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I. NAPSNet

1. US on DPRK Nuclear Program

Kyodo ("U.S. NIXES DEADLINE FOR N. KOREA NUKE DECLARATION", Washington, 2008/02/28) reported that the US spurned setting a deadline for the DPRK to provide a full account of its nuclear activities and repeated a call for Pyongyang to submit a "full and complete" declaration on them. "The important thing is that what we get is full and complete. There has been no particular new date attached to that I'm aware of," State Department spokesman Tom Casey told reporters.

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2. US-DPRK Relations

Yonhap ("BUSH REFUSES PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH N.K. LEADER", Washington, 2008/02/28) reported that US President George W. Bush said he will not pursue a personal relationship with the DPRK's top leader, whom he once called a tyrant and a dangerous man. "I learned that it's important to establish a personal relations with leaders even though you may not agree with them," Bush said at a White House press conference that dealt mainly with the domestic economy.

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3. US on DPRK Sanctions

Korea Herald (Lee Joo-hee, "U.S. 'READY TO LIFT SANCTIONS' ON N. KOREA", 2008/02/28) reported that U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said in Japan on Wednesday that Washington is ready to remove political sanctions on the DPRK in order to move to the next phase of denuclearization. "North Korea now needs to file a declaration that can give confidence that we know what we are dealing with going forward. We are ready to discharge our obligations, the United States is ready to discharge its obligations," Rice said in an interview with Japan's NHK television. "There is always a 'you-go-first' kind of instinct by everybody, and we have to figure out a way that everybody can be confident that the obligations are being carried out," Rice added.

Reuters ("HILL MAY RETURN TO BEIJING FOR NORTH KOREA TALKS", Washington, 2008/02/28) reported that US Assistant Secretary of State Chris Hill could return to Beijing this weekend to meet his DPRK counterpart for talks on ending Pyongyang's nuclear program, a US official said. The official, who asked not to be named because of the sensitivity of the diplomacy, said the US did not know whether the DPRK official, Kim Kye-gwan, would agree to go to Beijing for such talks. Asked about the possibility of Hill returning to Beijing, State Department spokesman Tom Casey noted that Hill told reporters on leaving the PRC on Thursday that he planned to visit Thailand and Vietnam and then return to the United States.

Yonhap (Shim Sun-ah, "FORMER U.S. OFFICIALS URGE N.K. TO MOVE TOWARD DENUCLEARIZATION", Seoul, 2008/02/28) reported that former U.S Defense Secretary William Perry has urged the DPRK to complete denuclearization work before the current US president's term of office expires early next year, a former senior US diplomat said. Perry made the call when he met with the DPRK's top nuclear negotiator Kim Kye-gwan in Pyongyang, hours before the New York Philharmonic's landmark concert, the former US Ambassador to Seoul Donald Gregg said. "We talked about all the issues" related with the North Korea nuclear dispute, Gregg said in a Seoul forum organized by the American Chamber of Commerce in Korea. "The point was do it now. Do it while Bush is in office," he said.

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4. DPRK Missile Program

Donga Ilbo ("PYONGYANG DEVELOPS LONG-RANGE BALLISTIC MISSILE: U.S.", 2008/02/28) reported that Lt. Gen. Michael Maples, director of the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency, said that the DPRK is continuing to develop Taepodong-2, the long-rang ballistic missile it test fired in 2006. He testified as a witness before the Senate Armed Services Committee. He said that the DPRK is developing a new missile by modifying a mid-range ballistic missile thought to have been exported to Iran by Pyongyang. About the DPRK's nuclear capability, National Intelligence Director Michael McConnell, who also appeared as a witness, said "If Pyongyang has sophisticated technologies, it can make 12 nuclear bombs with 50-kilogram plutonium thought to have been extracted. And if not, the number can be lowered to six, which is more likely to be true."

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5. ROK-Japan Relations

People's Daily Online ("SOUTH KOREA AND JAPAN TO DISCUSS 'NEW ERA OF BILATERAL TIES", 2008/02/28) reported that Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda congratulated ROK president-elect Lee Myung-bak, on the day when conservative Lee took the oath of office. Prime Minister Fukuda hopes to work with President Lee on the "further development of amicable, cooperative relations." Lee also vows to boost ties with Japan, and to improve his country's relationship with Japan by overlooking historical issues, the Asahi newspaper (English edition) reported. Both sides agreed on proposals to reinstate talks on bilateral economic cooperation as soon as possible, which broke off in 2004. They also expect to reach a consensus on restoring annual exchanges of top-level visits between the two sides.

