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I. United States

1. DPRK Famine

The Associated Press (Edith M. Lederer, "U.N. MAKES FOOD APPEAL FOR N. KOREA," London, 01/06/98)reported that the World Food Program on Tuesday urged the international community to donate more than US$378 million to avert famine in the DPRK this year. Catherine Bertini, the program's executive director, stated, "The number of people at risk are a vast majority of the population of 23 million." She added, "The people of North Korea, particularly the children, need our help to recover from this series of terrible calamities." The World Food Program's emergency appeal would provide nearly 723,800 tons of food to 7.5 million DPRK citizens, almost a third of the population. "It would be the largest program in our history," Bertini said. Last year, the UN agency provided more than 363,000 tons of food to 4.7 million DPRK citizens, while other donations from governments, voluntary organizations, and businesses brought the total contribution to over 990,000

tons, she said. She added, "With the generosity of the international community and the resilience of the people of North Korea, we were able to divert a major disaster that could have occurred." An assessment mission by the World Food Program and the Food and Agriculture Organization that visited the DPRK in October and November determined that the shortfall in food could not be met by the government, barter agreements or commercial operations. The main aid recipients will be children up to the age of 12, the handicapped, hospital patients, pregnant women, and workers in food-for-work programs. "The number of people at risk are more than some of the most severe problems that we've seen worldwide -- the problems in the mid-1980s in Ethiopia, the Rwanda regional crisis, the Bosnian relief program," Bertini said.

2. ROK-DPRK Relations

The Washington Post (Kevin Sullivan, "KOREAS' ILLS COMPETE FOR ATTENTION," Seoul, 01/06/98, A10) reported that the ROK's financial crisis has shifted international attention from the DPRK famine and led to a softening of DPRK rhetoric against the ROK. Ahn Byung-joon, a political science professor at Yonsei University, stated, "North Korea needs help from the South. Like it or not, the South is still the only country that can provide them with large-scale aid. My hunch is that they don't want to give the impression that they are interfering in South Korea's domestic problems." Stephen W. Bosworth, US Ambassador to the ROK, said that the DPRK does not know what to make of the ROK's crisis. He stated, "For a long time, they were kind of puzzled by all this. I don't think there was a broad understanding of what was going on." A US official in Seoul added that the DPRK has "done a bit of crowing over the situation down here, but not nearly as much as they could have. They've been far less noisy and obnoxious than in any previous election. Personally, I think it looks like they are preparing to get more engaged with the South." Regarding the light-water reactor project, Ben Limb, a top adviser to ROK President-elect Kim Dae-jung, said that Kim is "100 percent behind" the project. Ambassador Bosworth also said he believes that the ROK will continue to meet its obligations. However, Lee Jong-chang, a spokesman for Kim's transition team, said last week that the ROK would ask the US to pay some of the ROK's share of the project. Lee stated, "Our burden should be cut to the minimum in view of the current financial difficulty we are now suffering."

3. ROK Presidential Transition

The Washington Post (Kevin Sullivan, "NOT YET S. KOREA'S PRESIDENT, KIM DAE JUNG ALREADY CALLS THE SHOTS," Seoul, 01/05/98, A12) reported that ROK President-elect Kim Dae-jung has already begun to exercise authority, although he does not formally take office until February 25. Lee Jung-hoon, a political science professor at Yonsei University, stated, "President Kim Young-sam is quite awed by the whole economic situation, and he and his lieutenants don't have a clue what to do. They're just leaving it to Kim Dae-jung's camp." An unnamed official in the outgoing administration said, "There's a general sentiment that the president-elect should make decisions and exercise influence over national affairs, especially on economic matters. That is more or less understood by President Kim himself." The article said that while the transition period has been mostly smooth, the ROK media reported last week that state security authorities destroyed three truckloads of documents related to Kim Dae-jung on the day before the election.

4. ROK Financial Crisis

The Wall Street Journal (Stephen E. Frank in New York and Michael Schuman in Seoul, "BANKS, SOUTH KOREAN OFFICIALS MEET TO DISCUSS DEBT CRISIS," 01/06/98) reported that international bankers have set up a meeting Thursday to discuss rolling over their ROK loans for an additional 30 to 60 days. The banks hope to buy time for their complex debt-restructuring negotiations with the ROK government.

The Washington Post carried an opinion article by former undersecretary of state Robert B. Zoellick ("A LARGER PLAN FOR ASIA," 01/06/98, A13) which called on US President Bill Clinton to take decisive action to lessen the impact of the Asian financial crisis. He proposed that the US persuade Asian nations to avoid further currency devaluation, press Japan to stimulate growth through domestic demand and to clean up its banks' bad loan problem, and work closely with the PRC to clear up the bad debts of its state-owned enterprises. The author said that "The president should emphasize that this economic strategy advances and complements America's political and security interests." He also argued that the financial crisis could have long-term benefits for the situation on the Korean Peninsula. He stated, "today's troubles could compel South Korea to make economic changes that over time will enhance its capabilities to help reform North Korea's economy; current conditions might also supply a face-saving basis for the North to approach talks with the South on humanitarian links, military dangers and possible reconciliation." He concluded, "the climate is ripe for China and the United States to focus on their common interests: promoting market reforms in China and responsible security cooperation in the region, recognizing America's supportive and stabilizing presence."

