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I. NAPSNet

1. US-DPRK MOU

Asahi Shimbun ("WASHINGTON, PYONGYANG SIGNED NUCLEAR MEMORANDUM LAST MONTH", 2007-02-07) reported that the United States and DPRK signed a memorandum last month under which Pyongyang would freeze its nuclear reactor while Washington initiates energy and humanitarian aid. The memorandum was exchanged between U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill and Kim Kye Gwan, DPRK vice foreign minister, when they met in Berlin, the sources said. The two sides basically agreed on an outline of initial steps toward denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula before the memorandum was signed, several U.S. and DPRK sources said. Under the memorandum, the DPRK will halt operations at its graphite-moderated nuclear reactor in Yongbyon, according to the sources. Pyongyang will also allow the resumption of inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), whose inspectors were expelled in December 2002. In exchange, Washington would start supporting measures for energy assistance and humanitarian aid to the DPRK. The same deadlines are set for the halt of the Yongbyon reactor and the onset of support measures, according to the sources. But the memorandum falls short of detailing how much or what kind of aid Pyongyang will receive.

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2. Six Party Talks

Associated Press ("N KOREA AGREES IN PRINCIPLE TO TAKE INITIAL STEPS TO DISMANTLE NUCLEAR PROGRAM", 2009-02-08) reported that the DPRK agreed in principle Thursday to take initial steps toward dismantling its nuclear programs at the start of international talks seeking the first concrete progress on disarming Pyongyang. At a closed meeting of heads of delegations from the six countries at the Beijing meeting, all sides agreed that "it is important to reach agreement at this round of talks on first-phase measures," the ROK's envoy Chun Yung-woo told reporters. He said the PRC was to circulate a draft agreement by Friday morning, but gave no details. Earlier, the DPRK's envoy Kim Kye Gwan said upon arriving in Beijing that he was ready to discuss initial steps toward disarmament. "We are prepared to discuss first-stage measures," Kim told reporters. Kim said Thursday that any moves by the DPRK would depend on the United States' attitude.

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3. US on Six Party Talks

CBC ("RICE 'CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC' N. KOREA WILL END NUCLEAR PROGRAM", 2007-02-08) reported that there is cautious optimism from the U.S. side that the DPRK is shifting towards an eventual shutdown of its nuclear weapons program, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said Thursday, following a positive round of six-nation talks. "I am cautiously optimistic that we may be able to begin, again, to implement the joint statement of 2005 toward the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula," Rice told a congressional panel.

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4. Kim Jong Il Sighting

Reuters ("NORTH KOREA'S KIM SPOTTED FOR 1ST TIME IN 3 WEEKS", 2007-02-08) reported that the DPRK leader Kim Jong-il has made his first public appearances in about three weeks. On January 26, ROK officials denied a report by Japan's Jiji news agency that the North's powerful military might

have turned on Kim or the reclusive leader had taken ill. But the DPRK's official KCNA news agency said Kim visited two spots in the northeast city of Chongjin, -- a mining and metallurgy university as well as communist revolutionary sites.

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5. New Russian Ambassador to DPRK

Itar-Tass ("NEW RUSSIA AMBASSADOR TO NORTH KOREA ASSUMES OFFICE", 2007-02-08) reported that a new Russian Ambassador to the DPRK Valery Sukhinin presented his credentials to the Korean side on Thursday, thus he officially began performing his duties in Pyongyang. Chairman of the DPRK Supreme People's Assembly Kim Yong Nam, who traditionally represents his country during international events, received the credentials from the Russian diplomat. After the ceremony of delivering the credentials the meeting was held without an interpreter for the first time in the history of the two countries. Sukhinin is known as an outstanding specialist on the Korean issues and speaks fluently the Korean language. The Russian ambassador graduated 30 years ago from the Kim Il Sung University in Pyongyang.

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6. DPRK 'Great Escape' Prison Break

Mainichi Daily News ("REPORT: SOME 120 NORTH KOREANS ESCAPE POLITICAL PRISON CAMP", 2007-02-08) reported that some 120 inmates escaped from a political concentration camp in northeastern DPRK several months ago in an unprecedented prison break. The prisoners escaped from Hwasong camp in North Hamgyong, a province close to the Chinese and Russian borders, in December, the Dong-a Ilbo newspaper reported Wednesday. Daily NK, a Seoul-based Internet news site focusing on the DPRK, also carried a similar report on Tuesday. Both reports cited multiple unnamed sources in the DPRK. An official at the ROK's National Intelligence Service, said the agency is looking into the case. The Hwasong prison camp -- located deep inside a mountain and encircled by high wire fences -- holds about 10,000 prisoners, Daily NK said. The escape seemed to have been carefully planned with outside help since the escapees drove off in a vehicle waiting outside the prison, according to the report. So far, 21 prisoners have been caught, most of whom were found in the PRC and sent back after failed attempts to defect to the ROK, the report said.

