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Preceding NAPSNet Report

I. Napsnet

1. Six-Party Talks

Korea Times (Yoon Won-sup, "SIX-PARTY NUCLEAR TALKS SLOWING DOWN", Seoul, 2008/01/28) reported that ROK Foreign Minister Song Min-soon said Monday that the six-party talks will likely not make any progress for the time being. "In order to solve the (delayed) nuclear declaration of North Korea, recently we have made contacts with the parties concerned -- the United States, China, Russia, Japan and North Korea. But it is unlikely to get a tangible result for the time being," Song told reporters. Asked if there is any sign of resolution of the nuclear problem, Song said, "The whole process (including the six-party talks) is slowing down."

Kyodo ("N. KOREA DISABLEMENT SLOW; NO POSITIVE SIGNS ON LIST: YABUNAKA", Tokyo, 2008/01/28) reported that the pace of disablement work at Yongbyon has slowed and the DPRK has not shown a positive response to calls by the PRC and others to fulfill its promise in submitting a full declaration of its nuclear facilities, Japanese Vice Foreign Minister Mitoji Yabunaka said Monday. ''If this (the declaration) moves forward, I believe the (disablement) process will surely pick up pace,'' said Yabunaka. ''Unfortunately at this point in time, we haven't seen any positive response (from the DPRK).''

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2. DPRK on Human Rights Envoy

Associated Press ("NKOREA CRITICIZES US HUMAN RIGHTS ENVOY", Seoul, 2008/01/28) reported that the DPRK on Monday accused Jay Lefkowitz, US special envoy on DPRK human rights, with interfering in the six-party talks negotiations. "Lefkowitz was recently put into shame for indiscreetly trying to interfere in the nuclear issue," the Korean Central News Agency said Monday. "The matter is that in the U.S. some people like him who still don't know whether they should go forward or backward are unsatisfied with progress on the nuclear issue and North Korea-U.S. ties and only aim for chances to break up the process," KCNA said.

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3. DPRK-PRC Relations

Korea Times (Jung Sung-ki, "NK LEADER MAY VISIT CHINA IN MARCH", Seoul, 2008/01/27) reported that DPRK leader Kim Jong-il is expected to visit the PRC in March to discuss issues of mutual concern including the DPRK's economic reform, a report said Sunday. The PRC wants to invite Kim in late March when the National People's Congress ends, Yonhap news agency reported, quoting unidentified multiple diplomatic sources. ``I understand that China plans to arrange Kim's visit before Chinese President Hu Jintao visits Japan in mid-April,'' a source was quoted as saying.

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4. DPRK Trade

Korea Herald (Lee Sun-young, "DOING BUSINESS IN NORTH KOREA STILL DIFFICULT: POLL", Seoul, 2008/01/28) reported that a survey released Monday by the Korea Chamber of Commerce and Industry showed that the DPRK is still not as attractive as the PRC or Vietnam for ROK firms to do business. Eighty percent of firms polled said they are having difficulties operating or starting businesses in the DPRK. Reasons include procedural complications, poor economic infrastructure and a low level of understanding of market principles. Poor trade and financial systems, and a ban on shipping into the DPRK strategically important goods, which includes high-tech computers, were also cited as problems. If the nuclear tension is resolved, 58 percent of the firms said that the DPRK country would become a more attractive destination than the PRC or Vietnam.

Chosun Ilbo ("N.KOREA OPENS ONLINE SHOPPING MALL", Seoul, 2008/01/28) reported that the DPRK has opened its first internet shopping mall and is now selling hundreds of items online. An "e-shop" section was added to the DPRK's official business information site Chollima (www.dprk-economy.com/en/Shop/index.php). The shop's 14 product categories include machinery, building materials, vehicles, industrial art objects, foodstuffs, daily necessities, stamps, artworks, movies and software. After selecting items and clicking the "order" button, customers can enter their e-mail address or other contact information. The PRC-based administrator will then contact customers for their credit card number to process the order.

