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Preceding NAPSNet Report

I. NAPSNet

1. US Fuel Shipments to the DPRK

Yonhap ("U.S. TO SHIP SECOND BATCH OF HEAVY FUEL OIL TO N. KOREA: REPORT", Seoul, 2008/02/23) reported that the US plans to ship an additional 54,000 tons of heavy fuel oil to the DPRK in early March under a six-party deal aimed at denuclearizing the communist country, Yonhap News reported. The DPRK has so far received 146,000 tons, including 46,000 from the United States and 50,000 tons each from the ROK and PRC. Radio Free Asia, based in Washington, said the second batch of U.S. oil will arrive in the DPRK in early March.

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2. DPRK on Fuel Shipments

Yonhap ("N KOREA THANKS SOUTH, CHINA FOR ENERGY AID, URGES FASTER DELIVERY - SOUTH ENVOY", Beijing, 2008/02/22) reported that the DPRK thanked the ROK and PRC for supplying energy-related aid under an aid-for-denuclearization deal, but also called for faster assistance, a ROK envoy said. In a working-level meeting with the ROK and PRC, the DPRK complained that the economic and energy assistance promised to the country was not being delivered in sync with the ongoing dismantlement of its nuclear weapons programme, said ROK representative Lim Sung-nam. "The North basically expressed its position that the assistance wasn't proceeding as fast as its disarmament, but also expressed its gratitude to South Korea and China for sincerely implementing the supply of energy facilities," Lim told reporters.

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3. ROK on DPRK Nuclear Issue

Yonhap ("OPEN-DOOR POLICY HELPFUL TO N. KOREA, LEE SAYS", Seoul, 2008/02/23) reported

that the ROK's President-elect Lee Myung-bak urged the DPRK to open up to the outside world, saying that such a policy will not only help boost inter-Korean relations but also bring benefits to the DPRK itself. "For the success of the Kaesong complex, stronger open-door policies by North Korea would benefit the country itself as well as us," Lee said during a meeting with former Singaporean Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong in Seoul. Lee also told Goh that the DPRK has no reason to create tension with his government which he said will pursue a policy of reconciliation and peace in international relations.

Korea Times (Jung Sung-ki, "'DENUCLEARIZATION BEFORE NK AID'", 2008/02/25) reported that President Lee Myung-bak Monday said he will meet DPRK leader Kim Jong-il if necessary to discuss the reunification of the ROK and DPRK. In his inaugural speech at the National Assembly, the new President reiterated his DPRK policy, which calls for more reciprocity from Pyongyang. He made it clear that the DPRK's denuclearization is a precondition to the reconciliation of the two Koreas and Seoul's potential aid programs.

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4. US on DPRK Nuclear Issue

Chosun Ilbo ("USFK CHIEF WORRIED ABOUT 'CONVENTIONAL THREAT' FROM N.KOREA", 2008/02/25) reported that in an interview with the Wall Street Journal on Saturday, Gen. Burwell B. Bell, commander of the US Forces Korea, said, "First and foremost, I'm worried... about the conventional threat that the North Korean military poses to South Korea." On the six-party nuclear disarmament talks, Bell said the DPRK has been cycling between cooperating and stalling. "Six-party negotiators take note: (North Korean leader) Kim Jong-il is not in the habit of keeping promises," the newspaper said.

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5. US-DPRK Cultural Exchanges

Washington Post (Blaine Harden, "N.Y. PHILHARMONIC ARRIVES IN NORTH KOREA", Pyongyang, 2008/02/25) reported that the New York Philharmonic arrived late Monday afternoon amid light snow and gray skies, beginning a rare U.S. cultural exchange with one of the world's most isolated societies. Lorin Maazel, music director of the orchestra, said on the tarmac that he was very much aware of criticism of the trip by some human rights activists. Maazel said that for closed societies like the DPRK "we are a lifeline to the outside world." The Tuesday performance will be held before an audience of high-ranking DPRK officials, but also is scheduled to be broadcast live on DPRK state television. Maazel said he was pleased about the broadcast, but was unsure what its effect might be.

