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I. NAPSNet

1. DPRK Nuclear Program

Reuters (Jon Herskovitz, "NORTH KOREA SEEN RELUCTANT TO DIVULGE NUCLEAR PLANS", Seoul, 2008/01/08) reported that the DPRK's refusal to divulge details of its nuclear weapons program caused it to miss a deadline in a disarmament-for-aid deal it struck with regional powers, a U.S. nuclear envoy said. "They have not wanted to list certain programs that we know about and they know that we know about," U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill said after arriving in Seoul. "The DPRK is not often automatically inclined to be transparent."

Associated Press (Kwang-tae Kim, "US ENVOY: KEEP PUSHING NKOREA TO DISARM", Seoul, 2008/01/09) reported that US Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill told ROK President Roh Moo-hyun Wednesday that the countries in the six-party talks must keep pushing until their task is accomplished. "We just talked about the need to finish this job," Hill told reporters after meeting with Roh. Hill acknowledged that while the process of getting the DPRK to give up its nuclear programs can be "tiring," it was vital to "keep working at it and try to finish it." "It's very important to all the Korean people and the entire Korean peninsula, so I told him not to worry, that we will continue to work on this, and work very closely" with the ROK, Hill said.

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2. Six Party Talks

Agence France-Presse (Jun Kwanwoo, "US, SKOREA PUSH FOR SWIFT START TO NKOREA NUCLEAR TALKS: REPORT", Seoul, 2008/01/08) reported that the US and ROK will push for an early resumption of DPRK disarmament talks, Yonhap news agency said. "We discussed ways of resuming the six-way talks and shared the understanding on the need for holding the talks at an early date," the ROK's chief nuclear envoy Chun Yung-Woo said after discussions with Hill, Yonhap reported. Chun did not elaborate on a date. Hill, who after Seoul heads for talks in the PRC and Russia, earlier said he would hold talks with PRC officials on setting the next date of the six-party talks.

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3. Inter-Korean Economic Cooperation

Yonhap (Lee Joon-seung, "TWO KOREAS SHOULD SHARE MANAGEMENT OF DANCHEON MINE REGION: OFFICIAL", Seoul, 2008/01/08) reported that the two Koreas should jointly manage the mines in the DPRK's Dacheon region if it is developed for commercial mining, the head of a state-run resources development corporation said. Korea Resources Corp. (KORES) President Lee Han-ho said there would be a need for ROK experts to influence everyday operations to prevent a repetition of complications that have developed over past inter-Korean cooperative projects. Dacheon, located

in South Hamgyeong province on the east coast, has magnesite and zinc deposits that have shown to be of high quality in initial tests.

The New York Times (Norimitsu Onishi, "EAGER SOUTH KOREANS TOUR A SEMI-OPEN CITY IN THE NORTH", Kaesong, 2008/01/08) reported that under the gaze of a bronze statue of Kim Il-sung standing atop a hill, a convoy of 11 buses packed with South Koreans wound its way through this quiet city center in the DPRK, which was opened up to daily tours early in December and is now suddenly host to hundreds of mostly ROK tourists seven days a week. Entry by foreigners to Pyongyang tends to be strictly controlled. But the tours to Kaesong, like those to the Mount Kumgang area in the DPRK's southeastern section, are open to all foreigners, including journalists, as long as they pay the fee of about \$180 for a one-day trip. The tours here start in Seoul around 6 a.m. and are run by Hyundai Asan, the ROK company that developed the industrial zone and is planning to start regular tours to Mount Paektu and possibly to Pyongyang next spring.

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4. DPRK Economy

IFES NK Brief ("DPRK NEW YEARS EDITORIAL LACKS NEW ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT VISION", 2008/01/08) reported that through the annual New Year's Day Joint Editorial released on January 1, the DPRK calls for adhering to the following three principles: -- "The principle of technically modernizing the economy while preserving the specific features of our economic structure," "The principle of making people enjoy substantial benefit while ensuring the greatest possible profitability," and, "The principle of developing external economic relations while putting main stress on tapping all domestic resources and potentials." However, economic development based on these principles does not represent realistic reform measures or a new vision, but rather economic management with the preservation of socialist, collective principles while developing technologically and furthering international economic exchange. In addition, last year's joint editorial was exceptional in that it placed economic issues first, stressing their importance, while this year strengthening national defense again took first chair in the editorial.

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5. DPRK Military

Yonhap ("N. KOREAN LEADER INSPECTS MILITARY UNIT: REPORT", Seoul, 2008/01/08) reported that DPRK leader Kim Jong-il recently visited a military unit in his first such inspection this year, the DPRK's official news agency said. Kim's trip marked his second public appearance this year, after his inspection of a hydro-electric power plant at Ryesong River near the border city of Kaesong. After inspecting an operational command room and military lecture rooms to acquaint himself with the training of the commanding officers, he "set forth important tasks to be fulfilled by the unit to increase its combat capability in every way," the news agency reported.