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5. Inter-Korean Rail Link

Korea Times ("NK PROPOSES REDUCING INTER-KOREAN TRAIN SERVICES", Seoul, 2008/01/26) reported that has proposed cutting down cross-border railway services at this week's military talks, citing a lack of cargo, an ROK military official said Saturday. "It is better to reduce the runs than keep the service going without cargo," Col. Pak Rim-su, head of the DPRK delegation to the meeting, was quoted as saying by the official.

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6. UNDP in DPRK

New York Times (Warren Hoge, "SENATORS CRITICIZE U.N. PROGRAM IN NORTH KOREA, BUT QUESTION SET OF ACCUSATIONS", Washington, 2008/01/25) reported that Senate subcommittee criticized the United Nations Development Program in the DPRK on Thursday, accusing it of lax management and poor accountability. But much of the hearing on Thursday focused on charges made last year by Mark D. Wallace, an ambassador at the United States mission to the United Nations, that $2.8 million of program funds had been sent to DPRK missions abroad for the purchase of buildings in Britain, France and Canada; that $2.7 million had been paid to a DPRK financial agent responsible for sales of missiles and arms; and that more than $7 million had been transferred to a DPRK committee. The subcommittee staff report said that in fact the money to buy real estate was actually DPRK, not United Nations, money, and that the amount of money sent to the company suspected of financing arms was $52,000, not $2.7 million. It also accepted the program's explanation that the link to arms sales of the suspect contact, the Macao-based Zang Lock Trading Company, had not been known at the time.

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7. DPRK Population

Associated Press ("NKOREA TO ALLOW FIRST CENSUS IN 15 YEARS", Seoul, 2008/01/28) reported that U.N. Population Fund in October will begin a yearlong census in the DPRK for the first time since 1993. The DPRK's official media occasionally release population figures but their accuracy has been questioned because it is unclear whether they include people serving in the military and labor camps, said Sohn Hyun-jin, an official at the ROK Unification Ministry. The ROK will pay $4 million of the expected $5.6 million cost of the new U.N. census, the Unification Ministry said.

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8. DPRK-Canada Relations

Associated Press ("NORTH KOREA FREES DETAINED CANADIAN", Seoul, 2008/01/28) reported that Kim Je-yell, a Canadian aid worker detained in the DPRK has been freed after he reportedly spent three months in captivity accused of trying to start a church. Canadian consular officials met Kim Saturday at the border between the DPRK and the PRC, said Jess Dutton, a counselor at the Canadian Embassy in Seoul. "Canadian officials in Seoul have been providing consular assistance to Mr. Kim, and we are grateful to North Korean authorities for providing us with consular access to Mr. Kim," Dutton said.

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9. DPRK Defectors

Korea Times ("GOV'T ORDERED TO ISSUE PASSPORT TO NK DEFECTOR", Seoul, 2008/01/28) reported that the ROK Supreme Court Monday ruled in favor of DPRK defector Kim Tok-hong, who has been repeatedly denied a passport to travel to the United States, citing the need to protect his basic right. The court dismissed an appeal by the Foreign Ministry, which warned that the defector could be a target of DPRK assassination attempts in the U.S. and that his planned trip could cause diplomatic friction. Kim was president of the DPRK's Yogwang General Trading Company and an aide to Hwang Jang-yop, former secretary of the DPRK Workers' Party. The two defected together.

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10. Kim Jong-il Site Inspections

Yonhap ("N.K. LEADER VISITS PROVINCIAL ECONOMIC FACILITIES", Seoul, 2008/01/28) reported that DPRK leader Kim Jong-il recently made another economic guidance tour, the fourth of its kind this year, the DPRK's media has reported. Kim visited several economic facilities, including a mushroom farm, in Janggang County of Jagang Province in the northern tip of the country, the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said Sunday. Kim also visited a foodstuff factory and a rabbit farm.

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11. ROK Military

Chosun Ilbo ("KOREA FIGHTER JET PROJECT 'NOT VIABLE'", Seoul, 2008/01/28) reported that the Korea Development Institute concluded that a project to develop home-grown next-generation fighter planes would be economically unviable. The program, codenamed KF-X, aims to produce a multi-role fifth-generation aircraft by 2020 to replace the outdated F-4Es and F-5Es and to market it globally. However, the Defense Acquisition Program Administration said the report was for reference only and the project would be carried out in view of other factors such as export prospects and technological capacity.

