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Contents in this Issue:

- I. NAPSNet
 - [1. ROK, US on DPRK Nuclear Program](#)
 - [2. Sino-DPRK Relations](#)
 - [3. Inter-Korean Relations](#)
 - [4. ROK Aid to DPRK](#)
 - [5. DPRK Economy](#)
 - [6. US-ROK Security Alliance](#)
 - [7. US-ROK Trade Relations](#)
 - [8. Japan Nuclear Plant](#)
 - [9. Sino-Russian Relations](#)
 - [10. PRC Energy Supply](#)
 - [11. PRC Aviation Infrastructure](#)
 - [12. PRC Olympics](#)

[Preceding NAPSNet Report](#)

I. NAPSNet

1. ROK, US on DPRK Nuclear Program

Yonhap ("S. KOREA, US COORDINATE MESSAGE TO N. KOREA", Seoul, 2008/01/30) reported that Sung Kim, the director of the State Department's Office of Korea Affairs, and Lim Sung-nam, head of the ROK Foreign Ministry's North Korean nuclear affairs bureau, on Wednesday discussed ways of injecting momentum into the slow-moving denuclearization process, the Foreign Ministry said. "They had useful consultations on the pending issue of the six-way talks," ministry spokesman Cho Hee-yong said. The State Department left open the possibility that Kim may visit the DPRK's main nuclear facilities in Yongbyon during his upcoming visit to Pyongyang. "He doesn't currently have plans to do so, though I wouldn't rule out the possibility if he thinks it's in his interest," Tom Casey, the department's deputy spokesman, said.

[\(return to top\)](#)

2. Sino-DPRK Relations

Xinhua ("DPRK, CHINESE SENIOR OFFICIALS MEET ON BILATERAL TIES", Pyongyang, 2008/01/29) reported that senior officials from the PRC and the DPRK met here Tuesday to discuss bilateral ties. Choe Thae Bok, secretary of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK), held talks Tuesday with Wang Jiarui, head of the International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC). Choe said the traditional friendship between the two nations has a strong vitality, and bilateral relations are developing in an all-round way. Wang said the PRC is willing to work with the DPRK to deepen bilateral relations and to make efforts for regional peace and prosperity.

[\(return to top\)](#)

3. Inter-Korean Relations

Yonhap (Shim Sun-ah, "KOREAS DISCUSS IMPROVING CROSS-BORDER TRAIN SERVICE", Seoul, 2008/01/29) reported that on the first day of working-level talks in the DPRK, the two Koreas discussed scaling back their first regular inter-Korean railway service to run in more than a half century, as the trains are often empty, ROK officials said. Also discussed at the talks were the results of the first round of on-site surveys for the ROK's plan to repair the obsolete DPRK section of the cross-border railway, as well as plans for a second survey.

Korea Times ("KOREAS TO DISCUSS JOINT OLYMPIC CHEERING SQUAD IN FEBRUARY", 2008/01/29) reported that the ROK and DPRK will hold working-level talks early next month on sending a joint cheering squad to the Beijing Olympics this summer, the Unification Ministry said. The meeting, the second of its kind, will be held in the DPRK border town of Kaesong on Feb. 4 to discuss the size of the squad and other details, the ministry said in a statement.

[\(return to top\)](#)

4. ROK Aid to DPRK

Yonhap (Yoo Cheong-mo, "LEE TO BOOST TRANSPARENCY IN N.K. AID: OFFICIAL", Seoul, 2008/01/30) reported that ROK President-elect Lee Myung-bak's incoming government will significantly heighten transparency in the spending of the Inter-Korean Cooperation Fund in line with his plan to link DPRK economic aid to its denuclearization, officials at Lee's transition team said Wednesday. Lee's new government is planning increase transparency in the spending of the inter-Korean fund as one of its 20 priority tasks, which will be made public next week, said team officials. They said the incoming government is also determined to establish global energy networks with oil-producing countries and expand free trade agreements with the nation's major trading partners. "The 20 priority policy goals have been selected from 166 policy tasks based on their urgency, difficulty and fiscal feasibility," said Park Jeong-ha, a spokesperson of the transition team.

[\(return to top\)](#)

5. DPRK Economy

IFES NK Brief ("DPRK'S LARGEST COPPER MINE FLOODED WITH DIFFICULTIES", 2008/01/29) reported that it is being reported that the DPRK's Chungnyun Mine, in Hyesan, Ryanggang Province, is facing severe economic difficulties due to floodwater. Hyesan mines produce 80 percent of all DPRK copper, and the DPRK had estimated that it will be able to continue mining copper there for the next forty years. In the event that DPRK abandons the Hyesan Chungnyun Mine, it will be faced with the difficulty of needing to import the large amounts of copper required by the manufacturing industry. Currently, there is no feasible way to technically restore the mine, so as senior authorities in the DPRK are demanding that the mine be saved at any cost, those in charge of operations are said to be uneasy.

