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MARKTWO

I. Napsnet

1. US-DPRK Relations

Joongang Ilbo ("PYONGYANG WANTS ENVOY AT OBAMA'S JAN. INAUGURATION", Seoul, 2009/01/12) reported the DPRK last month said it wanted to send a representative to the inauguration of U.S. President-elect Barack Obama, according to ROK government sources. "The North, through its United Nations mission office in New York, conveyed the message that it can send Vice Foreign Minister Kim Gye-gwan as a representative to the inauguration ceremony," said the source. The message was first delivered to The Korea Society and was later delivered to the Obama transition staff. "We don't know for now whether the Obama team has made a decision to accept the request or not," the source said. "I've heard negative opinions far outpaced the positive views."

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2. DPRK-PRC Relations

Korea Times ("NK OPENS CONSULAR OFFICE IN DANDONG", Seoul, 2009/01/11) reported that the DPRK has opened a consulate office in Dandong, a source said Sunday. "The North Korean consulate general in Shenyang recently established its office in Dandong and dispatched personnel there," said the source. "The move signals the North's intention to increase its product procurement from China through brisker border trade and strengthen its consular affairs amid a growing North Korean population in the Chinese border city."

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3. Inter-Korea Relations

Joongang Ilbo ("TOP NORTH OFFICIAL SAID TO BE GETTING RE-EDUCATED", Seoul, 2009/01/12) reported that Choe Sung-chol, former vice chairman of the Asia-Pacific Peace Committee, the DPRK organization handling inter-Korean affairs, is undergoing "severe" communist training at a chicken farm, sources said Sunday. Officials in Seoul have acknowledged the dismissal of Choe, but could not confirm his whereabouts or why he was sacked. "He has been undergoing training for about a year now, so it really is hard to tell whether he will be reinstated or not," another source said.

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4. US Military Exercises in ROK

Donga Ilbo ("U.S. FORCES START TRAINING EXERCISE", Seoul, 2009/01/12) reported that U.S. Army and Air Force personnel along with ROK F-16 fighter jets and PAC-3 missiles begin a week-long war exercise Monday. The U.S. Forces Korea said that the exercise includes detaining and defeating DPRK's airplanes, troops and ground targets depending on various scenarios. A U.S. forces source said, "We will assess the general operational capability of the leadership of the U.S. Forces Korea in case of emergency and check the war preparation level to incapacitate North Korea's provocation from the early stage."

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5. ROK-Japan Relations

Associated Press (Jae-soon Chang, "JAPAN, SKOREA AGREE TO BOOST ECONOMIC COOPERATION", Seoul, 2009/01/12) reported that Japanese Prime Minister Taro Aso and ROK President Lee Myung-bak agreed Monday to boost economic cooperation amid the global financial crisis . "President Lee agreed to my view that Asia should be the growth center in the world and play a big role in the global economy recovery," Aso told a press conference. "We also confirmed that we will work closely with the new American administration" on the DPRK nuclear issue, Aso said .

Yonhap (Byun Duk-kun, "KOREA, JAPAN AVOID THORNY ISSUES AMID ECONOMIC MELTDOWN", Seoul, 2009/01/12) reported that the ongoing economic downturn forced Japanese Prime Minister Taro Aso and ROK President Lee Myung-bak to dodge historically contentious issues during their summit Monday. "Historical issues were not directly discussed. But as we had noted during President Lee's visit to Japan, the president and I completely agreed on the need to further develop the relationship between the two countries into a more mature partnership," Aso said in the press conference.

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6. ROK-Japan Territorial Dispute

Arirang News ("DOKDO 'NOT PART OF JAPAN MARITIME SURVEY PLAN'", Seoul, 2009/01/12) reported that the deputy press secretary at Japan's Foreign Ministry, says the waters near the Dokdo/Takeshima islets are not part of Jpaan's maritime resource development project. The official said Japan's scientific research plan concerns the Pacific Ocean side of the country.

