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Contents in this Issue:

- I. NAPSNet
  - 1. DPRK Nuclear Program
  - 2. Inter-Korean Relations
  - 3. DPRK-Syrian Arms Trade
  - 4. DPRK Economy
  - 5. ROK Politics
  - 6. Japan SDF Indian Ocean Mission
  - 7. Cross Strait Relations
  - 8. PRC Space Program
  - 9. PRC Unrest

Preceding NAPSNet Report

I. NAPSNet

1. DPRK Nuclear Program

Reuters (Jon Herskovitz, "NORTH KOREA STILL WANTS NUCLEAR DEAL: U.S. ENVOY", Seoul, 2008/01/08) reported that the DPRK is still committed to an international disarmament-for-aid deal, a U.S. nuclear envoy said, urging patience even though the reclusive state missed a deadline to list its nuclear arms program. "We are not that far apart. I don't think it is something we want to walk away from nor does the DPRK want to walk away from this," U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill told reporters in Seoul. "We didn't meet the timeframe. We ought to be a little patient on this."

Associated Press ("US WANTS NKOREA NUKE DECLARATION BY FEB.", Incheon, 2008/01/10) reported that U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill said Thursday that the DPRK should provide a complete declaration of its nuclear programs before a new ROK government is inaugurated next month. "I think it is very desirable if we could complete the phase two even before (Lee Myung-bak's) government comes in, so that by the time his government does come at the end of February, we'll be focusing on that last stage," Hill told reporters before departing for Beijing.

(return to top)

2. Inter-Korean Relations

Joongang Ilbo (Chae Byung-gun, Chung Kang-hyun, "SECRET PRE-VOTE SPY TALKS SOUGHT TO CALM NORTH", 2008/01/09) reported that on the eve of last month’s presidential election, the Roh Moo-hyun administration informed the DPRK that it expected Lee Myung-bak’s victory and tried to ease worries by assuring Pyongyang of Lee’s ability to persuade conservatives to continue the engagement with the DPRK, a transcript of secret talks between the intelligence chiefs of the two Koreas showed yesterday. The report detailed the secret visit of Kim Man-bok, the ROK’s National Intelligence Service chief, to Pyongyang on Dec. 18, including the transcript of Kim’s dialogue with his DPRK counterpart, Kim Yang-gon. “Currently, many inter-Korean dialogues are taking place. We hope to maintain smooth inter-Korean relations,” Kim Yang-gon was quoted in the report as telling the ROK spy chief.

(return to top)

3. DPRK-Syrian Arms Trade

Agence France-Presse ("ISRAEL PLANNED 1991 STRIKE ON NKOREA-SYRIA SHIP: REPORT", Tokyo, 2008/01/09) reported that Israeli agents prepared to strike a ship suspected of smuggling missiles from the DPRK to Syria in 1991 but canceled it at the 11th hour under US pressure, a Japanese newspaper reported. Undercover agents of Israel's Mossad intelligence agency secretly attached a guidance system for an airstrike on a cargo vessel believed to be carrying 23 short-range Scud missiles to Syria, the Yomiuri Shimbun said. The incident came during the first Gulf War, during which the United States, managing a coalition with Arab states including Syria, pressured

Israel not to respond to Scud missile attacks by Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

(return to top)

4. DPRK Economy

Agence France-Presse ("AID GROUP SAYS NKOREA CRACKS DOWN ON ILLEGAL SEX TRADE", Seoul, 2008/01/09) reported that the DPRK has closed massage parlours as part of a crackdown on the illegal sex trade, a ROK aid group said. The drive began last year, with masseuses asked to switch jobs, Good Friends said in a newsletter. Defectors say poverty-driven prostitution has increased in the DPRK despite a steady campaign to weed out "decadent" foreign culture. In September last year, the DPRK soldiers were told to shun alcohol, sex and money, according to a defectors' group in Seoul.

