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I. NAPSNet

1. ROK on Six Party Talks

Yonhap (Yoo Cheong-mo, "ROH'S OFFICE CALLS FOR RECONVENING SIX-NATION TALKS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE", Seoul, 2007/12/06) reported that the office of President Roh Moo-hyun demanded that a fresh round of six-nation talks on the DPRK's denuclearization convene as soon as possible to help accelerate the disablement of the DPRK's nuclear program. "China is still discussing the schedule of the next session of the six-party talks with the relevant countries. The (ROK) government wishes the talks to held as soon as possible," Roh's spokesman Cheon Ho-seon said.

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2. DPRK Nuclear Program

The Financial Times (Anna Fifield, "N KOREA LIKELY TO MISS DISCLOSURE DEADLINE", Seoul, 2007/12/06) reported that the DPRK is likely to miss the year-end deadline to declare all its nuclear programmes, the ROK's foreign minister said, striking a downbeat note as talks to convince Pyongyang to denuclearise hit a key stage. "Originally, we had set the end of the year as an initial deadline, but we will need to be a little more flexible," Song Min-soon, the ROK's foreign minister, told a business audience. While the disablement phase was proceeding smoothly, the declaration "is not moving forward," Mr Song said. A ROK official later said the problem was linked to the DPRK's suspected uranium programme.

Kyodo ("CHINA SAYS N. KOREA NUCLEAR DEADLINE UNLIKELY TO BE MET", Beijing, 2007/12/06) reported that the PRC, the chair of the six-party DPRK nuclear talks, said that the year-end goal set for Pyongyang's denuclearization steps is unlikely to be met, due to technical issues preventing progress in the disablement of its facilities. Vice Foreign Minister Wu Dawei also told reporters that the next meeting of the chief delegates of the six parties will likely take place in early next year, rather than by the end of this month as previously expected.

Reuters (Teruaki Ueno, "MORE TALKS NEEDED ON KOREA NUCLEAR INVENTORY: HILL", Tokyo, 2007/12/07) reported that Christopher Hill said that the DPRK is making progress on disabling its nuclear facilities but more talks are needed to complete an inventory of its atomic arms programs. They are disabling all three facilities and they are moving actually quite on schedule," Hill, told reporters after arriving in Tokyo for talks with his Japanese counterpart. He added that for technical reasons, the disablement probably could not be finished by the end of this year, but added: "Everything is going smoothly."

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3. US-DPRK Relations

Agence France-Presse ("US PRESIDENT'S LETTER TO BOOST KIM JONG-IL'S PRESTIGE: ANALYSTS", Seoul, 2007/12/07) reported that US President George W. Bush's personal letter to Kim Jong-Il could deter conservatives in both nations from trying to scupper a nuclear deal, analysts said Friday. The White House termed the letter a firmly worded reminder that it is up to the DPRK to make a full declaration, and that Bush addressed Kim as "Dear Chairman." Professor Toshimitsu Shigemura of Waseda University in Japan said that the DPRK's purpose in announcing the letter "was to tell the domestic audience, 'The American president came on his knees to make his requests'." Baek Seung-Joo of the Korea Institute for Defense Analysis stated, "In terms of diplomatic protocol the letter is something rather pleasant for Kim Jong-il as it means the US president accepted the North as a diplomatic partner." Koh Yu-Hwan of Dongkuk University argued, "By acknowledging openly that Bush has sent a personal letter, North Korea intends to prevent US hawks from creating a new hurdle to its push for improving ties with Washington."

Korea Herald ("BUSH LETTER TO KIM RAISES HOPE FOR NUKE RESOLUTION", 2007/12/07) reported that, according to an excerpt of his letter to Kim Jong-il unveiled by the Associated Press, US President George W. Bush wrote, "I want to emphasize that the declaration must be complete and accurate if we are to continue our progress." Derek Mitchell, an Asia expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said the letter is evidence that U.S. policy toward North Korea has changed "at least 150 degrees" from early in the Bush administration. "That Bush would, at this point, directly contact -- send a personal letter -- to Kim Jong-il is a remarkable turnaround." Michael O'Hanlon, senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, stated, "I think a presidential letter is a fairly restrained version of direct communication and appropriate to the stage of the negotiations. I think it's better for this sort of letter to be written than for the president to jump on a plane to Pyongyang."