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6. US-ROK Trade Relations

Chosun Ilbo ("HOPES FOR KOREA-U.S. FTA DIMMING", 2008/02/28) reported that U.S. President George W. Bush met some 20 experts including congressmen and a former secretary of commerce to discuss a last-ditch strategy to win ratification of free trade agreements with the ROK and Colombia. But there are growing concerns in Washington that the Korea-U.S. FTA might not be ratified. The Korean Embassy and Korea experts in Washington are saying prospects are bleak. First of all, concerns are rising over unemployment in the U.S. amid the increasing possibility of "stagflation". Second, both Democratic presidential rivals, senators Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, have expressed their opposition to the deal.

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7. US-ROK Relations

Yonhap (Lee Chi-dong, "S. KOREAN FM NOMINEE LIKELY TO FOCUS ON U.S. ALLIANCE", Seoul, 2008/02/28) reported that at a Wednesday parliamentary confirmation hearing on Yu Myung-hwan, the nominee set to become the ROK's next foreign minister, an opposition lawmaker said it appeared to be a celebration for his inauguration. The remarks by Choi Sung of the United New Democratic Party aimed at complimenting rather than criticizing Yu reflect the National Assembly's positive view of his nomination -- unlike many other scandal-ridden Cabinet appointees of the Lee Myung-bak administration. In fact, many expect Yu to smoothly pass the hearing and take office as early as late Friday. "He is likely to start his work as foreign minister on Friday after lawmakers submit an opinion on his nomination," a Foreign Ministry official said.

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8. US-ROK Military Exercises

Chosun Ilbo ("USFK SHOW OF MILITARY MIGHT QUESTIONED", Seoul, 2008/02/29) reported that the Korea-U.S. Combined Forces Command and the U.S. Forces Korea are showing off U.S. battle vessels, including a nuclear-powered submarine and a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, and parts of a joint military exercise to the media. The vessels are in Korea for Key Resolve/Foal Eagle, an annual combined/joint military exercise to be conducted from Sunday to March 7. About nine different parts of the military exercise will be open to the media this year. A source said, "The Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun administrations prevented the USFK from unveiling past combined/joint military exercises to the public for fear that it would irritate North Korea. With a conservative government being inaugurated in Seoul, the USFK is now unveiling more military exercises and equipment to the public."

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9. ROK Diplomacy

Joongang Ilbo ("AMBASSADORS TO KEY NEIGHBORS WILL BE REPLACED", Seoul, 2008/02/29) reported that the ROK ambassadors to Japan, the PRC, and Russia will soon be replaced, according to government sources. Kim Ha-joong, ambassador to the PRC, and Lee Kyu-hyung, ambassador to

Russia, are expected to resign next week, the sources said. "The government will soon designate new ambassadors to those two countries, as well as Japan," said a source who refused to be named. The status of Lee Tae-sik, the current ambassador to the United States, will be decided after President Lee Myung-bak visits the United States.

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10. ROK Politics

Reuters ("SOUTH KOREA PRESIDENT LEE FINALLY GETS PM APPROVED", Seoul, 2008/02/29) reported that the ROK National Assembly on Friday approved President Lee Myung-bak's nominee for prime minister, Han Seung-soo. Lee's nominees for unification, environment and gender equality ministers have withdrawn their names after allegations they had evaded taxes or speculated in real estate.

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11. Japan Maritime Incident

Agence France-Presse (Kyoko Hasegawa, "JAPAN PM DEFENDS EMBATTLED DEFENCE CHIEF", Tokyo, 2008/02/29) reported that Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda on Friday defended Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba from demands that he step down to take responsibility for a naval destroyer accidentally ramming a small fishing vessel 10 days ago. "There is no one who knows the current situation at the defence ministry better than Mr Ishiba. I want him to carry out the task of reforming the ministry," Fukuda said in parliament. Ishiba stated, "The way to take responsibility, I think, is to answer the feelings of the people who are suffering the most sadness. If I just take it lightly and say that I quit, that means that I'm not addressing their feelings."

