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I. NAPSNet

1. Six Party Working Groups: Uranium Issue

Joongang Ilbo ("HILL: NORTH WILL BE QUESTIONED CLOSELY ON URANIUM ISSUE", 2007-0--23) reported that Washington's chief negotiator in the nuclear talks vowed to thoroughly investigate an alleged uranium-based nuclear program that Pyongyang has denied in the past. "We'll set up a working group to run to the ground what we know about their highly enriched uranium program," Mr. Hill said in an interview with ABC, which was posted on the U.S. State Department's Web site Wednesday, Washington time. "They do deny that [having a program] at this point, but we will address that. And the North Koreans have said to us that they will address it with us to a mutual satisfaction. So we'll see where we go, but we do need to have clarity on that matter."

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2. Six Party Working Groups: Peace Treaty

Joongang Ilbo ("KOREA PEACE TREATY TALKS 'IN THE PIPELINE': SONG", 2007-02-22) reported that ROK Foreign Minister Song Min-soon told a press conference that a working group to discuss establishing a permanent peace regime on the Korean Peninsula is in the pipeline. The latest six party talks agreement stipulates that foreign ministers will hold a meeting once initial actions outlined in the deal, which have a 60-day deadline, are implemented. If the forum takes place it would be a significant first step by nations in the region to resolve the sometimes volatile security situation on the Korean Peninsula. A government official said yesterday that both Koreas, the United States and the PRC, which were pitted against each other in the Korean War, will be participants in such talks aimed at replacing the armistice that ended the Korean War with a permanent peace treaty.

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3. Inter-Korean Relations

Asia Pulse ("KOREAS TO HOLD MINISTERIAL TALKS IN PYONGYANG", 2007-02-22) reported that the Koreas agreed on February 15 to hold their next round of cabinet-level talks in Pyongyang for four days from February 27. The likely agenda of the ministerial meeting will include resuming rice and fertilizer aid to the DPRK and reunions of separated families, the opening of cross-border railways and the provision of raw materials in return for DPRK minerals, according to officials. The ministerial talks, the highest-level channel of regular dialogue between the two sides, have been suspended amid the tension over the missile tests in July and its nuclear weapon test in October.

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4. Negroponte Asia Visit

Financial Times ("US VISIT TO ASIA LIKELY TO SHORE UP N-DEAL", 2007-02-22) reported that John Negroponte, the former national director of intelligence who took up his new post as US deputy secretary of state last week, will visit the PRC, ROK and Japan. Negroponte also planned to add Pyongyang to his itinerary, though others either denied this or said such a trip was unlikely at this stage. A US state department spokesman said only: "We have nothing to announce at this time." Negroponte would be the most senior US official to visit Pyongyang since Madeleine Albright, then secretary of state, in October 2000. Officials admitted that a high-level visit to Pyongyang would be

controversial internally.

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5. US Congress on UNDP Probe

BBC ("CONGRESS URGES US TO CONTINUE SUSPENSION OF UNDP AID TO AFTER NORTH KOREA PROBE", 2007-02-20) reported that the US House has introduced a resolution urging the United States to continue to withhold contributions to a UN agency accused of inadvertently funneling cash to the DPRK. The House resolution demands that local UNDP staff who violated regulations or committed crimes be appropriately sanctioned and prosecuted accordingly. It also calls for the suspension of US contributions to the agency pending a full audit of activities in the DPRK since 1998 and until regulations are in place to ensure no UNDP funds are provided to the DPRK government.

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6. Yokotas Meet Cheney

Reuters ("CHENEY MEETS N.KOREA ABDUCTEE'S PARENTS IN JAPAN", 2007-02-22) reported that Vice President Dick Cheney didn't have time to meet Japan's defense minister, who has questioned the Iraq war, but did squeeze in a chat on Thursday with Sakie and Shigeru Yokota, whose 13-yea--old daughter Megumi was kidnapped by DPRK agents 30 years ago. The couple gave Cheney a letter asking President Bush not to remove the DPRK from Washington's list of state sponsors of terrorism until the abductees dispute is settled, Kyodo news agency reported.

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7. Pyongyang Revival

Christian Post ("RICK WARREN'S CONTROVERSIAL NORTH KOREA TRIP POSTPONED", 2007-0--22) reported that "megapastor" Rick Warren's controversial trip to the DPRK next month has been postponed. Originally scheduled for March when Warren was expected to preach to some 15,000 people at the first ever outdoor Christian event in the country, the evangelical pastor plans to pursue a later date possibly in the summer when the weather is warmer, according to his public relations team. The planned trip to the DPRK came at the invitation of a delegation of ROK businessmen with ties to Pyongyang. The invitation to preach publicly is a rare one. World renowned evangelist Billy Graham was one of the few Americans and religious figures to visit the DPRK. And Graham preached indoors. Warren's acceptance of the invitation drew wide criticism from many Christians and the general public. Warren reiterated that he is not going for political reasons, but to preach the Gospel. The planned speaking engagement is to take place in conjunction with the centennial year of the Pyongyang revival.

