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I. NAPSNet

1. DPRK Nuclear Program

Chosun Ilbo ("N.KOREA TO RESUME PEACEFUL NUCLEAR ACTIVITIES", 2005-12-20) reported

that the DPRK will increase peaceful nuclear activities through graphite reactors. The official KCNA news agency said since the US decided not to provide the DPRK with light-water nuclear reactors; it will develop its 50 MW and 200 MW graphite reactors and boost independent nuclear-driven industries. With time, the DPRK will expand its peaceful nuclear activities by building light-water reactors with local technology, it added.

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2. Japan on DPRK Nuclear Program

Voice of America ("JAPAN CALLS LATEST NUCLEAR THREAT BY NORTH KOREA 'SUICIDAL'", 2005-12-20) reported that according to the Korean Central News Agency Pyongyang planned to start developing light water reactors for nuclear energy. Japanese Foreign Ministry spokesman Tomohiko Taniguchi says such moves would make pointless further six party talks. "It is going to be suicidal for North Korea to pursue that course. This is going to undermine the whole rationale of six-party talks," he said.

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3. ROK on Six Party Talks

Bloomberg ("N. KOREA PROPOSES SEPARATING MONEY SANCTIONS, NUCLEAR TALKS", 2005-12-20) reported that DPRK officials would like to separate the topic of US financial sanctions against their country from six party talks, a ROK official said today in Washington. Chung Dong Young, South Korean's unification minister and an envoy to the nuclear talks, told reporters at a briefing that officials in the DPRK told him discussions on the US sanctions would not be "in keeping with the spirit of the six- party talks."

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4. Informal Six Party Talks

Chosun Ilbo ("SEOUL PROPOSED UNOFFICIAL SIX-PARTY TALKS TO N.KOREA", 2005-12-20) reported that Seoul's unification minister said he has proposed an informal meeting of chief delegates to six party talks. Unification Minister Chung Dong-young said he proposed an unofficial six party meeting during last week's inter-Korean ministerial talks in Jeju. Speaking Monday at the National Press Club in Washington, Chung said he had asked the DPRK delegation to accept the idea as a stepping stone to breaking the new impasse with the US. He said the proposal was delivered to the "highest level" in Pyongyang, suggesting the DPRK leader Kim Jong-il would consider it.

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5. DPRK-Russian Relations

RIA Novosti ("RUSSIAN SHIP RELEASED BY NORTH KOREA EN ROUTE HOME", 2005-12-20) reported that a Russian cargo ship arrested by the DPRK authorities on December 5 is now heading for the Pacific port of Vladivostok, a representative of the ship owner said Tuesday. According to Andrei Makeyev, the navigation director with Ardis, contact with the Terney has been fully restored, and the crew feels well.

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6. ROK on DPRK Human Rights

Chosun Ilbo ("MINISTER DEFENDS SEOUL'S N.KOREA POLICY", 2005-12-20) reported that Unification Minister Chung Dong-young defended the ROK's soft approach to the human rights abuses of the DPRK. Chung told a meeting at the National Press Club in Washington, "It is impossible for the South Korean government not to be more concerned with peace and stability on the peninsula than the improvement of human rights conditions in the North." He said some 1.8 million troops "stand face to face on the truce line" along the DMZ. However, "short of public condemnation of North Korea, the South Korean government is using all means possible to bring about substantial improvement in human rights in the North," he added.

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7. DPRK Counterfeiting

Donga Ilbo ("KEY NORTH KOREAN ENTERPRISE MOVES ITS BASE FROM MACAU TO ZHUHAI ", 2005-12-20) reported that it has been confirmed that Jogwang Trading Co., which virtually represents the DPRK in Macau, has withdrawn from Macau. The company, which was situated in the building complex in front of the transportation agency of the Macau security police, recently moved its office. Hence, DPRK employees have stopped coming to the site, and the signboard of the company has been removed. A source from Macau said that Jogwang Trading Co. moved its office to Zhuhai, a Chinese territory near Macau, at about the same time that the US announced that a Macau bank had engaged in money-laundering for the DPRK. It also said that quite a few DPRK enterprises have also moved their offices to mainland China.

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8. Possible DPRK Defectors

Yonhap News ("SIX SAILORS FROM N. KOREAN FISHING BOAT HEADED FOR S.KOREAN PORT ", 2005-12-20) reported that six crew members of a DPRK fishing boat that was adrift in the East Sea due to engine problems was approaching here Tuesday after being rescued by ROK coast guards, officials said. Its six-member crew, four men and two women, were rescued by a patrol boat dispatched to the scene after their discovery was reported to the local coast guard. The fishing boat was taken to a safe sea area near Ulleung Island, according to officials. "The rescued sailors want to return to Hamhung after having their ship repaired and refueled, and there appears to be no intention to defect to South Korea as of now," a guard member said.

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9. ROK Nuclear Program

Joongang Ilbo ("NUCLEAR INSTITUTE SAYS REFINING CHARGES FALSE", 2005-12-20) reported that the ROK's national nuclear energy institute denied yesterday an international press agency report that this country faced United Nations inspections of work here to develop a method to produce weapons-grade plutonium. In a press statement, the Korea Atomic Energy Research Institute said it was developing a "pyroprocessing" technology to reprocess spent nuclear fuel but without separating the components of the spent fuel. That work has nothing to do with weapons-grade plutonium, the institute said, and international inspectors have examined it.

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10. Japan Military Spending

Agence France Presse ("JAPAN SLASHES MILITARY, AID BUDGETS", 2005-12-20) reported that Japan slashed its military and foreign aid spending again in an austere budget for the year to March 2007 despite attempts to give the country a higher international profile. The defense budget was down 0.9 percent to 4.81 trillion yen (41.6 billion dollars) for a fourth consecutive decline.

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11. PRC Bird Flu

Reuters ("US HEALTH AGENCY SAYS CHINA OPEN ON BIRD FLU ", 2005-12-20) reported that the PRC and the US are cooperating on efforts to understand deadly bird flu, a major shift from Beijing's handling of SARS, US National Institutes of Health director Elias Zerhouni said on Tuesday. "There is a definite willingness to be completely cooperative, be completely transparent and to exchange samples with the WHO and with other partners so we can track the genetic changes," he told a news conference in Beijing.

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12. Hong Kong Political Reform

The New York Times ("SHOWDOWN NEARS ON HONG KONG POLITICAL CHANGES", 2005-12-20) reported that another showdown on constitutional change is looming in Hong Kong, as the territory's Beijing-backed leaders said Monday that they would make a modest change to their complex plan for limited democracy and then demand that the legislature vote later this week. Prominent democracy advocates said the plan, to be voted on Wednesday, did not go far enough because it did not set a timetable for general elections, and they vowed to vote against it.

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13. Sakhalin Oil Spill

The Vladivostok News ("SAKHALIN OIL SPILL INVESTIGATION ENSUED ", 2005-12-20) reported that Sakhalin Environmental Prosecutor's office has launched a criminal case to investigate a 27-to-oil spill at the Rosneft-Sakhalinmorneftegaz oil pipe in the bay of Nabil on December 13. The inspection held by Sakhalin's Nature Preserving Inspectorate on December 13 revealed that the spill occurred due to a break in the underground oil separation unit. The separation unit is located at the dam connecting two lakes with the bay of Nabil, Noglinsky County.

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