Asahi Shimbun (Kuniichi Tanida, "SECRECY, DISTRUST FUEL CONFUSION IN MINISTRY", Tokyo, 2008/02/29) reported that the confusion in the Defense Ministry over the Feb. 19 collision between the Aegis destroyer Atago and a fishing boat may not necessarily be the result of a cover-up, but rather a result of traditional military secrecy, deteriorating control by senior bureaucrats, and ministry officials' distrust of the Maritime Self-Defense Force. One former MSDF member said the MSDF now routinely hides facts that are not in its favor because the party that admits fault in a maritime accident is placed at a disadvantageous position.

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12. Sino-Japanese Relations

Yomiuri Shimbun (Toru Makinoda, "CHINA DENIES BEING PESTICIDE SOURCE FOR TAINTED GYOZA", 2008/02/28) reported that the PRC's Public Security Ministry on Thursday denied it was possible for pesticide that contaminated frozen gyoza in the recent food-poisoning scandal to have gotten mixed into the dumplings in that country. Yu Xinmin, deputy director general of the ministry's Criminal Investigation Bureau, held a press conference with Wei Chuanzhong, vice minister of the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine, on Thursday morning. It is the first time a senior official of the Public Security Ministry has held a press conference on the matter.

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13. Sino-US Relations

Reuters (Anna Fifield, "BUSH: WILL RAISE RIGHTS CONCERNS PRIVATELY IN BEIJING ", Washington, 2008/02/28) reported that President George W. Bush said he would express his concern about the PRC's human rights record in private talks with President Hu Jintao during a visit to Beijing for the 2008 Olympic games. "I'm going to the Olympics because it's a sporting event, and I'm looking forward to seeing the athletic competition," Bush told a White House news conference. "But that will not preclude me from meeting with the Chinese president, expressing my deep concerns about a variety of issues," he added.

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14. PRC African Diplomacy

Xinhua ("CHINA, NIGERIA VOW TO FURTHER BILATERAL CO-OP", Beijing, 2008/02/28) reported that the PRC and Nigeria vowed to expand cooperation from fields such as energy and telecommunications to agriculture, infrastructure and manufacturing. The two sides issued a joint press communique after talks between PRC President Hu Jintao and visiting Nigerian counterpart Umaru Yar'Adua, pledging to continue to promote the growth of relations. During the talks, the heads of the state expressed satisfaction at the evolving strategic partnership between their two countries.

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15. PRC Demographics

The Financial Times (Mure Dickie, "CHINA MULLS 'ONE-CHILD' POLICY SHIFT", Beijing, 2008/02/28) reported that the PRC is considering a gradual raising of its limits on the number of children a couple can have, according to a senior official of the National Population and Family Planning Commission. The comments by Zhao Baige, family planning vice-minister, highlight growing concern about the demographic implications of the strict and sometimes harshly enforced population control rules that are a cornerstone of PRC social policy. Ms Zhao, whose commission is responsible for overseeing the population control policy, said Beijing wanted to raise the birth limits "incrementally".

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II. ROK Report

16. DPRK-US Relations

Pressian ("RICE, THE SECRETARY OF STATES SAYS, 'FRANKLY, DPRK NUCLEAR COMPROMISE ATMOSPHERE IS NOT BAD'", 2008/02/29) wrote that although the US is keeping strict watch on the

political interpretation of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra Performance's at Pyongyang, as changes in the attitude of both nations are being observed, the US shows optimism. If the DPRK lowers its distrust toward the US, this can directly influence the nuclear report. Member nations of the six-party talks, having concentrated their dialogue on acceptable plans for the nuclear report, there is a possibility that DPRK leader Kim Jong-il will come up with a determination. Accordingly, observers believe that the DPRK and US will re-start the six-party talks and keep the fulfillment momentum at least.

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17. ROK Policy Toward DPRK

Seoul Shinmun ("[editorial] ROK MUST BE CIRCUMSPECT ON FULL-SCALE PARTICIPATION IN PSI", 2008/02/29) reported that the foreign ministry candidate has proposed reinforcement of participation in Weapons of Mass Destruction Proliferation Security Initiative at the National Assembly confirmation hearing. It might be obvious the Ministry of Foreign Affairs wishes to use full-scale participation in PSI as a symbolic card for restoration of US-ROK relations. However, the DPRK nuclear problem is in crisis these days. Hasty debate on full-scale participation in PSI might provide the DPRK with an excuse to dismantle the six-party talks. A pressure to DPRK like PSI is the last resort the ROK should think about when a roadmap to the DPRK denuclearization and all the conversations meet their end. I repeatedly ask the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for prudent action.

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