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I. NAPSNet

1. DPRK Nuclear Material

("THINK TANK: NKOREA CAN BUILD NUKE WARHEADS", 2007-02-21) reported that the Institute

for Science and International Security said in a report released Tuesday that as of this month the DPRK had between 101 and 141 pounds of plutonium, of which between 62 and 110 pounds is estimated to be usable for weapons -- enough to make four to eight crude warheads. The amount of radioactive material is key to monitoring its compliance with a Feb. 13 agreement to disarm, under which the DPRK is required to declare all nuclear programs and material to international inspectors.

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2. DPRK on UNDP Audit

Associated Press ("NORTH KOREA ACCUSES U.S. OF FABRICATING LIES THAT IT DIVERTED U.N. AID MONEY TO DEVELOP NUCLEAR WEAPONS", 2007-02-21) reported that the DPRK accused the United States of fabricating lies that it was diverting U.N. aid money to develop nuclear weapons and said it would accept an outside audit of U.N. operations unless the aim was to politicize aid to the country. In a letter to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the DPRK's U.N. Ambassador Pak Gil Yon also accused the United States of "hostile maneuvers" against his country in seeking an audit of the alleged misuse of aid money from the U.N. Development Program, known as UNDP.

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3. DPRK Edict on Japanese Cars

Daily NK ("ORDER OF CAR CONFISCATION ISSUED IN NORTH KOREA", 2007-02-21) reported that DPRK leader Kim Jong Il, after watching a wrecked Japanese car blocking his way from the late Kim Il Sung’s mausoleum on January 1, ordered that all Japanese cars operating in country be confiscated. However, it is questionable whether such order would be actually carried out while the country is heavily suffering lack of means of transportation. This is why some analysts suggest that Kim’s order is aimed at tightening the control of society.

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4. US-ROK Trade Relations

Yonhap ("S. KOREA-U.S. FTA MAY ENCOURAGE NORTH KOREA TO CHOOSE NON-NUCLEAR PATH: PAPER", 2007-02-21) reported that a US-ROK free trade agreement (FTA) could show the DPRK that economic liberalization would be a better guarantee of prosperity than nuclear brinkmanship, according to a paper re-issued by a conservative think tank. Kim Holmes, vice president of the Heritage Foundation, recommended that the US should maintain pressure on Pyongyang. "And we can sign a free trade agreement with South Korea," he said. "This would show North Koreans that economic liberalization is a better path to prosperity than nuclear blackmail, statist policies, and isolation."

(return to top) Korea Herald ("FARM TALKS TO PRECEDE FTA NEGOTIATIONS", 2007-02-21) reported that the ROK and the US are expected to hold high-level negotiations on agriculture next month a few days ahead of the next round of free trade agreement talks, suggesting both sides are determined to conclude a deal by their target deadline. "U.S. negotiators, after the end of the seventh round of (FTA) talks, proposed holding separate high-level talks on agriculture on the fifth or sixth of next month in the United States, and at that time we said we would look into it, and now we plan to do so," Park Hae-sang, Seoul's vice agriculture minister, said at a news briefing yesterday. (return to top)

5. US-ROK Security Alliance

Korea Herald ("KOREA, U.S. NEAR CONTROL TRANSFER ACCORD", 2007-02-21) reported that defense chiefs from the ROK and the US are expected to reach an agreement on the timetable for the transfer of wartime operational control during their talks in Washington. Working-level officials have narrowed their differences over the schedule and are reportedly close to an agreement on 2012 as the target year.

(return to top) Korea Times ("ASSEMBLY PANEL OKS RESOLUTION TO DELAY WARTIME CONTROL TRANSFER", 2007-02-21) reported that a National Assembly committee Wednesday passed a resolution calling for a delay in talks on the transfer of wartime operational control of the ROK armed forces from the US military to the ROK side. The move came a couple of days before Defense Minister Kim Jang-soo meets with his US counterpart, Robert M. Gates, in Washington, D.C., to try to set the timetable on the control transfer. The two defense chiefs will meet on Saturday. (return to top)

6. US-Japan Security Alliance

Kyodo ("CHENEY SAYS JAPAN-U.S. ALLIANCE 'NEVER BEEN BETTER' THAN NOW", 2007-02-21) reported that visiting U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney emphasized the importance of his country's alliance with Japan in the fight against global terrorism, and said the US will remain in Iraq until its mission there is completed. "We stand beside each other as allies but we are more than that," Cheney said of the relationship between Japan and the US. "Relations between our two countries have never been better than they are today. The United States of America is proud to call Japan one of our closest allies," he said.

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7. ROK-Japan Relations

Kyodo ("JAPAN, S. KOREAN DEFENSE MINISTERS TO MEET SUNDAY IN TOKYO", 2007-02-21) reported that Japanese Defense Minister Fumio Kyuma and ROK Defense Minister Kim Jang Soo will meet Sunday in Tokyo, the Defense Ministry said. The session at the Japanese Defense Ministry marks the first meeting between the defense chiefs of the two countries since January 2005, it said. Kyuma and Kim are expected to discuss the DPRK nuclear issue and promotion of defense exchanges between Japan and the ROK.

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8. Japan on UNSC Expansion

Kyodo ("JAPAN PROPOSES STUDYING 25-STATE U.N. SECURITY COUNCIL", 2007-02-21) reported that Japan, flip-flopping on a U.N. Security Council expansion policy, proposed that the world body study increasing the number of the council's seats to 25, diplomatic sources said. Takahiro Shinyo, deputy chief of Japan's mission to the United Nations, was quoted as telling a closed-door session of a U.N. General Assembly working group, "We should revisit the proposed size of 25," according to the sources. He suggested Japan could be flexible on the figure given lingering differences among other U.N. members, they said.

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9. Sino-US Trade Relations

The Associated Press ("PAULSON TO EMBARK ON THIRD CHINA VISIT", 2007-02-21) reported that Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson, continuing efforts to deal with America's huge trade gap with the PRC, will make his third visit to the country next month since joining President Bush's Cabinet last July. The Treasury Department announced Wednesday that Paulson will meet in Beijing with government officials on March 7 and deliver a major speech on the PRC's capital markets in Shanghai on March 8.

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10. PRC Environment

The Associated Press ("REPORT SAYS 2006 WAS CHINA'S WARMEST YEAR IN HALF A CENTURY", 2007-02-21) reported that the PRC had its warmest year in over half a century in 2006, with an average temperature of 9.9 degrees Celsius (50 degrees Fahrenheit), the Xinhua News Agency reported. The report, which cited the China Meteorological Administration, said the temperature was the highest on record since 1951. In a sign of how widespread the warming trend was last year, 13 out of 39 climate observation stations on the usually frigid Tibetan plateau recorded record high temperatures, Xinhua said.

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