NAPSNet Daily Report Thursday, December 14, 2006

Recommended Citation

"NAPSNet Daily Report Thursday, December 14, 2006", NAPSNet Daily Report, December 14, 2006, https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-daily-report/napsnet-daily-report-thursday-december-14-2006/

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I. NAPSNet

1. US on Six Party Talks

Washington Post ("U.S. TO PRESS NORTH KOREA FOR PROGRESS IN DISARMING", 2006-12-14) reported that US officials played down the chances of a breakthrough on North Korean disarmament talks, which will start this weekend in Beijing after a 13-month hiatus, but said they will press for tangible signs of progress. In a briefing for reporters yesterday, the chief US negotiator, Assistant Secretary of State Christopher R. Hill, declined to discuss specific US objectives for the talks, saying that listing them would invite reporters to measure the outcome against the original goals, resulting in possible headlines like "US Fails Once Again."

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2. Six Party Talks: US Security Guarantee

Yonhap News Agency ("US WILLING TO GIVE N KOREA WRITTEN SECURITY GUARANTEE: SOURCES", 2006-12-14) reported that the United States is willing to provide the DPRK with a written security guarantee if it agrees to take concrete actions to end its nuclear weapons programme at next week's six-way talks. The US offered the olive branch at a meeting between its chief nuclear envoy Christopher Hill and his DPRK counterpart Kim Kye-gwan in Beijing late last month, according to sources. "Such written security guarantees are seen as a prelude to the normalization of diplomatic ties between North Korea and the US," a source said.

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3. Six Party Talks: US Governor Meets DPRK

Associated Press ("NEW MEXICO GOVERNOR TO MEET FRIDAY WITH N KOREAN DELEGATION BEFORE 6-PARTY TALKS RESUME", 2006-12-14) reported that US Governor Bill Richardson is to meet Friday with two top DPRK officials in New Mexico. The governor's office said that the DPR Koreans asked for the meeting to discuss upcoming multilateral talks. The governor, a former congressman, energy secretary and U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, has dealt extensively with the DPRK, having traveled there five times, most recently last October. Richardson said that while he will not act as an official representative of the Bush administration, he will do whatever he can to move the talks forward.

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4. Six Party Talks: PRC - Russia on Ban/UN role

Bloomberg News ("BAN MUST LIMIT NORTH KOREA ROLE, SAY CHINA, RUSSIA", 2006-12-14) reported that the PRC and Russia are hoping Ban Ki Moon, newly sworn-in United Nations Secretary-general will take an "informal, low key, silent" approach on the DPRK issue and use his role to back the Six Party Talks. "We want to see in the secretary-general a man of the world," Russian Ambassador Vitaly Churkin said in an interview. Ban, 62, was nicknamed the "Slippery Eel" as he ascended the diplomatic ranks in the ROK told students at Seoul National University he would like the DPRK "to take the full advantage of my position to resolve the nuclear issue as soon as

possible," but PRC Ambassador Wang said being RO Korean might be a "double-edged sword" for Ban. He said that while Ban understands the DPRK psyche and is well positioned as a US ally to advise the Bush administration, "ideologically speaking, having someone from South Korea as secretary-general would be politically difficult for the North Koreans."

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5. KEDO

Yonhap News Agency ("KEDO CLOSES FINAL DEAL ON LIQUIDATION OF N KOREAN NUCLEAR REACTOR", 2006-12-14) reported that KEDO, the international energy consortium, signed its final agreement with a ROK firm to liquidate its 10-year project to build two light-water reactors in the DPRK. "In a 8 December meeting in New York, the executive board of the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) approved a deal with the Korea Electric Power Corporation (KEPCO)," Moon Dae-keun, an official from the Unification Ministry, told reporters. The so-called Termination Agreement made official the tentative agreement between the two sides in June that the RO Korean electric company would pay the cost of liquidating the 4.6-billion US dollars project in return for all of KEDO's tangible assets outside of the DPRK, Moon said. The agreement comes as probably the last official document to be signed by the international consortium, which includes RO Korea, Japan, the European Union and the United States, ministry officials said. The light-water reactors were part of a 1994 agreement between the United States and the DPRK, in which it agreed to freeze its nuclear activities in return for various economic incentives.

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6. DPRK Avian Flu

Associated Press ("NORTH KOREA MAY HAVE BIRD FLU VACCINE FOR POULTRY", 2006-12-14) reported that the DPRK has claimed it developed a poultry vaccine against the deadly H5N1 type of bird flu and is inoculating chickens as part of stepped-up efforts to prevent the disease following outbreaks in the ROK. Bird flu hit the DPRK early last year, prompting the slaughter of about 210,000 chickens and other poultry. No new cases have since been reported. Across the tightly sealed border with the ROK, three cases of bird flu have broken out since last month, forcing the government to cull more than 1.13 million poultry. At a chicken farm in Pyongyang on Wednesday, quarantine workers were disinfecting all trucks entering the farm, spraying disinfectants on the vehicles and putting disinfectant powder on the ground to make sure tires do not carry any virus, according to AP Television News video.