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12. ROK Government

Associated Press (Hyung-jin Kim, "SOUTH KOREA'S LEE NAMES PRIME MINISTER", Seoul, 2008/01/28) reported that ROK President-elect Lee Myung-bak named Han Seung-soo, currently serving as a special U.N.-appointed envoy on climate change, as prime minister Monday. Han has held a series of high-profile posts, including foreign minister in 2001-02, finance minister in 1996-97, national legislator three times since the late 1980s, and president of the U.N. General Assembly in 2001-02. "I believe he has a more global mind than anyone else," Lee said as Han stood beside him. "I think with his international experience and contacts he is the most competent person to revive the economy."

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13. Remains of US Soldiers from Korean War

Korea Times (Jung Sung-ki, "S. KOREA, US TO SIGN MOU ON RECOVERY OF WAR DEAD", Seoul, 2008/01/28) reported that the ROK and U.S. militaries Monday agreed to conduct joint recovery and identification of remains of their soldiers killed in action during the 1950-53 Korean War, the Ministry of National Defense (MND) said. Under the agreement, the two agencies will share information related to the recovery and identification of the remains of fallen soldiers and conduct joint operations on a regular basis, it said.

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14. US Port Visit to Hong Kong

Reuters ("CHINA LETS FIRST U.S. WARSHIP INTO HK SINCE ROW", Hong Kong, 2008/01/28) reported that the PRC has allowed a U.S. warship to dock in Hong Kong waters for the first time since Beijing denied a request for the USS Kitty Hawk to stop in the territory in November. A source at the Commissioner's Office of China's Foreign Ministry in Hong Kong said the USS Blue Ridge was allowed to enter Hong Kong waters on Monday morning.

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15. PRC Nuclear Tests

New York Times (David Lague, "CHINA NOW PAYS TROOPS INVOLVED IN NUCLEAR TESTS", Beijing, 2008/01/28) reported that the PRC has begun paying military personnel involved in nuclear tests, as part of its effort to improve benefits for veterans, the state news media reported over the weekend. Minister of civil affairs Li Xueju said aid the government paid 15.12 billion yuan, or more than $2 billion last year, to more than eight million veterans and families of service personnel killed in combat or in public service, an increase of 34.8 percent over outlays in 2006. The total included payments to “some military personnel and civilians” who had taken part in nuclear tests.

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16. Sino-Japanese Relations

Yomiuri Shimbun (Takanori Kato, "NANJING MEMORIAL LACKS BALANCE", Shanghai, 2008/01/26) reported that concerns about a possible deterioration in Japan-PRC relations were behind the Japanese government's request last week that the PRC tone down the contents of the Memorial Hall to the Victims in the Nanjing Massacre in Nanjing. The hall's floor space was expanded more than 10-fold to 9,000 square meters, and the museum now stands on a 7.4-hectare plot of land, which is three times larger than its previous precincts. The number of photo exhibits, including those showing scenes of killing, was drastically increased to about 3,500. Shanghai Consul General Yuji Kumamaru told senior officials of the city and the memorial hall that the exhibits "don't provide sufficient coverage of Japan's postwar development and the friendly relations between the two nations after the normalization of their diplomatic ties."

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17. US Bases in Japan

Associated Press ("JAPAN: US BASE MUST WEIGH EFFECT ON REVERED CREATURE", Tokyo, 2008/01/26) reported that Judge Marilyn Hall Patel of Federal District Court in San Francisco has ruled that the US Defense Department violated the National Historic Preservation Act by failing to evaluate the potential effect of a planned United States air base in Okinawa on a recognized Japanese national treasure — a big, slow-moving aquatic mammal called the dugong — and ordered it to do so. The judge sided with environmentalists who said plans to relocate the Futenma Air

Station, a Marine Corps base, to a site off the northeast coast of Okinawa would threaten the dwindling number of dugong that live in the seagrass beds.

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Nautilus Institute
608 San Miguel Ave., Berkeley, CA 94707-1535 | Phone: (510) 423-0372 | Email: nautilus@nautilus.org