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Directorate of Intelligence

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East Asia Notes: South Korea: Presidential Race Begins

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South Korea's three major presidential hopefuls are already launching their campaigns for this winter's election, and the race is likely to be intense.

recent speeches, Chung has stressed his business acumen will enable him to strengthen South Korea's economy, but it is unclear if his experience will be an asset or a liability with voters. Many South Koreans resent the power of conglomerates such as Hyundai and fear Chung would coddle big business.

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Democratic Liberal Party candidate Kim Young Sam's biggest challenge will be to unify the ruling party behind him. Kim faced stiff resistance to his nomination from the members of two other factions, and his rival for the nomination is hinting he may yet run as an independent. Kim is trying to mend fences in the DLP by appointing some of his rivals to party posts as he puts together his campaign, according to press reports. At the same time, he must work to reassure the public he can handle major issues.

The presidential vote must be held between 17 December 1992 and 25 January 1993--an exact date will be selected after interparty consultations--and a clear frontrunner has not yet emerged in opinion polls. Ruling party candidate Kim Young Sam undoubtedly hopes the public's traditional desire for stability will work to his advantage. Chung Ju Yung will try to boost his prospects by exploiting widespread public sentiment that it is time for the "two Kims" to retire from politics. For his part, Kim Dae Jung may calculate Chung Ju Yung will draw enough votes away from the ruling party to enable him to win with a plurality of votes in the multicandidate race.

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Kim Dae Jung--candidate of the largest opposition party--is campaigning hard on economic themes, but he must overcome his reputation as a leftist who cannot win outside his home province. Kim is trying to moderate his image by recruiting former Army officers to join his party and endorsing the continued presence of US troops in South Korea even after reunification, according to press reports. Kim contends his party's strong showing in Seoul in the March National Assembly election proves he is not merely a regional candidate.

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Meanwhile, Chung Ju Yung--the former Hyundai chairman who formed the Unification National Party in January--is the new face in the campaign who must convince voters he is a viable candidate. Chung's party won a surprising 17 percent of the vote in the Assembly election, and the billionaire has the money and organization to run a strong national campaign. In

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Office of East Asian Analysis. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, NEA Division, OEA,

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