Yonhap (Yoo Cheong-mo, "SEOUL, WASHINGTON DISCUSSED BUSH'S LETTER TO KIM: CHEONG WA DAE", Seoul, 2007/12/07) reported that and the U.S. discussed U.S. President George W. Bush's personal letter to DPRK leader Kim Jong-il before it was delivered, Cheong Wa Dae said Friday. "The decision on Bush's letter to Kim was finalized while U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill was staying in Seoul from Nov. 29 to Dec. 3, prior to his visit to North Korea. In the process, South Korea and the U.S. held discussions on the letter," presidential spokesperson Cheon Ho-seon said. "At the time of Hill's arrival in Seoul, he didn't have a letter from Bush. Hill and South Korean officials came to consider a letter from Bush to Kim while discussing the settlement of the North Korean nuclear issue before the U.S. official's departure to the North," he added.

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4. Inter-Korean Economic Cooperation

Chosun Ilbo ("TWO KOREAS BOOST PLANNED MEETINGS IN DECEMBER TO 12", 2007/12/06) reported that the two Koreas have agreed that subcommittees will meet in December to discuss setting up a shipbuilding complex in the DPRK, progress at the joint Kaesong Industrial Complex, agricultural and fisheries products, and health and medical services. The agreement came on Wednesday, the second day of a Joint Committee for Inter-Korean Economic Cooperation meeting. That would bring the number of inter-Korean talks of one kind or another in December alone to 12. But it remains to be seen if all can be held as scheduled, since the presidential election is 10 days away.

Korea Times (Jung Sung-ki, "NK RELUCTANT OVER WIDER OPENING OF JOINT INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX", 2007/12/06) reported that the ROK and DPRK failed to strike a deal on measures to facilitate an inter-Korean industrial complex in the DPRK's border city of Gaeseong including freer access to the business zone, government officials said. During the economic talks, the ROK asked the DPRK to ease rules on the operation of the industrial complex regarding transportation, customs clearance and telecommunications services in the business park, Unification Ministry officials said. The DPRK, however, was negative about the offer, citing the need for security guarantees, they said.

IFES NK Brief ("DPRK UNIFICATION FRONT ENVOY TOURS ROK INDUSTRIES", 2007/12/05) reported that Kim Yang-gon, head of the DPRK Workers' Party Unification Front department, led a DPRK delegation to the ROK, and after two nights and three days, returned to the DPRK on December 1. On the day Kim's delegation arrived, the group visited the Songdo Free Trade Zone, where he and his delegation were moved by a presentation by officials explaining the value of an Inchon-Kaesong-Haeju 'West Sea Belt'. On the second day, the group visited Daewoo shipyards in Koje, the Busan Customs House, and other facilities.

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5. US on Korean Peace Treaty

Joongang Ilbo (Brian Lee , "WASHINGTON UNMOVED BY ROH OVERTURE ON SUMMIT", 2007/12/06) reported that despite a Blue House announcement that the US and ROK agreed at a recent meeting in Washington to consider a summit meeting once the DPRK has completed disablement and declaration of its nuclear program, a high-level diplomatic source said Seoul hardly raised the issue and that the stance of the US has not changed. The diplomatic source familiar with the meeting said the Blue House's announcement was based more on its own interpretation. "There has been no change in the U.S. position that a declaration or treaty to end the Korean War can only come when North Korea denuclearizes in full. There is absolutely no readiness in Washington for a summit until Kim Jong-il verifiably gives up his nuclear weapons."

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6. ROK Politics

Yonhap (Yoo Cheong-mo, "ROH'S OFFICE CONDEMNS PRESIDENTIAL FAVORITES ANTI-NORTH KOREA RHETORIC", Seoul, 2007/12/07) reported that the office of ROK President Roh Moo-hyun denounced Friday front-running presidential candidate Lee Myung-bak for displaying a "confrontational" attitude towards the DPRK during a live television debate the previous night. "It is lamentable that candidates Lee Myung-bak and Lee Hoi-chang called the sunshine policy over the past 10 years a failure. They remain unchanged from their confrontational attitude of the past," Roh's spokesman Cheon Ho-seon said in his daily media briefing. During the debate, Lee Myung-bak said he would persuade DPRK leader Kim Jong-il that the abandonment of the nuclear weapons program would be beneficial to the DPRK people, while Lee Hoi-chang stressed the principle of reciprocity.