Joongang Ilbo ("AHEAD OF CONCERT, PYONGYANG LAUDS ITS OWN MUSIC", Beijing, 2008/02/26) reported that Gershwin and Dvorak are coming to the DPRK. But it's the music created and inspired by the dynastic rulers of the DPRK that truly tugs at the heartstrings of one of the world's most isolated people. The DPRK's KCNA news agency last week reminded readers how, during the 1950-53 Korean War, its soldiers "mowed down the U.S. imperialist aggressors," after being inspired by such tunes as "Song of Defending the Homeland" and "My Song in the Trench."

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6. DPRK-Russian Relations

RIA Novosti ("RUSSIA, N. KOREA AGREE ON RELEASE OF ARRESTED SHIP - DIPLOMAT", Moscow, 2008/02/25) reported that Russia's general consul in Chongjin, Valery Valkovich, has secured a speedy release of a Russian ship arrested in the Sea of Japan for allegedly violating the DPRK border, a Russian diplomatic source said. The Russian Lidiya Demesh vessel was carrying a batch of cars from the Japanese port of Hamata to Vladivostok in Russia's Far East, when a DPRK border guard vessel stopped it near Cape Musudan, three to five miles from the DPRK's shores. "During talks between the Russian general consul in Chongjin and North Korean border guard authorities in the port of Kimch'aek, where the detained ship is anchored, the sides agreed on a speedy release of the vessel," an official from the Russian general consulate told RIA Novosti on the phone.

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7. DPRK Economy

IFES NK Brief ("ENERGY SHORTAGES LEAD TO FALL IN APPLIANCE SALES IN DPRK STATE-RUN STORES", 2008/02/25) reported that the ROK NGO 'Good Friends' has reported that government stores in the DPRK are mourning the drop in sales of electrical appliance, which appear to be out of favor due to electrical shortages around the country. In addition, the newsletter describes the seriousness of the DPRK's energy shortage, pointing out that "as it becomes more and more difficult for residents to see electricity, they are seeking out Chinese-made 12V batteries, car batteries, candles, and other alternatives." According to the article, most well-off residents are using car batteries, while average laborers carry flashlights or small battery chargers to work, using electricity slated for industrial use to charge personal items.

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8. US-ROK Security Alliance

Chosun Ilbo ("RELOCATION OF U.S. TROOPS MAY BE POSTPONED", 2008/02/26) reported that a proposed plan to relocate US troops stationed near the border with the DPRK could be pushed back another year or two. According to the planned relocation of the 2nd Infantry Division, the move was to be carried out by 2013. But this is likely to be delayed for financial reasons. A ROK government official said on Sunday that they are facing difficulty obtaining the funds necessary to move the troops to Pyeongtaek, some 70 km south of the capital.

Korea Times (Jung Sung-ki, "KOREA, US TO BOOST ROLES OF COMBINED MARINE FORCES", 2008/02/25) reported that the ROK and U.S. Marine Corps will enhance their combined operational capability in case of war on the Korean Peninsula, military sources said. To that end, the two sides agreed to upgrade the current Combined Marine Forces Command (CMFC) to the Combined Marine Forces Component Command (CMCC), a source said. Gen. Kim Kwan-jin, chairman of the ROK's Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) and Gen. B. B. Bell, commander of the U.S. Forces Korea, signed a related memorandum of agreement in Seoul earlier this week, JCS officials said.

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9. US-Japan-PRC Military Relations

Reuters (Edwina Gibbs, "CHINA SEEKS THREE-WAY TALKS WITH U.S. AND JAPAN: REPORT", Tokyo, 2008/02/25) reported that the PRC has proposed to the US and Japan that the three nations hold regular high-level talks on matters such as the DPRK, energy strategies and the environment, the Nikkei business daily reported. The proposal, which was made last year, calls for talks between vice ministers and senior bureaucrats, and possibly also between heads of state and foreign ministers, the paper said. The ROK has expressed alarm at being excluded from potential discussions on North Asia security, which has led the US to take a cautious view of the proposal, it added.