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7. ROK-Japan FTA

Korea Times ("SEOUL, TOKYO AGREE TO RESUME TALKS ON FTA", Seoul, 2009/01/12) reported that the ROK and Japan will hold working-level discussions on resuming their negotiations on a free trade agreement (FTA), Yonhap News quoted Cheong Wa Dae as saying Monday. Seoul and Tokyo previously held several rounds of preliminary discussions on signing the envisioned deal but the talks were suspended in 2004.

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8. ROK-PRC Economic Relations

Joongang Ilbo ("ANGRY SAIC EXECES VENT FURY AGAINST KOREAN GOV'T", Seoul, 2009/01/12) reported that the Chinese executives at Shanghai Automotive Industry Corp., which owns ROK automaker Ssangyong Motor Co., said during the board of director's meeting on Thursday that Ssangyong Motor's liquidity problem is not the fault of SAIC management, but rather the global economic crisis. They added that although the PRC government has given trillions of won in financial support to its automakers, the ROK government has been uncooperative.

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9. ROK Military in Iraq

Yonhap ("SOLDIER ARRESTED IN IRAQ BRIBERY CASE", Seoul, 2009/01/12) reported an ROK military officer has recently been arrested on charges of receiving bribes from an Iraqi construction company to delay its work related to an ROK base, officials at the Ministry of National Defense said. The officials added that a master sergeant who worked with him has also been arrested on charges of seeking bribes from the same company.

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10. ROK Peacekeeping Operations

Korea Herald ("KOREAN PEACEKEEPERS IN LEBANON SAFE AFTER MORTAR FIRE NEARBY: OFFICIAL", Seoul, 2009/01/09) reported that Park Sung-woo, a spokesman at the Ministry of National Defense, said Friday peacekeeping forces in Lebanon remain unharmed by mortar fire launched from Israel but are operating under an elevated alert. "The shells fell about 16 kilometers from where our troops are stationed," Park said. "No harm has been done."

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11. ROK Climate Change

Korea Herald ("SEOUL CITY JOINS WITH NGC TO FIGHT CLIMATE CHANGE", Seoul, 2009/01/12) reported that Seoul Mayor Oh Se-hoon and National Geographic Channel Asia chief executive Ward Platt signed a memorandum of understanding at City Hall Monday to work together to combat climate change. The metropolitan government agreed to sponsor NGC's environment-related programs in exchange for inserting its logo in the channel's "Preserve Our Planet" campaign and a program titled "Six Degrees Could Change the World."

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12. ROK Asylum Policy

Korea Times (Park Si-soo, "ASYLUM SEEKERS' RIGHTS IGNORED", Seoul, 2009/01/11) reported that several asylum seekers in the ROK have been held at detention centers for several years without judicial reviews to justify their confinement. Human rights activists, lawyers and the United Nations have urged the ROK government to amend its refugee law so that judges can prevent ``unnecessarily prolonged" detention of those seeking asylum here. Lawyer Kim Jong-chul stated, ``Under the current law, the immigration office has the sole right to detain asylum seekers as long as it wants without any court intervention. This is a grave human rights infringement."

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13. ROK Politics

Agence France-Presse ("SKOREA'S LEE SLAMS 'SHAMEFUL' SCUFFLES IN PARLIAMENT", Seoul, 2009/01/12) reported that ROK President Lee Myung-Bak Monday rapped legislators for "shameful" violence in the National Assembly. Lee said such clashes damaged the nation's reputation and MPs involved must be punished. "What is deplorable is that politics may be destroying what the government and our citizens have worked so long and hard for, to raise our brand image," he said.

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14. ROK Freedom of Speech

Korea Times (Jane Han, "FOREIGNERS PUZZLED OVER MINERVA'S ARREST", Seoul, 2009/01/12) reported that Park Dae-sung, 31, who wrote more than 200 online postings criticizing the government's economic policies under the alias Minerva, was arrested on charges of undermining the country's financial markets. ``Korea is starting to look silly for trying to imprison a blogger," said Tom Coyner, who helps advise foreign investors in the ROK as president of Soft Landing Consulting. ``Authorities are taking this too far." ``You wouldn't see this kind of situation in the U.S. or any other advanced country," said Michael Breen, a political and business consultant, who stressed that both the prosecution and the government must learn to uphold people's rights.

