

NAPSNet Daily Report 10 December, 2008

Recommended Citation

"NAPSNet Daily Report 10 December, 2008", NAPSNet Daily Report, December 10, 2008,
<https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-daily-report/napsnet-daily-report-10-december-2008/>

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I. NAPSNet

1. Six-Party Talks

Associated Press ("PRC SEEKS TO END DISPUTE HALTING AID TO PYONGYANG", Beijing, 2008/12/09) reported that PRC on Tuesday distributed a draft proposal on how to verify DPRK's account of its atomic activities. The PRC's draft was given to teams from the five other countries in the talks, according to an ROK official. The draft will serve as the basis for negotiations with DPRK and could be adopted formally when the talks conclude, possibly Wednesday, he said.

Reuters (Chris Buckley , "NUCLEAR ENVOYS HAGGLE OVER DPRK DRAFT RULES", Beijing, 2008/12/09) reported that nuclear disarmament negotiators fell short of agreement on Tuesday on rules about probing DPRK's nuclear activities. "If we can get through this it would be an important milestone on that road, but with the understanding there is still a long way to go," chief U.S. envoy Christopher Hill said after a second day of negotiations. Hill avoided suggesting there was an impending breakthrough over the draft verification rules written by Chinese negotiators.

Yonhap News Service (Lee Chi-dong, "NUCLEAR TALKS SHOW SIGNS OF PROGRESS", Beijing, 2008/12/09) reported that negotiators in the six-way talks on DPRK's nuclear program cleared one of their biggest obstacles by reaching consensus on permitting international inspectors to take samples from the DPRK's nuclear facilities, an informed source said Tuesday. "Sampling is not a contentious issue any more," the source said on condition of anonymity after senior envoys from DPRK and its five dialogue partners ended their second-day session.

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2. US on DPRK Nuclear Program

JoongAng Ilbo (Lee Sang-il and Jung Ha-won , "U.S. REPORT LISTS DPRK AS NUCLEAR POWER", Washington, 2008/12/10) reported that a recent U.S. defense department report has listed DPRK as one of five nuclear powers in Asia. "The rim of the great Asian continent is already home to five nuclear powers: China, India, Pakistan, North Korea and Russia," said the report, titled "Joint Operating Environment 2008: Challenges and Implications for the Future Joint Force" and produced by the U.S. Joint Operation Command under the Defense Department.

Yonhap News (Hwang Doo-hyong, "U.S. SAYS IT DOES NOT RECOGNIZE N. KOREA AS NUCLEAR POWER ", Washington, 2008/12/09) reported that the US said it does not recognize the DPRK as a nuclear weapons state. "As a matter of policy, we do not recognize North Korea as a nuclear state," Stewart Upton, spokesman for the Department of Defense, said in a statement. "What was contained in a recent Joint Forces Command report does not reflect official U.S. government policy regarding the status of North Korea."

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3. ROK on DPRK Nuclear Program

Chosun Ilbo ("AID TO N.KOREA 'DEPENDS ON NUCLEAR VERIFICATION' ", 2008/12/09) reported that the ROK says economic and energy aid to the DPRK is linked to reaching an agreement on a verification protocol. Seoul's top nuclear negotiator Kim Sook made the point at the six-party nuclear talks in Beijing on Monday. "Economic and energy aid is linked to nuclear disablement and the principle of action for action. It does not end with just setting a new timeline for disablement. This has to happen comprehensively with the verification issue," Kim said. This means Pyongyang may not be getting about half of the promised 950,000 tons of economic and energy assistance for nuclear disablement unless it also agrees to a complete verification process.

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4. Japan-DPRK Relations

Kyodo News ("JAPAN SEEKS BILATERAL TALKS WITH NORTH", 2008/12/09) reported that Japan will continue to seek bilateral talks with the DPRK on the sidelines of the six-party denuclearization talks in Beijing, Chief Cabinet Secretary Takeo Kawamura said. Foreign Minister Hirofumi Nakasone meanwhile re-emphasized the importance of putting into writing a protocol for verifying the DPRK's nuclear information to move the denuclearization process forward. Kawamura said there has been no direct bilateral contact between Japan and the DPRK at the six-way session, which began Monday, and that Japan would seek such an opportunity.

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5. Inter-Korea Relations

Chosun Ilbo ("PLANS FOR 'PEACE CITY' COMPLEX TO BE BUILT NEAR DMZ", 2008/12/09)

reported that under the new balanced regional development policy by the Ministry of Public Administration and Security, plans are underway to build a common development and international peace zone in the area around the DMZ. The peace complex proposal will be presented to the Korea Research Institute for Human Settlements by November 2009, after which a feasibility study will be conducted.