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7. DPRK Sports

Scotsman ("NORTH KOREA CHAMPIONS", 2006-12-14) reported that the DPRK were crowned women's football champions for the second consecutive Asian Games when they beat Japan 4-2 in a penalty shootout after 120 minutes of deadlock at the Qatar Sports Club in Doha yesterday.

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8. Japan-ROK Relations

Kyodo ("S. KOREAN FOREIGN MINISTER SONG PLANS TO VISIT JAPAN BY YEAR-END ", 2006-1-

-14) reported that the ROK Foreign Affairs and Trade Minister Song Min Soon is expected to make a two-day visit to Japan from Dec. 26 to hold talks with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Foreign Minster Taro Aso and other leaders about improving bilateral relations, Japanese and ROK diplomatic sources said.

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9. Japan-Russian Territorial Dispute

The Associated Press ("JAPAN OFFERS SOLUTION FOR RUSSIA DISPUTE ", 2006-12-14) reported that Japan's foreign minister said a dispute with Russia over a string of islands could be solved by splitting the total land area in half, a newspaper reported. Russia would get 75 percent of the biggest island, Etorufu, while Japan would get the remaining 25 percent, plus the other three islands, Aso said.

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10. Japan-India Relations

Agence France-Presse ("INDIAN PM PRESSES JAPAN FOR INVESTMENT, NUCLEAR ALLIANCE ", 2006-12-14) reported that Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has called for an "arc of prosperity" with fellow democracy Japan but pressed Asia's largest economy to invest more and support nuclear cooperation. Singh is seeking Japan's blessing for a controversial India-US pact that allows civilian nuclear cooperation even though New Delhi has developed nuclear weapons.

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11. Japan Defense Policy

Kyodo ("BILLS TO UPGRADE JAPAN'S SECURITY POSTURE PASS UPPER HOUSE PANEL", 2006-12-14) reported that a set of bills to upgrade Japan's low-profile Defense Agency to a ministry and make the Self-Defense Forces' overseas missions their main duty passed a House of Councillors committee, clearing the way for its enactment through parliament on Friday. Under the legislation, the Defense Agency, which is now under the direct control of the prime minister as an affiliate of the Cabinet Office, will be transformed in January into a ministry with budgeting and policymaking roles.

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12. Japan Town Meetings

The New York Times ("JAPAN'S LEADERS RIGGED VOTER FORUMS, A GOVERNMENT REPORT SAYS", 2006-12-14) reported that they were supposed to be exercises in grass-roots democracy, events during which Japan's political leaders met and talked with voters more accustomed to a political system in which decisions were simply handed down. But a government report concluded that two-thirds of the town meetings organized by the Japanese government since 2001 were Soviet-style performances with people paid to ask planted questions — favorable to the government.

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13. Japan Education Reform

Kyodo ("JAPAN PARLIAMENT TO ENACT REVISED EDUCATION LAW FRIDAY", 2006-12-14) reported that Japan's parliament is set to enact the revised post-World War II basic education law aiming at instilling patriotism in classrooms as a House of Councillors key committee approved a bill for the controversial revision. The bill introduces the idea of respect for the public spirit in its preamble, and calls for developing "an attitude which respects tradition and culture and loves the nation and homeland that have fostered them" as a goal of education.

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14. US on Defense of Space

The Washington Times ("U.S. TO DEFEND SPACE WITH MILITARY FORCE", 2006-12-14) reported that the US will use military force in space to protect satellites and other space systems from attack by hostile states or terrorists, the Bush administration's senior arms-control official, Robert Joseph, said. US officials said the comments are an indirect warning to the PRC, which has fired a ground-based laser gun at a US satellite that passed over its territory -- an event viewed as one sign of the PRC's efforts to develop space arms that can blind or destroy systems.

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15. Sino-US Trade Relations

The New York Times ("U.S. HITS RESISTANCE AT ECONOMIC TALKS IN CHINA", 2006-12-14) reported that a high-level array of cabinet officials from the PRC and the US clashed today over how quickly the PRC should move to change policies that have caused friction with Washington, in the opening session of an unusual two-day closed-door dialogue. US officials argued that a faster pace of reform is in the PRC's interest. PRC officials countered firmly that their country must proceed at its own pace and that US officials must try harder to understand the PRC's achievements and constraints.

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16. Taiwan Leadership

Agence France-Presse ("TAIWAN PRESIDENT'S WIFE TO STAND TRIAL OVER CORRUPTION CHARGES ", 2006-12-14) reported that Taiwanese President Chen Shui-bian's wife is set to go on trial on corruption and forgery charges, with the presidency potentially at stake after Chen vowed to resign if she is convicted. Wu Shu-chen, the first wife of a Taiwanese leader ever to be prosecuted, stands accused of illegally claiming 14.8 million Taiwan dollars (450,000 US) in personal expenses from state funds.

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