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15. ROK Media

Korea Times (Michael Ha, "PRIME MINISTER HAN DEFENDS MEDIA REFORM BILL", Seoul, 2009/01/11) reported that Prime Minister Han Seung-soo spoke out in defense of the media reform bills that would get rid of barriers that prohibit the nation's major newspapers and chaebol from buying and operating television broadcast businesses. He said that all over the world, the big media trend is the merging of newspapers and broadcasters, bringing disparate media operations under one roof to boost efficiency.

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16. 1948 ROK Massacre

Korea Times (Kim Sue-young, "'439 CIVILIANS KILLED IN 1948 MASSACRE'", Seoul, 2009/01/09) reported that the ROK Truth and Reconciliation Commission said more than 400 civilians labeled left-wingers were killed by the military and police in Yeosu and Suncheon in October of 1948. ``The civilian death toll in the Suncheon area was confirmed as 439," the commission reported. ``But it could be as high as 2,000, since some families did not request an investigation and some victims lacked witnesses." The organization also said that martial law instituted by then-President Syngman Rhee ultimately caused the slaughter.

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17. US Military in Japan

Asahi Shimbun ("U.S. STEALTH FIGHRES IN OKINAWA", Kadena, 2009/01/11) reported that six U.S. Air Force F-22 Raptor stealth fighters arrived Saturday at U.S. Kadena Air Base in Okinawa for a three-month deployment. The routine deployment is in support of the U.S. Pacific Command's security obligations in the Western Pacific, the air force said. It is not part of any effort to deal with a specific threat or situation. Local residents protested the arrival of the fighters, saying they increase the burden on the community.

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18. Japanese Anti-Piracy Measures

Yomiuri Shimbun ("GOVT TO SEND DELEGATES TO ANTIPIRACY MEET IN N.Y.", Tokyo, 2009/01/11) reported that the Japanese government likely will dispatch delegates to the first meeting in New York on Wednesday of a contact group of nations trying to fight piracy off Somalia. The meeting was called after the Security Council adopted a resolution on Dec. 16 calling on the international community to take part in efforts to stamp out piracy in the waters off East Africa. About 20 countries, including the PRC, Russia and the United States, are expected to send delegates to the meeting.

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19. Japanese Politics

Kyodo ("APPROVAL RATE FOR ASO'S CABINET BELOW 20%, NEARLY HALF SUPPORT OZAWA", Tokyo , 2009/01/11) reported that the approval rate for Prime Minister Taro Aso's Cabinet came to 19.2 percent in a weekend survey conducted by Kyodo News, down 6.3 percentage points from the previous survey in December. The disapproval rate came to 70.2 percent, up 8.9 points, with 46.4 percent of respondents saying they would prefer Ichiro Ozawa, leader of the main opposition Democratic Party of Japan, as prime minister, up 11.9 points. In the telephone survey conducted Saturday and Sunday, only 22.1 percent said they prefer Aso to lead the country, down 11.4 points.

Reuters ("JAPAN PM SAYS WON'T QUIT DESPITE RATINGS FALL", Tokyo, 2009/01/12) reported that Japanese Prime Minister Taro Aso said on Monday he would not resign despite falling approval ratings. "I won't abandon the leadership," Aso told Fuji Television .

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20. Cross Strait Relations

Agence France-Presse ("A TALE OF TWO MUSEUMS UNFOLDS AS TAIWAN-CHINA RIVALRY THAWS", Taipei, 2009/01/11) reported that in February, director Chou Kung-hsin of the National Palace Museum in Taipei plans to visit the Palace Museum in Beijing, which would mark the highest level contact between the two museums in the 60 years since Taiwan and China split. While there, Chou and her delegates "will take a look at the collection of the Beijing Palace Museum and explore the possibility of future cooperation," said Fung Ming-chu, spokeswoman for the Taipei museum. Cheng Xinmiao, head of the Palace Museum in Beijing's Forbidden City, would reciprocate the visit in March, she said.