(return to top)

5. ROK Politics

Associated Press (Jae-soon Chang, "SKOREAN COURT OKS PROBE OF LEE MYUNG-BAK", Seoul, 2008/01/10) reported that the ROK Constitutional Court rejected a petition Thursday seeking to halt a probe of President-elect Lee Myung-bak over financial fraud allegations. The court ruled in a verdict read on national TV by Judge Lee Kang-kook that only one clause of the special law -- which would have enabled investigators to take witnesses into custody for questioning without a warrant -- violated the constitution. The court said the probe could go on if that clause were not invoked.

(return to top)

6. Japan SDF Indian Ocean Mission

The Yomiuri Shimbun ("ANTITERROR LAW LIKELY TO BE ENACTED THIS WEEK", 2008/01/09) reported that the bill to establish a new antiterrorism law to allow the Maritime Self-Defense Force to resume its refueling mission in the Indian Ocean likely will pass the Diet later this week, as the ruling camp has decided to enforce a stipulation in the Constitution that states if the House of Councillors does not vote on a bill within 60 days of it being sent from the House of Representatives, it will be regarded as having been voted down in that chamber. The ruling camp plans to hold a plenary session of the lower house Friday to vote for the second time if the bill was voted down by the upper house on the same day. If the bill is not put to a vote until Saturday, the ruling camp plans to hold a lower house plenary session on the same day.

Kyodo ("FUKUDA, OZAWA REMAIN APART OVER REFUELING BILL IN 1ST DIET DEBATE", Tokyo, 2008/01/09) reported that Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda and main opposition Democratic Party of Japan President Ichiro Ozawa remained apart in their first parliamentary debate over Japan's suspended refueling mission in the Indian Ocean and on how the government should address pension record-keeping blunders. Fukuda, who doubles as the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's president, said the mission is for ''international peace cooperation''. Fukuda also stressed that the refueling mission does not violate Japan's Constitution, which prohibits the use of force to settle international disputes. But Ozawa said that the activities are the same as offering ''logistical support'' for a U.S.-led war. Ozawa said, ''I'm against sending the SDF abroad without making clear

what kind of reason…the deployment is based on.''

(return to top)

7. Cross Strait Relations

Reuters ("TAIWAN SAYS CAN'T MATCH CHINA'S AID OFFER TO MALAWI ", Taipei, 2008/01/09) reported that Taiwan cannot match the PRC's reported $6 billion aid offer to Malawi, but hopes a legacy of goodwill can convince the African nation not to switch allegiance to its giant neighbor, a government spokeswoman said. Taiwan is recognized by just 24, mostly small, impoverished countries, compared to 170 which recognize U.N. Security Council member the PRC which seeks to isolate the island diplomatically. News reports in Malawi said the PRC made the $6 billion aid offer, equivalent to almost three quarters of Malawi's 2006 GDP, in December, Taiwan Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Phoebe Yeh said. The Malawi flap is Taiwan's worst diplomatic crisis since the island broke ties with long-time ally Costa Rica in June.

(return to top)

8. PRC Space Program

Reuters ("CHINA TO LAUNCH 17 SATELLITES THIS YEAR", 2008/01/08) reported that the PRC said it would launch 15 rockets, 17 satellites and its third mission with astronauts in 2008. Huang Qiang, secretary-general of the Commission of Science Technology and Industry for National Defense, made the announcement at a news conference, the Xinhua news agency said.

(return to top)

9. PRC Unrest

BBC News ("CHINA ARRESTS OVER BEATING DEATH", 2008/01/09) reported that at least 24 people have been questioned in the PRC, following the death of a man who had been filming local officials abusing the public in Hubei province. Those being questioned include members of an unpopular security force employed by police to tackle minor crime. The PRC's state news agency Xinhua said the dispute began when local people attempted to stop a rubbish truck from dumping rubbish near their village. Members of the city's management police, the Chengguan, intervened and Wei Wenhua, manager of a construction company in Tianmen City, began filming the confrontation on his mobile phone. When the Chengguan demanded that Mr Wei delete the images he refused. He was then attacked and beaten to death, said witnesses.

(return to top)

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