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10. Sino-Japanese Relations

China Daily ("CHINA, JAPAN VOW TO BOOST TIES", 2008/02/25) reported that Sino-Japanese relations have reached a new historic starting point and are facing important development opportunities, high-level officials attending the Eighth PRC-Japan Strategic Dialogue have said. The two-day dialogue, which concluded on Saturday in Beijing, mainly focused on boosting mutual strategic trust, according to the Foreign Ministry. The two delegations vowed to boost cooperation to ensure the visit's success and the healthy and steady development of Sino-Japanese relations. They also pledged to strive for an early and proper settlement of the East China Sea issue.

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11. Japan Maritime Incident

Agence France-Presse (Kimiko de Freytas-Tamura, "JAPAN PM DEMANDS SHAKE-UP AFTER MARITIME COLLISION ", Tokyo, 2008/02/25) reported that Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda promised to shake up the defence ministry after the country's newest and largest destroyer rammed a fishing boat, leaving a father and son missing at sea. The Kyodo news agency separately reported that Japan's navy chief would be sacked over the embarrassing collision, which is threatening to become another headache for a premier whose approval ratings have dropped sharply. "I think the organisational structure (of the ministry) is problematic," Fukuda told a cabinet meeting. "We need to review the organisation from its root."

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12. Japan-Australia Trade Relations

Kyodo ("JAPAN EYES EXEMPTION OF 5 FARM ITEMS FROM FTA WITH AUSTRALIA", Tokyo, 2008/02/25) reported that Japan has proposed to Australia that rice, wheat, beef, dairy products and sugar be taken off the table in negotiating a bilateral free trade agreement, a senior Japanese farm ministry official said Monday. "We intend to protect sectors that need to be protected," vice farm minister Toshiro Shirasu said at a news conference. Australia, a major farm product exporter, is expected to oppose the exemption of the five items from the envisaged FTA with Japan. Shirasu's remark came as the fourth round of the bilateral FTA talks got under way Monday in Tokyo. The

negotiations are to last until Friday.

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13. Sino-US Military Relations

The Associated Press (Robert Burns, "PENTAGON CITES MIA DEAL WITH CHINA ", Washington, 2008/02/25) reported that the PRC has agreed to a long-standing US request for access to sensitive military records that Pentagon officials believe might resolve the fate of thousands of US servicemen missing from the Korean War and other Cold War-era conflicts, a Pentagon official said Monday. The arrangement is scheduled to be publicly announced Friday in Shanghai after a final set of talks to work out certain details, according to Larry Greer, spokesman for the Pentagon's POW-MIA office.

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14. Sino-Indian Military Exercise

Agence France-Presse ("INDIA TO HOST NEXT MILITARY EXERCISE WITH CHINA ", New Delhi, 2008/02/25) reported that India will host the second joint military exercises with the PRC, as the neighbours continue to mend ties after a brief but bitter border war in 1962, a report said. The first-ever military manoeuvres between the world's most populous nations were held in the PRC in December, when about 200 Indian and Chinese troops jointly "took out" a group of supposed terrorists along their border. "The next joint exercise will be held in India this year," Defence Minister A.K. Anthony was quoted as saying by the Press Trust of India news agency.

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15. Cross Strait Relations

Agence France-Presse (Benjamin Yeh, "TAIWAN PRESIDENTIAL HOPEFULS BACK BETTER CHINA TIES ", Taipei, 2008/02/25) reported that Taiwan's presidential hopefuls voiced support for a lessening of tensions with rival PRC as they squared off in their first live televised debate ahead of next month's election. Frontrunner Ma Ying-jeou of the Kuomintang (KMT) and ex-premier Frank Hsieh of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) are vying for the right to succeed independence-leaning President Chen Shui-bian. "I would like to reiterate my mainland policy -- no unification, no independence and no use of force. I will not discuss unification with China if elected," said Ma. For Hsieh, who has tried to distance himself from Chen's confrontational policies towards Beijing, a gradual opening up to the PRC must not come at the cost of the island's security. "I have a plan in mind regarding the opening of direct links with China, but Taiwan's national security and sovereignty should be given top priority," the DPP candidate said.