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8. US-ROK Security Alliance

Agence France-Presse ("US, SKOREA TO DEBATE ALLIANCE AMID NKOREA NUKE FEARS", 2007-02-22) reported that the ROK's defense chief left for the US to discuss major changes in the military alliance. Defence Minister Kim Jang-Soo and his US counterpart Robert Gates are likely to set a date for the transfer of wartime operational control when they meet Friday, officials said. The ROK wants

to regain wartime control over its forces by 2012, citing national pride and a new US military global strategy. Washington does not object and has proposed an earlier date of 2009.

(return to top) Chosun Ilbo ("DEFENSE COMMITTEE PASSES RESOLUTION ON TROOP CONTROL", 2007-02-22) reported that the National Assembly's National Defense Committee passed a resolution urging a delay to the planned handover of wartime operational control of ROK forces to Seoul until the DPRK nuclear problem is completely resolved. The margin was slim. Of the committee's 13 members, six from the ruling Uri Party opposed it. But one Uri Party lawmaker, Cho Seong-tae, and six from opposition parties approved the resolution. (return to top) Yonhap ("LINKAGE OF WARTIME COMMAND TRANSFER TO N. KOREA NUKE ISSUE IMPROPER: DEFENSE MINISTRY", 2007-02-22) reported that the Defense Ministry said Thursday it is not proper for lawmakers to link the ROK's planned takeover of wartime control of its military to efforts for the scrapping of the DPRK's nuclear program. "The provision of the U.S. nuclear umbrella will be continued under the two countries' alliance treaty even if the wartime command is transferred so the nuclear threat from North Korea will be controlled," the ministry said in a news release. (return to top)

9. ROK Elections

International Herald Tribune ("SOUTH KOREAN PRESIDENT TO QUIT RULING PARTY", 2007-0--22) reported that President Roh Moo Hyun announced he would soon leave his Uri Party, acknowledging that he had become a political liability in advance of the December presidential poll. Noting that he has become a stumbling block for his party's unity, Roh said he would leave the party soon to allow it to regroup before the election.

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10. US-Japan Trade Relations

Reuters ("U.S. NOT READY FOR JAPAN FREE TRADE TALKS: USTR", 2007-02-22) reported that a top US trade official quashed business community hopes for the US to begin talks on a free trade agreement with Japan after it finishes negotiations on a proposed pact with the ROK. "We're not ready for an FTA (free trade agreement) with Japan right now," Assistant U.S. Trade Representative Wendy Cutler. "I'm not saying it's impossible. I just don't see it happening in the short term."

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11. Japan UNSC Seat Bid

Japan Times ("JAPAN LOOKS TO REVIVE G-4 UNSC BID", 2007-02-22) reported that the government plans to resubmit a plan along with Brazil, India and Germany to expand the composition of the UN Security Council in a bid to secure permanent seats for themselves, according to government sources. Japan is hoping that reuniting forces with the three other countries will help gain increased support for its reform agenda after it failed last year without backing from the US.

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12. Japan-Russia Uranium Enrichment Agreement

The Yomiuri Shimbun ("JAPAN-RUSSIA URANIUM ENRICHMENT DEAL NEAR", 2007-02-22) reported that the government and the nation's major electric power companies have entered the

final stage of negotiations with Russia for consigning the enrichment of uranium for fuel in nuclear power plants to Atomenergoprom, or Atomprom, which is to be established as Russia's state-run monopoly for the nuclear energy industry, according to sources close to the deal. Under Japan's nuclear fuel recycling scheme, fissionable uranium and plutonium are recovered from spent fuel rods, and the uranium is enriched to be used as nuclear fuel again.

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13. Cross Strait Relations

Agence France-Presse ("TAIWAN'S RULING PARTY CHIEF ANNOUNCES PRESIDENTIAL BID ", 2007-02-22) reported that Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party chairman Yu Shyi-kun, a radical independence activist, announced he will seek the party's nomination for 2008 presidential polls. Yu renewed his pledge to "insist on Taiwan's sovereignty" in dealing with Beijing, an apparent gesture to appeal to independence supporters which make up about 18 percent of the eligible vote.

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14. PRC Journalist Prison Sentence

The Associated Press ("PRISON SENTENCE REDUCED FOR CHINA EDITOR", 2007-02-22) reported that a jailed editor of a PRC newspaper known for its aggressive reporting has had his eight-year prison sentence reduced by one year, a Hong Kong newspaper said. The news about Yu Huafeng came just weeks after his colleague, Li Minying, was released from prison three years before the end of his six-year sentence, Ming Pao Daily News reported. Both were convicted of embezzlement and graft, but many believe the charges were trumped up by officials seeking revenge for media reports that embarrassed the local government in the southern province of Guangdong.

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15. PRC Environment

Agence France-Presse ("CHINA PLANS TO CUT WATER CONSUMPTION ", 2007-02-22) reported that the PRC plans to cut its average water consumption by 20 percent by the end of 2010 in an effort to avert a looming shortage crisis, state media reported. The government will set up consumption quotas and make local officials responsible for managing the use of water, the Xinhua news agency reported, citing the ministry of water resources.

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