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I. Napsnet

1. US-DPRK Cultural Exchanges

Chosun Ilbo ("KIM JONG-IL TO ATTEND NY PHILHARMONIC CONCERT", Seoul, 2008/02/14) reported that DPRK leader Kim Jong-il is expected to attend a concert by the New York Philharmonic Orchestra in Pyongyang on Feb. 26, according to Radio Free Asia Tuesday. RFA said U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice could use that moment to visit the DPRK to seek a breakthrough in deadlocked six-nation nuclear talks by attending the concert along with the North Korean leader. Rice is scheduled to attend the inauguration ceremony of ROK president-elect Lee Myung-bak on Feb. 25 before flying to Japan and the PRC, but a change in the itinerary is possible, the broadcaster predicted.

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2. DPRK Food Aid

Korea Herald (Lee Joo-hee, "NORTH KOREA DIVERTS RICE FOR MILITARY AID: REPORT", Seoul, 2008/02/14) reported that a news report released Thursday claimed that some of the rice sent to the DPRK from the ROK was being diverted to the military. "Since the end of 2006 until recently, rice bags have been seen being unloaded from a Red Cross truck -- apparently coming from South Korea -- at a forefront army unit in North Korea's Injae, Gangwon Province," an ROK military source said on condition of anonymity. "We do not feel that we have enough transparency in the distribution and we will continue to seek diverse ways to intensify the watch, as well as continuously taking the issue with North Korea during our contacts," the Unification Ministry said in a statement.

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3. ROK Investment in DPRK

IFES NK Brief ("ROK BUSINESSES OPTOMISTIC ABOUT INTER-KOREAN COOPERATION AFTER NUKE RESOLUTION", Seoul, 2008/02/12) reported that according to a survey by the Korea Chamber of Commerce, 79.4 percent of ROK companies involved in inter-Korean cooperation responded that they are "currently facing systemic and procedural difficulties." When asked about the relative attractiveness of investment in the DPRK if the current situation were maintained, as compared to Vietnam and the PRC, only 27 percent responded, "more attractive," while 53.7 percent responded that investment was "impossible." However, 58 percent responded that, in the event the nuclear issues were resolved, investment in the DPRK would be "more attractive than China and Vietnam," while only 21.7 percent responded that investment in the the DPRK would still be "impossible."

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4. Inter-Korean Sports Exchanges

Donga Ilbo ("RED DEVILS' TO SKIP WORLD QUALIFIER IN N.KOREA", Seoul, 2008/02/14) reported that the ROK soccer fan group Red Devils will not attend the March 26 World Cup qualifier between the two Koreas in Pyongyang. On its official homepage, the group said Wednesday that it decided not to go citing the inability to use the cheering method of its choice. "Using our national symbol is a must for us and at the core of our Red Devil tradition. If another country threatens to dictate our tradition, there is no point in us taking a long journey for cheering," a member of the Red Devils' operating committee said.

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5. US Military in ROK

Chosun Ilbo ("RESTORE STATUS OF USFK, EX-FM URGES", Seoul, 2008/02/14) reported that Former foreign minister Yu Jong-ha said Wednesday the status of U.S. Forces Korea has fallen over the past 10 years under two progressive governments. "In the past, the U.S. forces served in South Korea with pride... But the U.S. has been embarrassed to face criticism that it is an obstacle to the unification of North and South Korea." "The U.S. doesn't leave its forces under the directorship of foreign commanders. Demanding the return of wartime control is tantamount to asking the USFK to leave this country," he said.

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6. ROK-US FTA

Donga Ilbo ("NAT'L ASSEMBLY BEGINS DELIBERATING FTA WITH US", Seoul, 2008/02/14) reported that the ROK National Assembly on Wednesday began deliberating the free trade agreement with the United States five months after the deal was submitted to parliament. The parliamentary committee on unification, foreign affairs and trade in a meeting put the pact on the official agenda as supported by a bipartisan agreement.

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7. ROK-US FTA

Donga Ilbo ("OPPOSITION TO US FUELING ANTI-FTA MOVEMENT", Seoul, 2008/02/14) reported that The Center for Free Enterprise in Seoul released a report which said that opposition in Korea to the free trade agreement with the United States is really fueled by anti-American sentiment rather than freedom of speech. "Looking deep into the activities of the some 20 member groups of the alliance, all of them seem to share the causes of denial of the historic integrity and legitimacy of the Republic of Korea; advocacy of anti-capitalism and North Korean totalitarianism; and hostility toward the United States and its allies," the report said.

