("NAGO, TOKYO REACH AGREEMENT ON MOVING FUTENMA", 2006-04-08) reported that the Japanese government and the city of Nago, Okinawa Prefecture, agreed Friday to build two runways at a US airfield to be built in the city, ending a bitter battle over the relocation of a US Marine Corps helicopter base. According to the agreement, two runways will be built across the tip of Cape Henoko in an L-shaped formation to prevent US military aircraft from flying over residential areas. (return to top) The Japan Times ("GOVERNOR NIXES OKINAWA BASE RELOCATION PLAN", 2006-04-09) reported that despite an agreement struck the previous day between the city of Nago and the Japanese government on a replacement for a US Marine base, Okinawa Gov. Keiichi Inamine remained opposed to the plan Saturday, saying the prefecture will stick to a plan to build the air base farther offshore. (return to top) Kyodo ("BUSH HINTS AT ACCEPTING FUTENMA PLAN", 2006-04-12) reported that US President George W. Bush indicated Monday that the US accepts a deal struck last week between the Japanese government and local authorities for relocating an air base in Okinawa. (return to top)

11. Japan Missile Defense

Kyodo ("ASDF PLANS MISSILE DATA NETWORK", 2006-04-07) reported that the Air Self-Defense Force (ASDF) will establish a mobile communications network by spring 2009 that will enable missile data detected by Maritime Self-Defense Force vessels to be swiftly transmitted to Air Defense Command Headquarters in Tokyo. "As the missile defense program requires instant decision-making, such as on firing interceptors and guided missiles, a high-speed communications

network with large-volume capability is an essential system," said a senior ASDF official.

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12. Yasukuni Shrine Issue

The Asahi Shimbun ("OZAWA STRIKES OUT AT YASUKUNI VISITS", 2006-04-12) reported that newly elected opposition leader Ichiro Ozawa has come out swinging, criticizing Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi for his PRC policy, including his visits to controversial Yasukuni Shrine. Ozawa, who last Friday was elected to lead the Democratic Party of Japan, told The Asahi Shimbun in an exclusive interview Monday that Japan is missing its chance to play a key role between the PRC and the US.

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13. Japan Nuclear Plant Accident

The Associated Press ("RADIOACTIVE WATER LEAK AT JAPAN NUKE PLANT ", 2006-04-12) reported that water containing radioactive material has leaked at an experimental nuclear fuel reprocessing plant in northern Japan, but no radioactivity was released into the atmosphere and no one was exposed to radiation. About 10.5 gallons of water containing plutonium and other radioactive material leaked inside a compound at the plant in Rokkasho on Tuesday.

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14. US-PRC Military Exchanges

Xinhua ("CHINA, US TO STEP UP EXCHANGES BETWEEN MILITARY ACADEMIES", 2006-04-12) reported that the PRC and the US agreed on Tuesday to boost exchanges between military academies. "China-US military relations, an important part of overall relations, have seen an increase in exchanges," Liang Guanglie, chief of the General Staff of the People's Liberation Army, told visiting president of the US National Defense University, Michael Dunn.

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15. US-PRC Trade Relations

Reuters ("CHINA PLEDGES MOVES TO EASE TRADE FRICTION WITH US ", 2006-04-12) reported that the PRC promised on Tuesday to reduce trade friction with the US by reopening its market to US beef, reducing piracy of US goods and beginning talks by end of next year to open its huge government procurement market to foreign firms.

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16. Cross Strait Relations

Kyodo ("TAIWAN'S OPPOSITION NATIONALIST PARTY TO HOLD TALKS WITH CHINA", 2006-0--12) reported that Taiwan's main opposition Nationalist Party is set to hold talks with the PRC on further bilateral economic exchanges in the absence of formal political dialogue, a fresh move following an icebreaking meeting between the party and the Chinese Communist Party in April last year.

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17. PRC Media Control

Reuters ("CHINA CENSORS FOCUS IN ON TELEVISION DRAMAS, NEWS ", 2006-04-12) reported that the PRC unveiled new censorship rules for television dramas and news reports on Tuesday that tighten the Communist Party's squeeze on the country's increasingly commercial media. The State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) issued rules demanding that local government offices overseeing production of television dramas submit monthly reports to ensure the shows stick to pre-approved scripts and avoid taboo themes, the official Xinhua News Agency reported.

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18. PRC Flu Outbreak

Agence France-Presse ("CHINESE SCHOOL CLOSES AFTER MYSTERY FLU KILLS ONE STUDENT", 2006-04-12) reported that a high school in northern PRC has been shut down after a mystery virus killed one student and left dozens hospitalized with high fevers. Authorities have determined that the outbreak in Shaanxi province is not bird flu or the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) but are still trying to identify the virus, a local health official told AFP.

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