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16. PRC AIDS Issue

Reuters ("CHINA: RISE IN AIDS AND SYPHILIS", 2008/02/25) reported that the PRC disclosed a large percentage rise for 2007 in diseases transmitted sexually or via blood, including AIDS and

syphilis, without reporting exact figures. The number of new AIDS cases rose 45 percent in 2007 from the year before and new syphilis cases rose 24 percent, the Health Ministry said on its Web site. It did not elaborate. The PRC has been battling an acknowledged rise in cases of AIDS and H.I.V., the virus that causes AIDS, now mainly sexually transmitted, though it had said before that the overall rate was slowing. In the past, most cases were caused by intravenous drug use. The government said last year that it estimated that about 700,000 people had H.I.V. or AIDS.

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II. Republic of Korea

17. ROK-DPRK relation

Kyunghyang Newspaper ("[editorial] 'PRAGMATIC INSTRUMENT' IN ROK-DPRK RELATION MUST BE REALISTIC", 2008/02/26) wrote that in his inaugural address, President Lee Myung-bak manifested his will toward "productive" ROK-DPRK relations, and proposed a "pragmatic" instrument rather than an "ideological" one as the criterion. The general view is that the new administration, unlike the Roh administration which had much weight on the value of "a people," will focus on strict economic logic and reciprocity. However, in order to develop ROK-DPRK relations productively, the pragmatic instrument must wisely free itself from a simple logic -- strict economic logic and reciprocity -- and be realistic.

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18. ROK diplomacy

Donga Ilbo ("[editorial] 'LEE MYUNG-BAK'S FOUR-POWER DIPLOMACY' HAS MOUNTAINS TO CLIMB OVER", 2008/02/26) wrote that due to President Lee Myung-bak repeatedly emphasizing the importance of the ROK-US alliance only, there are voices that are concerned that the PRC and Russia might feel disappointed. The new administration must practice a balanced diplomacy with respective strategies for the four powers with ROK-US relations as the axis. The predicted demand of diversification in the roles of US troops in the ROK from the US alone has sensitive elements for the PRC and Russia. The administration must grasp such elements of conflict beforehand and ask the nation for persuasion and understanding. That is pragmatic diplomacy.

Joongang Ilbo ("[editorial] GLOBAL DIPLOMACY, IN ACTION, NOT IN WORDS", 2008/02/26) wrote that in order to realize the keyword of Lee Myung-bak's inaugural address, "advancement," both national benefit and national quality must be kept in mind. In that sense, having "global diplomacy" the title of the foreign policy can be seen as a proper choice of direction. He elucidated a realistic reciprocity principle of linking nuclear abandonment and opening to aid. People are curious how the DPRK will respond to this. Increasing the national benefit and raising the national quality through diplomacy must be followed by will to translate ideas into action and specific conduct.

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19. US-DPRK Relations

Kukmin Ilbo ("[editorial] NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC PYONYANG PERFORMANCE THAT WILL GO DOWN IN HISTORY", 2008/02/26) wrote that the DPRK allowing a Pyongyang performance of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra can be interpreted as the DPRK's willingness to ameliorate US-DPRK relations. That is why this orchestra diplomacy is being compared to the "Ping Pong Diplomacy" in the past that led to improvement of US-China relations. Obviously, there are indications that this is a political show of the DPRK to gain a positive impression from global society or a propaganda of the Kim Jong-il regime. However, the New York Philharmonic Orchestra's Pyongyang performance can be a steppingstone for the DPRK to free itself from the anti-US only system into an open and liberal society. And, if possible, I hope that this would lead to DPRK nuclear abandonment and be recorded as the beginning of amelioration of US-DPRK relations and Korean Peninsula Peace settlement.

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