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I. NAPSNet

1. Japan-DPRK Bilateral Talks

Associated Press ("NORTH KOREA, JAPAN END TALKS", 2006-02-08) reported that the DPRK and Japan ended five days of high-level talks aimed at establishing diplomatic relations without any agreements. The two sides agreed to meet again to "narrow our differences" but did not set a date. The discussions, which began in Beijing on Saturday, were the highest-level contacts between the two sides in three years on possible diplomatic ties. "For the last five days we discussed the issue of normalization, abductions and security," DPRK's chief envoy Song Il Ho said. "We got to know each other's positions more clearly. At the same time, however, we discovered that there's a big difference of opinion." Song's Japanese counterpart, Koichi Haraguchi, said the two governments understood each other better but "we discovered that there's a big difference of opinion."

(return to top) Itar-Tass ("JAPAN, NORTH KOREA AGREE TO CONTINUE TALKS", 2006-02-08) reported that Japan and the DPRK agreed to continue bilateral talks under a three-track format at an early date through diplomatic channels. (return to top) Xinhuanet ("KOIZUMI SAYS JAPAN TO CONTINUE TALKS WITH DPRK", 2006-02-08) reported that Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi confirmed Japan will continue to negotiate persistently with the DPRK to resolve contentious issues between the two countries. Koizumi described the outcome of the talks in Beijing as "discouraging" and acknowledged that the two countries remain far apart in their positions. "But I think we will have to deal patiently with the matter," he was quoted as telling reporters at his official residence. (return to top)

2. US - DPRK Relations

Itar-Tass ("US DEPARTMENT OF STATE REJECTS REPORTS ON BILATERAL TALKS WITH NORTH KOREA", 2006-02-08) reported that the US administration rejected media reports that a bilateral meeting of US and DPRK officials is allegedly due to take place in Washington this month. A representative of the Department of State told Tass that no such meeting has been planned.

(return to top) Bloomberg ("S. KOREAN ENVOY SAYS N. KOREA SHOULD END 'ILLICIT' ACTIVITY", 2006-02-08) reported that Lee Tae Sik, ROK's ambassador to the US, said the DPRK should stop money laundering and circulating counterfeit US currency and return to Six Party Talks. "Such illicit activities are not acceptable," Lee said in a speech at a luncheon organized by the Korea Economic Institute in Washington. The US Treasury Department designated Macau, China-based Banco Delta Asia SARL as a money laundering threat in September, saying the lender helped DPRK officials accept "surreptitious" multimillion dollar deposits and withdrawals and counterfeit US currency. In October, the US Treasury identified eight DPRK companies said to be helping the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and froze their US assets, a move the DPRK called a "hostile'" act that may jeopardize multilateral talks. (return to top)

3. Inter-Korean Military Talks

Reuters ("NORTH KOREA THREATENS TO CALL OFF TALKS WITH SOUTH", 2006-02-08) reported that Pyongyang threatened to halt talks with Seoul unless it pulls out of joint US-ROK military drills which Pyongyang sees as a preparation for an invasion. Officials from the two Koreas agreed last week to resume military talks aimed at reducing tensions between the two armies. The DPRK routinely criticizes joint ROK-US military exercises, but this latest protest came soon after the two Koreas agreed on the defense talks. The DPRK'S Rodong Sinmun, said in a news analysis it was wrong of the ROK to say it would hold exercises at about the same time the two Koreas were holding talks on military confidence-building measures. "Dialogue can never go together with war

exercises," the newspaper said, according to the North's KCNA news agency. "This is a challenge to the dialogue partner and a mockery of it. The South Korean authorities' announcement of their plan to stage those war exercises against the North goes to prove that 'dialogue', 'reconciliation', 'building of military confidence' and 'detente' much touted by them are nothing but rhetoric to deceive the public opinion," the newspaper said. It was not clear whether the DPRK had in mind all talks or just the military meetings.

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4. Inter-Korean Relations

Associated Press ("NORTH AND SOUTH KOREA TO MARCH TOGETHER", 2006-02-08) reported that North and South Korean athletes will march together at the opening ceremony of a Winter Olympics for the first time. Korean delegates met Tuesday on the sidelines of a meeting of National Olympic Committees and agreed to a unified Olympic march, extending a tradition that started at the 2000 Summer Games in Sydney and continued at the 2004 Athens Games. The two Koreas are hoping to form a unified team to compete at the 2008 Beijing Olympics. The DPRK did not send a team to Salt Lake City in 2002 and is competing at the Winter Olympics for the first time since Japan hosted the 1998 edition at Nagano. IOC president Jacques Rogge described the move as "a very important, symbolic gesture."