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7. DPRK Abductions of Japanese

Yomiuri Shimbun (Satoshi Saeki , "HU PRESSED KIM JONG-IL ON ABDUCTIONS", 2007/12/07) reported that PRC President Hu Jintao effectively urged DPRK leader Kim Jong-il to achieve substantial progress in talks with Japan over the issue of Japanese being abducted by Pyongyang agents. Liu Yunshan, head of the Publicity Department of the Chinese Communist Party's Central Committee, conveyed Hu's message to Kim when visiting Pyongyang on Oct. 30. In the message, Hu stated that the PRC "hopes for an earlier improvement of the bilateral relationship between Japan and North Korea" and that "the improvement will benefit North Korea, too," according to sources.

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8. Sino-Japanese Relations

The Asahi Shimbun (Kyohei Matsuda, "OZAWA BEATS FUKUDA TO BEIJING", 2007/12/06) reported that opposition leader Ichiro Ozawa heads for PRC today to strengthen personal ties with PRC leaders--gaining a jump-start on Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda, who is expected to visit Beijing later this month. Central to Ozawa's three-day visit will be talks with PRC President Hu Jintao. Ozawa, who earlier argued that Tokyo should maintain an equal diplomatic distance from Washington and Beijing, told reporters he would hold his ground with PRC leaders.

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9. Japan SDF Indian Ocean Mission

Reuters ("JAPAN PM TO FORCE AFGHAN BILL, RISK ELECTION: PAPER", Tokyo, 2007/12/06) reported that Japan's Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda plans to force a law through parliament to resume a naval mission supporting the US-led war in Afghanistan, risking a clash with the opposition that could trigger an early election, a newspaper said. The Yomiuri newspaper said Fukuda has decided to extend the parliament session to mid-January so the ruling bloc can override the expected rejection of the bill by the upper house by using its overwhelming majority in the more powerful lower chamber. Opposition lawmakers have threatened to adopt a rare censure motion against the prime minister should he resort to using the lower house majority, which political analysts say could lead Fukuda to call a snap election.

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10. US-Japan Economic Relations

Agence France-Presse ("US WANTS PROGRESS FROM JAPAN ON ECONOMIC REFORM: OFFICIAL", Tokyo, 2007/12/06) reported that the US wants "positive signals" from Japan that it is ready to move more quickly on economic reform to make up for lost opportunities between the two powers, a US official said. "In general we have not yet seen the ambitious breakthroughs in US-Japan economic relations that should be within reach," said Daniel Price, US deputy national security advisor for international economic affairs. Earlier this year the US urged Japan to take further steps in opening and deregulating its markets, especially the medical, pharmaceutical and insurance sectors. Japan has also come under criticism in Washington for its zealous protection of its

farmers, and for its restrictions on beef imports from the US due to mad cow disease fears.

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11. US-PRC Economic Relations

Agence France-Presse (P. Parameswaran, "US TREASURY CHIEF URGES CHINA TO REVALUE CURRENCY", Washington, 2007/12/06) reported that US Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson called for an immediate revaluation of the PRC currency after Beijing announced moves to tighten monetary policy for the first time in a decade. He said that allowing flexibility of the tightly-controlled yuan was critical to cool the world's fastest growing economy battling serious inflationary pressures. "A more flexible currency is especially important now, when the risks of inflation are clearly rising in the Chinese economy," Paulson said.

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12. PRC Migrant Workers

China Daily (Shan Juan, "MIGRANT POPULATION SWELLING IN BEIJING", 2007/12/06) reported that nearly one out of three people in Beijing belongs to the mobile population, according to the capital's population and family planning commission. The municipality's mobile population reached 5.4 million in October, accounting for nearly 30 percent of the total, the commission's deputy director Li Yunli said. More than 80 percent of the capital's mobile population belongs to the PRC-unique category of rural migrant workers, Li told a conference on population in Beijing on Monday. The remainder is mostly made up of people visiting for less than a month.

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13. PRC Environment

Sprol ("SHANGBA, CHINA'S VILLAGE OF DEATH", 2007/12/03) reported that just south of Liangqiao, in southern PRC's Guangdong province is the small village of Shangba. This town is now known as "Village of Death." It has earned this name because, over time, cancer has claimed the lives of approximately 80 percent of the Shangba townspeople. The source of this epidemic of cancer is most likely coming from the water, both river and ground water. Today the Hengshui River has been referred to as "The Dead River," and with good reason. Researchers from Huanan Agricultural University have reported that water samples collected after a recent flood were much more polluted than they had expected. Even after diluting the samples by a factor of 10,000, the results confirmed that no aquatic life could survive in the waters of the Hengshui for more than 24 hours.

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