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8. ROK-Japan FTA

Chosun Ilbo ("JAPAN PM HOPES FOR FTA TALKS WITH SEOUL", Seoul, 2008/02/14) reported that would resume talks on a free trade agreement following president-elect Lee Myung-bak's inauguration on Feb. 25. Fukuda said, "(After the next president is sworn in Seoul) the political situation will change. Taking advantage of this momentum, I'd like to resume (FTA) talks with Korea."

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9. ROK-Iraq Relations

Donga Ilbo ("KOREAN CONSORTIUM WINS OIL RIGHTS IN N. IRAQ", Seoul, 2008/02/14) reported that a consortium consisting of Korea National Oil Corp. and other ROK firms has won exploration rights at a large oil field in the Kurdish autonomous region of northern Iraq. The consortium was to sign a memorandum of understanding Thursday with the Kurdistan Regional Government on energy cooperation at the Shilla Hotel in Seoul.

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10. Sino-Japanese Relations

Associated Press ("CHINA DENIES POISON AT DUMPLING FACTORY", Beijing, 2008/02/13) reported that Wei Chuanzhong, deputy head of the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection, and Quarantine in the PRC, on Wednesday dismissed reports that factory workers could have deliberately poisoned dumplings blamed for sickening at least 10 people in Japan. "There is almost no possibility anyone could disrupt the environment at that factory for production, processing and transport for export," he said at a news conference. Wei dismissed a report in Kyodo News Agency that cited a local PRC official who said poor work conditions may have prompted workers to poison the dumplings as pure speculation.

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11. Japanese Offshore Development

Asahi Shimbun ("SURVEY SHIP LAUNCHED AMID RESOURCES RACE", Tokyo, 2008/02/14) reported that the Japanese government has launched a 23.2-billion-yen vessel called Shigen (resources) to survey undersea natural resources in Japanese waters amid increasing competition with neighboring countries. Akira Amari, minister of economy, trade and industry stated, "The likelihood of being able to develop natural resources, as well as the precision of geological surveys, will be greatly enhanced at once." The ship is also expected to study faultlines responsible for earthquakes.

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II. ROK Report

12. DPRK Nuclear Program

OhmyNews (Jeong Wook-sik, "DPRK'S ULTIMATE GOAL, BECOMING NUCLEAR-POSSESSING NATION?", Seoul, 2008/02/14) said in an op-ed written by Jeong Wook-sik, the representative of Peace Network, that the DPRK's "step by step" nuclear reporting is highly unlikely to solve the problem unless they are compensated by being removed from the terrorist-supporting nations list and if the UEP problem is resolved. Also, it is implausible to view the DPRK as a country whose ultimate goal is to possess nuclear weapons only because they do not seem to be actively engaged in clarifying the UEP and the issue around nuclear collaboration with Syria. We should stop judging their purpose as the way we have assumed them to be and resorting to force and pressure even before the nuclear abandonment talks are started.

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13. ROK Policy Toward DPRK

Hankyoreh ("2.13 TREATY REMINDS OF ROK'S RESPONSIBILITY", Seoul, 2008/02/14) said in an op-ed that the largest barrier to solving the DPRK nuclear issue is lack of DPRK-US mutual confidence. Since the ROK is responsible for the problem as well, the responsibility imposed to the incoming government is very heavy. According to a survey, experts of inter-Korean relations all view the new government's policies toward the DPRK, that are focused on practicality, negatively. Assertions such as "strengthening the ROK-US alliance" are too vague. The ROK should not forget its role as an "active leader" in solving the problem of the Korean Peninsula.

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14. Alleged DPRK Uranium Enrichment

Segye Ilbo (Koh Yoo-hwan, "YEAR PASSED SINCE 2.13 TREATY", Seoul,) said in an editorial written by Koh Yoo-hwan, professor of DPRK studies at Dongguk Univ., that the main barrier of putting 2.13 treaty into practice is the conflict between the DPRK and the US arose with the UEP reporting issue. If the US assertion about the DPRK's development of uranium enrichment is revealed as untrue, it is highly likely that the US will be criticized for inducing the DPRK nuclear crisis and nuclear test. For the DPRK as well, since the admission means a violation of Geneva agreement, they are concerned about whether it will make it becomes less likely for the light-water reactor to be provided to them. Also, as the admission can make the US conservative become even more firm, it is difficult for the DPRK to admit the development plan. The inauguration of Lee Myung-bak, who is conservative about the DPRK issue, and Bush's lame duck status seem to make the problem even worse.

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