[\(return to top\)](#)

6. US-ROK Security Alliance

Joongang Ilbo (Nam Jung-ho and Jung Ha-won, "WARTIME CONTROL DEADLINE IS FINAL: BELL", 2008/01/29) reported that General Burwell Baxter Bell III, the chief commander of United States Forces Korea, said that the US military is unwilling to renegotiate the terms of the transfer of wartime operational control from the US to the ROK, sending a stern message to the incoming ROK administration that has said it wants to renegotiate the deal. Bell, in a speech to the Korea Society in New York on Jan. 28, said he sees "no military rationale" to delay handing over wartime operational control, currently scheduled for completion by 2012, even if the new government proposes a rethink.

[\(return to top\)](#)

7. US-ROK Trade Relations

Donga Ilbo ("BUSH URGES CONGRESS TO RATIFY KORUS FTA", 2008/01/29) reported that US President George W. Bush urged Congress to ratify the free trade agreement (FTA) between the US

and ROK in his final State of the Union address delivered on January 28. During the speech, Bush called on lawmakers to “approve the free trade pacts with Colombia, Panama and South Korea.” In a press release distributed prior to the address, the White House explained that the KORUS FTA is commercially most meaningful, and that its ratification will enhance the American competitiveness in the fast-changing Asian markets and strengthen the alliance between Washington and Seoul.

Chosun Ilbo ("KOREA-U.S. FTA FACES CRISIS", 2008/01/29) reported that the ROK-US free trade agreement, which has been rated one of the Roh Moo-hyun administration's achievements, is now in danger of being scrapped. Ruling and opposition parties remain passive about it as they are focused on the upcoming general election. Political schedules in the ROK and the US make it all the more difficult to ratify the pact before its deadline. If one of the Democratic candidates who are negative about the FTA, such as Hillary Clinton or Barack Obama, wins the US presidential election late this year, the two countries will probably have to begin FTA talks all over again. The ratification has been cold-shouldered by political circles in Seoul, although chiefs and senior executives of business associations have been visiting the National Assembly and political parties since early this year to reiterate the importance of ratifying the deal.

[\(return to top\)](#)

8. Japan Nuclear Plant

Agence France-Presse ("IAEA TEAM BACK AT JAPAN'S QUAKE-HIT NUCLEAR PLANT", Tokyo, 2008/01/29) reported that a team from the UN atomic watchdog kicked off a follow-up examination at the world's largest nuclear plant in Japan which has been halted since a massive earthquake last year. Jamet, director of the IAEA's Nuclear Installation Safety Division, said the mission would focus "on three main subjects." "The first is the effect of the earthquake on the plant. The second is to understand the mechanism that created such a big earthquake and the third is a necessary improvement in the domain of fire safety," he said.

[\(return to top\)](#)

9. Sino-Russian Relations

Xinhua ("CHINA, RUSSIA SIGN AGREEMENT ON CROSS-BORDER WATER USE, PROTECTION", Beijing, 2008/01/29) reported that the PRC and Russia signed an agreement on Tuesday on the use and protection of trans-border waterways, according to a statement from the PRC Foreign Ministry. "The Agreement between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Russian Federation on Reasonable Utilization and Protection of Transboundary Waters" was signed by PRC Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi and the visiting Russian Natural Resources Minister, Yuri Trutnev. "The agreement indicates the two countries have entered a new phase of cooperation in water use and protection and will further promote Sino-Russian strategic partnership of coordination," it said.

[\(return to top\)](#)

10. PRC Energy Supply

China Daily ("COAL FIRED POWER ON THE WAY OUT, SAYS NDRC", 2008/01/29) reported that the

PRC will close more small coal fired power stations in 2008, officials said yesterday, to save energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The goal is to eliminate 13 million kilowatts in such capacity, or about 30 percent more than the target of 10 million kilowatts set last year, according to the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC). Last year, the PRC shut 553 small thermal power generators with a total capacity of 14.38 million kw, 44 percent above the target. The State Council, or the Cabinet, has set a target of closing 50 million kw of thermal power capacity from 2006 to 2010.

[\(return to top\)](#)

11. PRC Aviation Infrastructure

The Financial Times (Jamil Anderlini, "BEIJING PLANS TO BUILD 97 REGIONAL AIRPORTS", Beijing , 2008/01/29) reported that a decade of rapid economic growth has created serious bottlenecks in aviation infrastructure, forcing the government to embark on a substantial building program. The PRC government has launched an ambitious plan to build 97 regional airports by 2020 at an estimated cost of \$62.5bn in an attempt to meet soaring domestic passenger and cargo demand. But analysts said chronic congestion will linger even with the addition of new airports, because of shortages in skilled personnel.

[\(return to top\)](#)

12. PRC Olympics

Washington Post (Maureen Fan, "CHINA ACKNOWLEDGES 6 DEATHS IN OLYMPIC CONSTRUCTION WORK", Beijing, 2008/01/28) reported that six workers have died helping to build venues for this summer's Olympic Games, including two who worked at Beijing's celebrated "bird's nest" stadium, a top work safety official said Monday. The announcement followed a British news report last week that alleged a coverup of worker fatalities at Olympic sites. The report accused site managers and police of ordering construction teams to remain silent about incidents in which workers plummeted to their deaths from the capital's National Stadium, an intricate steel-laced structure that resembles a bird's nest.

[\(return to top\)](#)

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