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7. Japan Security

Kyodo News ("JAPAN'S NSC TO BE LAUNCHED IN APRIL NEXT YEAR", 2007-02-08) reported that a government panel agreed to launch a Japanese version of the United States' National Security Council in April next year. The prime minister, chief Cabinet secretary as well as foreign and defense ministers will be the core NSC members, and they will hold meetings regularly to set up medium- and long-term strategies over diplomacy and security, said the members of the panel, led by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

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8. Sino-Japanese Trade Relations

New Kerala ("JAPAN MULLS FILING COMPLAINT AGAINST CHINA WITH WTO", 2007-02-08)

reported that Japan is considering filing a complaint against the PRC with the WTO for unfairly using subsidies to protect domestic companies, the country's Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Akira Amari said. Amari indicated that Japan was considering taking the measure by joining US-PRC talks or WTO panel negotiations over the subsidy issue as a third party. The US had asked Japan last month to jointly file a complaint against the PRC in the WTO. However, Japan wanted to pursue a softer third party approach, given that a large number of Japanese companies run joint ventures in the PRC.

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9. PRC African Diplomacy

Agence France Presse ("CHINA'S HU IN MOZAMBIQUE AS AFRICAN TOUR WINDS DOWN", 2007-02-08) reported that PRC President Hu Jintao arrived in Mozambique on the penultimate stop in his eight-nation African tour. Hu is expected to write off Mozambique's debt to the PRC while in the country, following similar shows of magnanimity in other ports of call such as Liberia and Zambia. Mozambique has largely untapped coal reserves and natural gas, which the PRC wants in order to fuel its booming economy. Currently, Mozambican exports to the PRC are largely confined to wood, sugar and other agricultural products.

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10. Russia-Japan Territorial Dispute

The China Post ("JAPAN VOWS TO TAKE BACK ISLANDS", 2007-02-08) reports that Japan's prime minister Shinzo Abe has pledged to regain four disputed northern islands from Russia, saying it was time to end the bickering between Tokyo and Moscow over the prime fishing grounds. Russia seized the four-island chain, called the Southern Kurils by Russia and the Northern Territories by Japan, from Tokyo in the closing days of World War II. The dispute has kept the two countries from signing a formal peace treaty.

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11. Cross Strait Relations

The Associated Press ("PRESIDENT WANTS 'TAIWAN' ON STAMP", 2007-02-08) reported that President Chen Shui-bian said the name 'Taiwan' would soon replace 'China' on the island's stamps, a move likely to anger the PRC. At present, Taiwanese stamps bear the island's official name, Republic of China, in English and Chinese. "I believe we will soon see a satisfactory outcome, including the long-awaited terms 'Taiwan Post' and 'Taiwan stamp,'" Chen said in a response to a reader posted on the Presidential Office Web site.

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12. PRC Climate Change

The New York Times ("CHINA SAYS RICH COUNTRIES SHOULD TAKE LEAD ON GLOBAL WARMING", 2007-02-08) reported that the PRC said Tuesday that wealthier countries must take the lead in curbing greenhouse gas emissions and refused to say whether it would agree to any mandatory emissions limits that might hamper its booming economy. Jiang Yu, a spokeswoman for the Foreign Ministry, said China was willing to contribute to an international effort to combat global

warming but placed the primary responsibility on richer, developed nations that have been polluting for much longer.

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13. PRC Religion

BBC News ("SURVEY FINDS 300M CHINA BELIEVERS", 2007-02-08) reported that the number of religious believers in the PRC could be three times higher than official estimates, according to a survey reported by state media. A recent poll suggests 300 million people nationwide could be religious, compared to the official figure of 100 million. Correspondents say the poll's findings back up suspicions that religion has been enjoying a resurgence in the PRC over the past 20 years, as Communist Party disapproval has eased. Their methodology was not made clear in the state media reports, neither was it clear whether people are becoming religious, or becoming more prepared to say so.

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14. Asia Wealth Inequality

BBC News ("ASIA FACES 'GROWNING POVERTY GAP'", 2007-02-08) reported that the president of the Asian Development Bank has warned of increasing inequality across Asia. Haruhiko Kuroda also called on governments to do more to address what he called a new kind of poverty. He also said that the PRC and India in particular were experiencing widening income gaps. Asia is home to many of the world's fastest growing economies - and that growth has lifted millions of people out of poverty. But the benefits of growth have not been spread equally. Mr Kuroda called on governments to spend more on health and education and improve conditions in rural areas to address the gaps between rich and poor.

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