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6. US-ROK Security Alliance

Joongang Ilbo (Brian Lee, "LEE TO RECONSIDER FORCE CONTROL", 2008/01/08) reported that the

scheduled transfer to Seoul of wartime operational control over ROK forces from the United States needs to be reconsidered, the presidential transition team indicated. Transition team spokesman Lee Dong-gwan said, "The transfer of wartime control has to be considered in light of the North Korean nuclear issue and the security situation on the Korean Peninsula." He added, "A close consultation with the United States is a given; the transfer timing and other issues need to be carefully reconsidered." An official at the U.S. Embassy, requesting anonymity, said that Washington would be open to such discussions.

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7. US-ROK Trade Relations

Korea Times ("USTR SAYS KOREA FTA SHOULD NOT BE SACRIFICED BY OPPOSITION OF FEW", Washington, 2008/01/08) reported that the top US trade negotiator stood firmly by a free trade agreement (FTA) signed with the ROK, saying the benefits from the deal should not be sacrificed under the opposition of some. "This is clearly a winner" for Americans from farmers to service providers, Susan Schwab, the U.S. trade representative, said in a teleconference from Las Vegas. Some will oppose it, include those who will be negatively affected by the FTA, Schwab said. "We have an obligation and desire to look after them, but the rest of the economy should not be punished by virtue of that, should not have to pick up the cost in terms of the U.S. not opening its market," she said.

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8. ROK-Africa Trade

Joongang Ilbo (Limb Jae-un, "KOREA MULLS FTA WITH AFRICAN NATIONS", 2008/01/08) reported that the ROK is looking at the possibility of a free trade agreement with a group of southern African nations as a part of ongoing efforts to expand economic cooperation with Africa and help local companies exploit natural resources on the continent. The Ministry of Finance and Economy said yesterday in a release that it would pursue an FTA with the Southern African Customs Union by 2011 while sweetening preferential import duties it offers to developing African nations. The SACU consists of South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia and Swaziland, and allows the free exchange of goods between member countries. The deal would be the ROK's first FTA with Africa.

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9. ROK-Japan Relations

Yonhap ("S. KOREA, JAPAN AGREE TO WORK FOR RESUMPTION OF REGULAR SUMMITS", Seoul, 2008/01/08) reported that the ROK and Japan agreed to make efforts to resume "shuttle diplomacy" between their leaders, as the ROK's incoming leader Lee Myung-bak hopes to mend strained ties between the two countries. The commitment came at a biannual meeting in Seoul between the two countries' number two diplomats.

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10. Japan SDF Indian Ocean Mission

Mainichi Shimbun ("JAPAN PONDERES PERMANENT LAW ON DISPATCH OF SDF TROOPS OVERSEAS", 2008/01/08) reported that the Japanese government is set to consider a permanent law on the dispatch of Self-Defense Force (SDF) troops on overseas missions, government officials said. The government is poised to ask the largest opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) to support such a bill, and seek Diet approval within fiscal 2008. The Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Bill, under which SDF troops will resume their mission to refuel U.S. military vessels involved in the fight against terrorism, is expected to become law during the current Diet session. However, it is expected to be replaced by a new permanent law after it is enacted, according to the officials.

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11. Japan Demographics

Washington Post (Blaine Harden, "DEMOGRAPHIC CRISIS, ROBOTIC CURE?", Tokyo, 2008/01/08) reported that with a surfeit of the old and a shortage of the young, Japan is on course for a population collapse unlike any in human history. What ails this prosperous nation could be treated with babies and immigrants. Yet many young women here do not want children, and the Japanese will not tolerate a lot of immigrants. So government and industry are marching into the depopulated future with the help of robots -- some with wheels, some with legs, some that you can wear like an overcoat with muscles. Engineers say it's the "service robots" that can bail out Japan, which has the world's largest proportion of residents over 65 and smallest proportion of children under 15.

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12. Sino-US Military Relations

Agence France-Presse ("TOP US PACIFIC COMMANDER TO VISIT CHINA NEXT WEEK: REPORT", Beijing, 2008/01/08) reported that the top commander of the US Pacific Fleet will meet PRC military officials in Beijing next week, state media said, in talks that come after a heated row over US naval visits to Hong Kong. Admiral Timothy Keating, commander-in-chief of the US Pacific Command, will visit the PRC from January 13 to 16, Xinhua news agency said. Keating will discuss Sino-US military ties, Taiwan and other issues, said the report, citing a defence ministry statement.

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13. PRC Land Reform

China Newsweek (Translated by China Digital Times) ("LAND REFORM TOP PRIORITY - CHINA NEWSWEEK", 2008/01/08) reported that the most serious economic, social and even political issues nowadays are all, directly or indirectly, connected with the land system. The PRC's current land system is getting closer and closer to a tipping point where reform will be necessary. The main premise of this argument is, nearly all major players involved with land, from local governments to real estate developers, to suburban farmers and citizens and villagers in the country, have motivation to break the land-related laws, regulations and policies. If a system has come to such a point, it demonstrates that the system itself has got a problem, and the only solution is "reform."

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