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I. United States

1. US-DPRK Talks

Agence France Presse ("S.KOREA IN CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM ABOUT US-N.KOREAN TALKS," Seoul, 1/07/00) reported that the ROK on Friday expressed cautious optimism over the possible progress in an upcoming round of talks between the US and the DPRK. A senior ROK foreign ministry official said, "we don't need to be so pessimistic this time. (However,) Pyongyang still demands that the United States 'create a more favorable atmosphere' for progress in the talks." Analysts believe that the DPRK want a further easing of US economic sanctions. William Drennan, a DPRK specialist at the US Institute of Peace, said, "any high-level meeting at least carries the potential for substantial progress." DPRK experts in the ROK, however, warned that a high-level DPRK visit would not necessarily lead to a normalization of ties between the US and the DPRK in the near future. Yu Suk-Ryul, a DPRK specialist at the ROK Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security, said, "Pyongyang is not ready to go to the end. The North's present aim is seen to get more economic benefits by upgrading its contacts with Washington."

2. Korean War Massacres

Associated Press (Sang-hun Choe, "NKOREA CLAIMS US ROLE IN EXECUTIONS," Seoul, 1/07/00) reported that the DPRK on Friday accused the US of involvement in alleged mass executions of political prisoners by ROK police during the Korean War. The claim came one day after an ROK newspaper revealed that declassified US military documents dated September 1950 to May 1951 quoted Lieutenant Colonel Bob Edwards, the US Embassy's Army attache at the time, as saying that ROK police executed thousands of political prisoners in the first weeks of the war. One of the documents said that 1,800 political prisoners were executed over three days in the first week of July 1950 in Taejon, 93 miles south of Seoul. The ROK Defense Ministry said on January 6 that it would investigate the report. The Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) called the alleged killings "part of the massacres of political prisoners committed by the U.S. imperialists and the South Korean rulers." Lee Ferguson, spokeswoman for the US military in Seoul, declined to comment.

3. US Policy toward Russia and PRC

Reuters ("U.S. SAYS RUSSIA, CHINA COULD END UP AS THREATS," Washington, 1/07/00) reported that US National Security Adviser Sandy Berger said in remarks at the National Press Club on January 6 that Russia and the PRC could emerge as threats to the US if their political evolution took the wrong turn. Berger said that a critical question for the next generation was "whether our former adversaries Russia and China will emerge as stable, prosperous, democratic partners of the United States." Berger expressed confidence that Congress will allow the PRC's entry to the World Trade Organization this year. He also praised Russia's peaceful transfer of power to acting President Vladimir Putin following the resignation of President Boris Yeltsin. Berger said that failure by Russia to complete its transformation into a democracy and free-market economy "could present us, I believe, with a threat." Regarding the PRC, Berger said, "a sense of realism cautions us to be prepared for the possibility that this emerging power emerges as a threat. But we should not presuppose that outcome, or make it more likely by acting as if it has already happened." Berger said that the best way to protect US interests and promote democratic change in the PRC is "by continuing a policy of principled, purposeful engagement with China's leaders and people."

4. Japanese Mixed Oxide Fuel

Agence France Presse ("JAPAN'S NUCLEAR FUEL PLANS IN LIMBO AFTER BRITISH SCANDAL," Tokyo, 1/07/00) reported that the Tokyo Electric Power Company said Friday that it would temporarily put off its use of mixed plutonium- uranium oxide (MOX) at a nuclear power plant in Fukushima prefecture, north of Tokyo. The delay was caused by time-consuming checks on MOX production after a scandal in which British Nuclear Fuels (BNFL) found that falsified data on MOX fuel was supplied to another Japanese power utility. Tokyo Electric Power spokesman Takeshi Takamori stated, "we have to wait for the completion of the survey before we can say when we will be able to start the MOX use." The spokesman said that the company president, Nobuya Minami, had notified of the postponement to the governor of Fukushima where the plant is located. Minami also stated, "the survey has been conducted thoroughly with the participation of a third organization. There is no change in the importance of MOX fuel for resources-poor Japan."

II. Japan

1. Japanese-DPRK Relations

The Yomiuri Shimbun ("JAPAN TO RESUME FOOD AID TO DPRK NEXT MONTH," 01/05/2000)

reported that several ruling party leaders revealed that the Japanese government and the ruling parties decided to resume food aid to the DPRK even before the resumption of the normalization talks between the two countries. Some hundred tons of rice will be sent to the DPRK in February at latest, according to the report. The report pointed out that the government decided to resume food aid to the DPRK because, during the visit of Japanese Diet members late last year, the DPRK showed a positive attitude toward investigating the suspected abduction of Japanese civilians by DPRK agents, and also agreed at a meeting between Japanese and DPRK Red Cross officials to allow another group of Japanese women married to DPRK men to visit Japan. As for the method of food aid, the report said that rice will be sent through international organizations such as the World Food Program (WFP), or the Japanese government will provide rice to the DPRK as "loaned rice. The report also suggested that the Japanese government expects the decision to facilitate the normalization talks. However, the report added that some within the government question the resumption of food aid to the DPRK before major progress on the abduction issue.

2. DPRK-Italy Diplomatic Normalization

The Asahi Shimbun ("JAPAN HAILS ESTABLISHMENT OF DPRK-ITALIAN DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS," 01/06/2000) reported that Mikio Aoki, Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary, told reporters that Japan welcomes the establishment of diplomatic relations between the DPRK and Italy. Aoki stated, "It should be hailed that (an official) channel was established between Italy and the DPRK." The report said that the reason for Japan's positive reaction is that an event like this may facilitate the DPRK's opening up. The report also revealed that, given Italy's recent efforts to engage isolated countries in the international community, and given that the headquarters of some international organizations close to the DPRK are located in Rome, the Japanese government had already seen Italy as the European country most likely to establish diplomatic relations with the DPRK. Moreover, the DPRK has also been active in its efforts to establish diplomatic relations with European Union countries, according to the report. However, the report added that according to a foreign ministry source, "the establishment of DPRK-Italian diplomatic relations will not affect Japanese-DPRK relations (directly)."

3. Japanese-US Military Relations

The Asahi Shimbun ("DEFENSE AGENCY DIRECTOR GENERAL SAYS BUDGET FOR US FORCES IN JAPAN SHOULD BE REDUCED," 01/06/2000) and the Yomiuri Shimbun ("TALKS ON HOST-NATION SUPPORT ARE LIKELY TO BE DIFFICULT," 01/06/2000) reported that Japanese-US talks on the special pact on Japan's financial support for the US forces in Japan, which is to be terminated in March, 2001, began in Washington on January 5. The reports said that during the talks, Japanese Defense Agency (DA) Director General Kawara told US Secretary of Defense William Cohen that Japan wants to reduce its financial support for the US forces stationed in Japan due to the worsening financial situation in Japan. Cohen asked Kawara to maintain the current level of support. The reports quoted Cohen as saying, "We always emphasize to Congress that Japan's contribution is a good example." The Yomiuri Shimbun also quoted a DA high-ranking official as saying, "Host-nation support began by considering the US financial situation, but given Japan's current difficult financial situation, why should (the same level of support) be maintained?" The reports said that from now on the matter will be left up to working-level talks, but the reports predicted that the talks would be difficult. The Yomiuri Shimbun also pointed out that within DA there are concerns that Japan's reluctance about host-nation support may harm the Japanese-US security treaty and that the US Congress may get involved, pushing the talks into deadlock. The reports added that Japan's financial support has increased from 6.1 billion yen in 1978 to 28.19 billion yen in 1997. For fiscal year of 2000, the amount is 26.03 billion yen.

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