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21. PRC on Gaza Crisis

Associated Press ("CHINESE FM, UN CHIEF DISCUSS GAZA CONFLICT", Beijing, 2009/01/11) reported that PRC Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi told U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on Sunday that Beijing hopes a U.N. resolution passed in recent days calling for an immediate cease-fire in the Gaza will be observed by parties in the conflict. Yang said the resolution reflected the strong desire of the international community for an immediate cease-fire, according to a foreign ministry statement. The Foreign Ministry announced Saturday that the PRC's Middle East envoy will soon travel to Egypt , Israel and the Palestinian territories to push for an end to the fighting in Gaza.

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22. PRC Tibet Issue

Associated Press ("CHINA TO MARK DEFEAT OF TIBET UPRISING", Beijing, 2009/01/11) reported that a bill to decide on a holiday to mark the defeat of a Tibetan uprising in March 1959 will be

presented during the second annual session of the ninth Tibet Regional People's Congress, Xinhua News Agency said. The bill is aimed at "reminding all the Chinese people, including Tibetans, of the landmark democratic reform initiated 50 years ago," Pang Boyong, deputy secretary general of the Tibetan regional congress standing committee, said Saturday. "Since then, millions of slaves under the feudal serfdom became masters of their own," Pang said.

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23. PRC Censorship

Reuters ("CHINA CLOSES 91 WEBSITES IN ONLINE CRACKDOWN", Beijing, 2009/01/12) reported that the PRC has shut down 91 websites for pornographic and other "vulgar" content, state media said on Monday. Bullog.cn, a blog portal with many famous bloggers, including some signatories of the pro-democracy "08 Charter," has been inaccessible since Friday. Luo Yonghao, the founder of Bullog.cn, confirmed on his own blog that the website had been closed because of "amount of political harmful information," citing a notice from government.

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24. PRC Food Safety

Associated Press ("CHINA: 60 ARRESTED IN TAINTED MILK SCANDAL IN 2008", Beijing, 2009/01/09) reported that the PRC Ministry of Public Security says police arrested 60 people last year in relation to the tainted milk scandal. The ministry's website said Friday 21 of those suspects have been prosecuted in Hebei province, home of Sanlu Group Co., the dairy at the heart of the scandal.

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II. PRC Report

25. PRC Environment

Ministry of Water Resource ("WATER RESOURCE CONSTRUCTION NEEDS NEW DEVELOPMENT", 2009/01/07) reported that exertions should be made to enhance the PRC's abilities to combat flooding and drought and to distribute water resources, taking the advantage of the government's decision to increase spending in water conservancy projects. Vice Premier Hui Liangyu made the remarks at the national water resources work conference held from Tuesday to Wednesday in Nanning. He said the country's capabilities of water and soil resources conservation should also be intensified. Between 2000 and 2008, the water resources ministry said, the PRC spent 61.8 billion yuan to provide 160 million rural people with safe drinking water.

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26. PRC Migrant Labor

Finance (Zhang Hong, "3% OF MIGRANT WORKERS IN GUANGDONG LOSE JOB", 2009/01/08) reported that an estimated 600,000 migrant workers have left the PRC's southern Guangdong Province due to unemployment in 2008 after the worldwide financial crisis hit the region, a government official said Thursday. Guangdong Province Vice Governor Huang Yunlong revealed the statistics at a press conference. "More than 143,000 migrant workers left Guangdong in the first half of 2008. By the end of last October, the number reached 500,000. The Guangdong statistics bureau estimated that a total of 600,000 migrant workers might have left the province last year, accounting for 3% of the total 20 million migrant workers in Guangdong," he said.

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