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5. DPRK Development Assistance

Chosun Ilbo ("WFP TALKS COMPROMISE AID PROJECT WITH NORH KOREA", 2006-02-08) reported that the UN World Food Program is discussing a new aid structure for the DPRK. Catherine Bertini, the former head of the WFP, said efforts are underway to arrange what is being called a "protracted relief and recovery operation." The US$100 million project comes as a compromise to suspending all emergency relief. Speaking at a seminar sponsored by the US Institute of Peace in Washington, Bertini said the new framework addresses Pyongyang's request for a shift in assistance from food donations to development aid.

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6. Japan Politics

The Los Angeles Times ("FRAUD SCANDAL, SUCCESSION LAW PUT KOIZUMI'S CLOUT TO THE TEST", 2006-02-08) reported a backlash has materialized against Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's plan to allow women to ascend to Japan's imperial throne. But the gathering tempest over what seemed to be just another of Koizumi's modernizing steps is a measure of how his iron grip on Japanese politics has weakened in recent weeks. Regarded as virtually unassailable after his crushing electoral win in September, the prime minister has seen opponents come back to attack on several fronts, from his handling of the imperial succession changes to his ties to fraud suspect Takafumi Horie.

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7. Sino-Japanese Relations

Kyodo ("CHINA SAYS IMPROVING TIES UNDER KOIZUMI DIFFICULT: LAWMAKER", 2006-02-08)

reported that PRC State Councilor Tang Jiaxuan told a Japanese lawmaker Wednesday there is little chance of relations between Japan and the PRC improving while Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi remains in office, the legislator said.

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8. PRC on UNSC Reform

People's Daily Online ("CHINA OPPOSES JAPAN'S PUSH FOR VOTE ON UNSC REFORM", 2006-0--08) reported that the PRC opposes the move by any country to forcefully push for the vote on the reform plan of the United Nations Security Council, PRC Foreign Ministry spokesman Kong Quan said in Beijing Tuesday. Kong made the statement in response to questions on the PRC's opinions about the new UN Security Council reform plan proposed by the Japanese Foreign Ministry.

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9. Asia Trade Relations

MarketWatch ("CHINA SURPASSES JAPAN IN ASIAN TRADE", 2006-02-08) reported that the PRC overtook Japan as the largest single trading partner within Asia last year, accounting for 12% of the region's total external trade, according to ABN Amro research. The Dutch banking giant said Japan accounted for 10% of regional trade, though it still outpaces the PRC as the key partner to Southeast Asian nations Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines.

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10. Cross Strait Relations

Agence France-Presse ("CHINA SAYS TAIWAN'S CHEN A "DESTROYER" OF PEACE ", 2006-02-08) reported that the PRC has called Taiwan President Chen Shui-bian a "troublemaker" and "destroyer" of peace, following his recent speech that called for the scrapping of unification guidelines with the mainland. "He is a troublemaker and destroyer of cross-Strait relations and peace and stability in Asia," Li Weiyi, spokesman for the cabinet-level Taiwan Affairs Office.

(return to top) Agence France-Presse ("TAIWAN SAYS IT NEEDS MORE US MISSILES TO COUNTER CHINA THREAT ", 2006-02-08) reported that Taiwan's defense ministry said it needs more US-made Patriot anti-missile systems as PRC ballistic missiles targeting the island are anticipated to more than double to 1,800 by 2013. Officials from the defense ministry made their case to reporters for more weapons as Taiwan's opposition parties have blocked a 340 billion Taiwan dollars (10.6 billion US) arms purchase package. (return to top)

11. US on Cross Strait Relations

Reuters ("PENTAGON OFFICIAL VOICES CHINA-TAIWAN CONCERNS ", 2006-02-08) reported that the PRC may be preparing to deal with its dispute over Taiwan through other than political means as it increases its offensive military power, a top Pentagon official said on Wednesday. "They continue to increase their offensive systems," said Ryan Henry, principal deputy undersecretary of defense for policy told reporters. "It looks like they are preparing for something other than a political solution to the Taiwan problem."

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12. PRC Bird Flu

Reuters ("CHINA CONFIRMS 11TH HUMAN CASE OF BIRD FLU-XINHUA", 2006-02-08) reported that the PRC's Ministry of Health on Wednesday announced one more human case of bird flu, bringing the number of the country's confirmed cases in humans to eleven, the Xinhua news agency said. The victim, a 26-year-old woman from eastern PRC's Fujian Province, is in stable condition, it said.

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