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I. NAPSNet

1. US on DPRK Counterfeiting

China Daily ("US REJECTS NORTH KOREA DEMAND TO END CRACKDOWN ", 2006-01-04) reported that the US on Tuesday rejected the DPRK's demand to end a crackdown on the latter's finances before nuclear weapons talks can restart and said this matter is "not subject to negotiation." In a tough statement, the White House also insisted that it would continue to take action to thwart what it said was DPRK's money laundering and counterfeiting activities. "We've made very clear what the concerns are when it comes to those activities, whether it's counterfeiting U.S. money, engaging in drugs or proliferation of weapons technology," spokesman Scott McClellan told reporters.

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2. US on Six Party Talks

The Korea Times ("US READY FOR SIX-WAY TALKS WITHOUT CONDITIONS: VERSHBOW ", 2006-01-04) reported that Alexander Vershbow, US ambassador to Seoul, urged the DPRK to return to the six party talks, saying that the US is ready to do so without attaching any new conditions. "I sincerely hope that 2006 will be the year in which North Korea's leaders end their country's self-imposed isolation by getting out of the nuclear business," he said in a speech at the Korean-American Association in Seoul.

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3. US on DPRK Sanctions

Chosun Ilbo ("SANCTIONS ON NORTH KOREA REMAIN: WHITE HOUSE", 2006-01-04) reported that Washington will not lift its sanctions on the DPRK anytime soon despite the its request. US State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said the economic sanctions are independent of attempts to end Pyongyang's nuclear drive.

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4. DPRK-US Relations

Chosun Ilbo ("U.S. DAILY SLAMS 'DANGEROUS' N.KOREA DIPLOMACY ", 2006-01-04) reported that the US administration is treading dangerous ground with actions that have brought high-level talks with the DPRK screeching to a halt, the New York Times warned Tuesday. The daily singled out US Ambassador to South Korea Alexander Vershbow's description of Pyongyang as a "criminal regime" as an example of the name-calling it says the Bush administration has reverted to. In an editorial titled "Diplomacy's Fleeting Moment in Korea" the paper says, "It makes little sense for the Bush administration to return to name-calling or to rule out high-level talks on the Patriot Act sanctions. That's not just disappointing. It is extremely dangerous."

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5. US Envoy to DPRK

Reuters ("US NEGOTIATOR WITH N.KOREA LEAVES POST ", 2006-01-04) reported that a senior US negotiator with the DPRK has left his job as six party nuclear talks seem stalemated but two senior

officials said that was not the reason for his departure. After two years as special envoy for the DPRK, Joseph DeTrani left the State Department to become a senior adviser to the new director of national intelligence, the officials told Reuters.

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6. ROK Aid to DPRK

The Korea Times ("SEOUL TO HELP N. KOREAN INFANTS ", 2006-01-04) reported that the ROK government has decided to provide \$10 million to the World Health Organization (WHO) this year to help finance the organization's program to aid millions of infants and pregnant women in the DPRK, a government official said Monday. The decision follows a series of consultations with the UN health watchdog last year, according to the official. The government is expected to conclude its negotiations with the WHO soon and sign a memorandum of understanding on the financing plan.

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7. ROK Submarine Fleet

Chosun Ilbo ("KOREA BOOSTS SUBMARINE PROJECT TO DOUBLE FLEET", 2006-01-04) reported that the ROK has expanded a plan to build three 1,800-ton level 214 submarines starting in 2012 by another six in a bid to double the country's fleet by 2020, the armed forces said Wednesday. Observers pricked up their ears at the choice of submarines over Aegis vessels as a key strategic weapon to counter any threat posed by powerful nations like the PRC and Japan in the event of reunification with the DPRK.

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8. US on ROK-Japanese Territorial Dispute

Korea Times ("US ENVOY STUMBLES OVER DOKDO", 2006-01-04) reported that Alexander Vershbow, the US top diplomat to the ROK, might not have fully understood how sensitive it could be when he spoke about the "legal validity" of the existing situation over Dokdo, the ROK's easternmost islets. "Legally valid, what does that mean?" This was the question reporters raised right after he gave his answer. "We accept this existing situation as it is," the statement said. "The US government has not taken a position on the legal aspects and we hope that issue does not become a further irritant in the relations between the two countries."

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9. Japan on Yasukuni Issue

Reuters ("JAPAN BLAMES CHINA AND SOUTH KOREA FOR WORSENING RELATIONS ", 2006-0-04) reported that a tearful Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi on Wednesday rejected criticism by the PRC and ROK of his visits to a Tokyo war shrine, but added he was committed to developing friendly ties with Beijing and Seoul. "I cannot understand why a foreign government should intervene in a matter of the heart and make it a diplomatic issue," Koizumi said at his first news conference of the year, tears welling up in his eyes.

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10. Japan-Indian Relations

Reuters ("JAPAN, INDIA TO START TALKS TO BRIDGE NUCLEAR DIVIDE ", 2006-01-04) reported that India and Japan agreed on Wednesday to launch talks on nuclear issues in a bid to resolve differences as New Delhi pushes its ambition to become the world's sixth atomic power and boost energy production. The agreement came during discussions between India's junior foreign minister, E. Ahamed and visiting Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Aso, officials said.

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11. PRC Journalist Arrest

The New York Times ("CHINA RELEASES INVESTIGATIVE REPORTER WHOSE JAILING HAD UPSET U.S.", 2006-01-04) reported that the PRC government released a prominent investigative reporter from prison Tuesday, even as it has been intensifying a crackdown on the press. Jiang Weiping, 50, who spent the last five years in prison after writing a series of hard-hitting articles on government corruption for a magazine in Hong Kong, was granted a sentence reduction for good behavior and released one year before his term was set to end, according to his wife, Li Yanling.

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12. PRC Bird Flu Outbreak

Agence France-Presse ("CHINA CONFIRMS BIRD FLU IN THIRD-MOST POPULOUS PROVINCE ", 2006-01-04) reported that the PRC has suffered its first bird flu outbreak in southwestern Sichuan, the nation's third-most populous province and a major agricultural base. A disease that killed 1,800 birds in a village in Dazhu county in the southwest PRC province in late December was confirmed as the H5N1 virus Tuesday, the agriculture ministry said on its website.

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