5. US Journalist Jailed in ROK

The Los Angeles Times ("RELEASE OF JOURNALIST COULD MAKE VIGIL UNNECESSARY," 01/06/98) reported that Chang Kee-sung, spokesman of the ROK Consulate in Los Angeles, said that Richard Choi, a US journalist arrested for slander in the ROK, could be freed on Tuesday. The US civic groups Congress for Racial Equality and Creating a Civil Society in Los Angeles had scheduled a candlelight vigil for Tuesday night to pressure the ROK Government to release Choi.

6. Alleged Illegal Arms Sale to PRC

The AP-Dow Jones News Service ("U.S. RESIDENT ACCUSED OF SELLING ARMS TO CHINA," New York, 01/06/98) reported that George Cheng, a scrap metal dealer, was accused under US export laws of trying to ship military equipment to the PRC. Cheng allegedly tried to ship a Stealth F-117 gyroscope, along with parts for tanks, other jet fighters, and a system that Navy aircraft carriers use to jam incoming missiles. Assistant U.S. Attorney Charles Gorder said Monday of the gyroscope, "That's a technology we don't share even with our closest allies. Defense Department regulations require it be completely mutilated before it is sold, so it really is scrap." Cheng bought the parts from other scrap dealers and the US government, authorities said. Cheng is a Taiwan citizen with US residency.

7. Taiwanese Diplomacy

The Associated Press ("TAIWANESE LEADER VISITS SINGAPORE," Taipei, 01/02/98) reported that Taiwan Foreign Ministry officials said that Taiwan Vice President Lien Chan is currently on a four-day trip to Singapore. Taiwan's United Evening News said that Lien would golf with Singapore officials, including Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, and also would meet with former prime minister Lee Kuan Yew. PRC Foreign Ministry spokesman Tang Guoqiang warned Singapore on Tuesday to "address this issue cautiously lest the relations between the two countries suffer undue damage."

II. Republic of Korea

1. DPRK Power Shortage

An ROK government official said on December 30 that the DPRK turned off its propaganda speakers early this month, as it apparently faces an electricity shortage. "The North has, since December 1, completely stopped blasting the South over its speakers (near the Demilitarized Zone)," said the

official. The official attributed the halt to the DPRK's failure to generate enough electric power. "The North has dilapidated machinery for power generation, and its coal stocks have almost run out," he said. (Korea Herald, "DPRK RUNNING SHORT OF POWER," 12/31/97)

2. DPRK Famine

The ROK Ministry of National Reunification announced December 29 that the DPRK will have a food shortage of around 1 million tons in 1998, as its 1997 production fell by 5.4 percent compared to 1996. A spokesman for the ministry commented that natural disasters, including bad weather, flooding, and droughts, are the primary cause for the shortfall, in addition to shortages of fertilizers and other agricultural tools. The minimum amount of crops required for survival in 1998 is 4.764 million tons. (Chosun Ilbo, "NK FOOD SHORTAGE ESTIMATED AT 1 MILLION TONS IN 1998," 12/31/97)

3. Light-Water Reactor Project

The committee preparing for the transfer of government for President-elect Kim Dae-jung has called for the US to share the cost of the light-water nuclear reactors now under construction in the DPRK. The proposed sharing of the cost by the US will help reduce the financial burden of the ROK, which is suffering from a serious dollar shortage, officials of the transfer committee said. "We do not oppose the continuous promotion of the project as it is for the stability and peace on the Korean peninsula," an official said. He added, "but our burden should be cut to the minimum in view of the current financial difficulty." (Korea Times, "TRANSITION TEAM SAYS WASHINGTON SHOULD SHARE REACTOR COST," 01/04/98)

4. ROK-US-Japan Meet to Discuss DPRK

Senior officials from the ROK, Japan and the US will meet in Seoul during the week beginning January 19 to coordinate strategy on the DPRK, an ROK Foreign Ministry official said Monday. During the first high-level policy consultative meeting between the three countries this year, the officials will evaluate the situation in the DPRK and discuss appropriate policies. ROK Deputy Foreign Minister Song Young-shik will represent Seoul in the meeting, the official said. Japanese Assistant Foreign Minister Minoru Tanba and US Assistant Secretary of State Stanley Roth will represent their countries. The delegates will focus their discussion on food aid to the DPRK and the process of the four-party talks. Analysts say that the ROK's economic woes will limit its capability to respond to the DPRK famine appeal and the US role in assistance to the DPRK will increase. (Korea Herald, "KOREA, JAPAN, US TO MEET TO COORDINATE POLICY ON DPRK," 01/06/98)

5. Russian Defense Industry

The Russian government on December 24 approved a program for streamlining the nation's unwieldy defense industry inherited from the Soviet Union and for supporting more modern plants. The government wants to reduce the number of defense plants from 1,750 to about 670, closing the rest or converting them to civilian use, said Russian Deputy Prime Minister Yakov Urinson. (Korea Times, "RUSSIAN GOV'T APPROVES DEFENSE INDUSTRY RESTRUCTURING PLAN," 12/27/97)

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We invite you to reply to today's report, and we welcome commentary or papers for distribution to

the network.

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