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6. DPRK Food Security

Washington Post Foreign Service (Blaine Harden and Glenn Kessler, "DISPUTE STALLS U.S. FOOD AID TO DPRK", Tokyo, 2008/12/09) reported that a U.S. program to restart food aid to DPRK has run into difficulty, according to U.S. and overseas officials. U.S. officials noted that food aid delivered via nongovernmental organizations continues but acknowledged that the main effort through the World Food Program has stalled. They said they are trying to resolve the problems, which concern disputes over the number of U.S. personnel in Pyongyang and Korean-speaking U.N. employees around the country. "The United States seeks to fully implement the terms of the food aid agreement with the DPRK, which included agreed-upon improvements in monitoring and access conditions that are necessary to effectively ensure food is reaching those most in need," State Department spokesman Robert A. Wood said.

Yonhap News (Hwang Doo-hyong, "U.S. PLANS TO SEND OFFICIALS TO N.K. TO SECURE DISTRIBUTION TRANSPARENCY", Washington, 2008/12/09) reported that the State Department said it plans to send a group of officials to the DPRK to assure transparency in the distribution of food aid to the DPRK as a prerequisite to implementing its pledge to funnel up to 500,000 tons of food. "So we're going to try to send some additional personnel to North Korea in an effort to make it work so that we can assure ourselves that we are fulfilling those dual responsibilities," spokesman Sean McCormack said.

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7. ROK Energy

Bloomberg (Shinhye Kang, "ROK TO INVEST 252.2 BILLION WON IN RENEWABLE ENERGY", 2008/12/09) reported that ROK's government and companies plan to invest 252.2 billion won (\$174 million) in renewable energy to increase business spending as economic growth slows. The funds will be spent to develop eight key technologies in solar and wind power and fuel cells for the next three years, the Ministry of Knowledge Economy said in an e-mailed statement in Seoul today.

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8. ROK Free Trade Zone

Chosun Ilbo ("4 NEW FREE TRADE ZONES PLANNED", 2008/12/09) reported that ROK is to get four new free trade zones, in Ulsan and Pohang Port, Gimje and Pyeongtaek Dangjin Port, the government said Monday. The existing free trade zones of Masan, Busan Port, and Gwangyang Port will be expanded. Rent of land and buildings will be lowered, businesses will get tax benefits, and it will become easier to lure foreign investment and export companies.

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9. Japan Politics

The Asahi Shimbun ("CALLS FOR REALIGNMENT GROW IN LDP", 2008/12/09) reported that Prime Minister Taro Aso's sinking popularity could cost the ruling coalition its critical two-thirds majority in the Lower House as many lawmakers start jockeying for positions to prepare for a political realignment. One closely watched LDP politician is Yoshimi Watanabe, a vocal critic of Aso who advocates political reorganization, presented scenarios for forming a new party at a meeting he hosted Monday, after newspapers reported that the support rate for Aso's Cabinet had plummeted to barely above 20 percent.

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10. Japan Environment

New York Times ("BETTER PLACE TAPPED BY JAPAN FOR ELECTRIC VEHICLES PROJECT", 2008/12/09) reported that Better Place, which promotes electric vehicles, said Tuesday it will build battery exchange stations in Japan as part of a government pilot project to encourage the use of green cars. Better Place builds battery exchange stations, where drivers with no time to charge can trade drained batteries for charged ones — providing infrastructure that helps make electric vehicles a practical option. The Japanese Environment Ministry invited Better Place to take part in the feasibility project for three to six months starting in January in several cities, starting with the port city of Yokohama.

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11. Japan-Taiwan Relations

Bloomberg (Sachiko Sakamaki and Lee Spears, "TAIWAN, JAPAN SHOULD DEVELOP DISPUTED WATERS, WU SAYS ", 2008/12/09) reported that Japan and Taiwan should jointly develop resources in waters near disputed islands in the East China Sea, the chairman of Taiwan's ruling Kuomintang party said. "The islands belong to us but we want to shelve the sovereignty issue and jointly develop fisheries in the area," Wu Poh-hsiung told reporters in Tokyo.

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12. Sino-Japanese Relations

Xinhua News ("JAPANESE PM MEETS REPRESENTATIVES OF CHINA-JAPAN FRIENDSHIP BODY", 2008/12/09) reported that Japanese Prime Minister Taro Aso Monday met with representatives of the new 21st Century Committee for China-Japan Friendship on bilateral ties. As great progress has been made in bilateral relations, Japan and the PRC need to further strengthen exchanges and cooperation in various areas, expand common interests in a bid to promote the strategic and mutually beneficial relations between the two nations, said Aso in talks with representatives of the friendship body at the prime minister's residence.

International Asian News Service ("MARITIME PATROL NEAR DIAOYU ISLANDS IRREPROACHABLE: PRC", 2008/12/09) reported that PRC Tuesday rejected Japan's protests over its ships entering the waters near the disputed Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea, saying maritime patrolling in its territorial waters is "irreproachable". "The Diaoyu Islands and adjacent islets are PRC territories since ancient times. The usual cruising of the Chinese ships within Chinese seas is irreproachable," said foreign ministry spokesperson Liu Jianchao.

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13. PRC Human Rights

Bloomberg (James Peng and Lee Spears, "PRC CONCEDES HUMAN RIGHTS PROBLEMS, AIMS TO IMPROVE ", 2008/12/09) reported that PRC acknowledged its progress on improving human rights was "less than satisfactory" and pledged further work on the issue, the state-run Xinhua News Agency reported, citing a leading official. "There are still many problems and difficulties in the development of human rights," Wang Chen, minister in charge of the State Council Information Office. Still, the message is mixed: Xinhua's PRC-language report distributed to the nation's state-run newspapers cites Wang in claiming that the country's human rights record is at "a historical best," without any acknowledgement of problems.

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14. PRC Food Safety

Associated Press (Gillian Wong, "CHINA UPS EFFORTS TO RID FOOD OF ILLEGAL ADDITIVES", Beijing, 2008/12/09) reported that PRC is launching a four-month food safety campaign Wednesday that will include inspections of food makers to weed out illegal or excessive chemicals in food. The drive will be jointly conducted by nine central government departments and will target food and additive producers across the country, the Health Ministry said in a statement.

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15. PRC AIDS Issue

Agence France-Presse ("PUBLIC SECURITY FORCES UNDERMINE CHINA'S HIV FIGHT: RIGHTS GROUP", Beijing, 2008/12/09) reported that the harassment and imprisonment of drug users in the PRC is undermining the country's response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, activist group Human Rights Watch said. Police and public security forces are driving drug addicts away from community-based prevention services and denying them access to treatment, the group said in a report. The PRC has three to six million drug users, and nearly half of all recent HIV transmission has been associated with drug use, the group said, quoting official government reports.

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16. PRC Security

The Associated Press (Christopher Bodeen, "CHINESE PAPER: GOV'T CRITICS SENT TO MENTAL

WARDS", Beijing, 2008/12/09) reported that PRC provincial authorities lock up critics and complainants in mental hospitals, local media reported in a rare look at official abuse of the PRC's psychiatric health system. According to an article in the Beijing News, Shandong provincial officials in the city of Xintai south of the capital committed people who were seeking to attract the attention of higher authorities to their complaints over local corruption or land seizures. Some were forced to take psychiatric drugs and all were told they would not be released until they signed pledges to drop their complaints, the paper said.

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II. PRC Report

17. PRC Civil Society

China News Net (Wang Hongchuang, "CHANG XIANGYU FOUNDATION SET UP IN HENAN", 2008/12/08) reported that Chang Xiangyu was a great master of Henan opera. She was the only one who gets the title "People's Artist" given by the State Council. Her daughter Chang Yuru is the chairwoman of the Foundation. The establishment of Chang Xiangyu Foundation is not only to commemorate the deceased master of a whole generation, but also to succeed and develop the precious Chang Xiangyu spirit.

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18. PRC Economy

Chengdu Business News (Wu Feng, "SICHUAN TO OPEN CREDIT CARD FOR VOLUNTEERS", 2008/12/08) reported that Volunteers in Sichuan province will have a special credit card before long, for the credit card can only be applied for after you have registered as a volunteer, and the credit limit will be dependant on your volunteer hours. This kind of credit card is co-issued by Sichuan Provincial Communist Youth League, Sichuan Youth Volunteers Association and Business Bank. The credit card will be divided into five star ratings. The highest five star needs over 300 hours of volunteer service.

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19. PRC Civil Society and the Disabled

Xinhua Net (Zou Dapeng, "HAERBIN TRAINING CENTER FOR DISABLED PERSONS TO BE LAUNCHED", 2008/12/08) reported that according to Haerbin Disabled Persons' Association, Haerbin city's first Training Center for Disabled Persons will be launched on December 25. Mental disabled persons over the age of 16 may learn simple working skills here. The Center also provides life care, medical and vocational rehabilitation, cultural and sports activities and so on.

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III. ROK Report

20. Six-Party Talks

PRESSian ("ROK-JAPAN'S BEING HARD TOWARD DPRK", 2008/12/10) reported that the problem of the six-party meeting this time was that the ROK became even firmer. Experts analyzed that the ROK's attitude will be burdensome for the Bush Administration, who wants to contact with them directly and more actively. That way, the ROK is highly likely to be excluded from Korean Peninsula issues. Or else, the denuclearization process will be delayed, experts added. Though Lee Administration seems to act firmly to solve the DPRK nuclear issue on the surface, they rather seem to be bound within a trap which blocks the negotiation process.

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21. DPRK-PRC Relations

DongA Ilbo ("DPRK, 'PRC ENTERPRISES, LEAVE TOO!'", 2008/12/10) reported that the DPRK required PRC companies to withdraw from Rajin-Sunbong special economic zone by the end of November. Whether it was for all corporations is not revealed, though. Officials who are well aware of the DPRK issue said that the corporations have not withdrawn yet, and the DPRK also has not taken any compulsory actions to force them. There are about 250 PRC corporations in the area. They have not been allowed to sell their products in the area since October. However, an official of the department deals with Rajin special economic zone in Yanbian said they are not aware of the withdrawal order. The ROK embassy in the PRC also said they have heard nothing about it.

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