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I. NAPSNet

1. US on DPRK Nuclear Problem

Korea Times (Jung Sung-ki, "US INTELLIGENCE COUNCIL SEES NK AS NUCLEAR STATE", 2008/12/15) reported that foreign and defense officials in Seoul reiterated Monday that the United States does not accept the DPRK as a nuclear power, spurning media speculation about a possible change in the U.S. stance toward the DPRK's nuclear capability and status. On Sunday, a Pentagon official was quoted by Yonhap news agency as said the US government intelligence community believed the DPRK was a nuclear state. Subsequently, it was also found that U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said in a magazine interview that he believed the DPRK has built several nuclear bombs.

Reuters (Matt Spetalnick and Bill Tarrant, "DPRK'S KIM TRYING TO "TEST THE PROCESS": BUSH", Bagram, Afghanistan , 2008/12/15) reported that DPRK leader Kim Jong-il is "trying to test the process," U.S. President George W. Bush said on Monday. "The objective is to keep our partners firm with the understanding that the six-party process is the best way to solve the North Korean issue," Bush said.

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2. ROK Energy Aid to DPRK

Associated Press ("SEOUL: NO DECISION ON HALTING ENERGY AID TO DPRK", Seoul, 2008/12/15) reported that ROK said Monday it hasn't decided whether to go ahead with a promised shipment of fuel to DPRK after Pyongyang failed to cooperate at nuclear disarmament talks last week. "We will continue to study the issue while monitoring various situations," Seoul's Foreign Ministry spokesman Moon Tae-young told reporters.

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3. Inter-Korean Relations

Yonhap News Service (Kim Young-gyo, "SEOUL TO HOST FORUM ON DPRK FILMS", Seoul, 2008/12/12) reported that an academic forum will be held next week to discuss how DPRK films have changed since the communist regime first introduced market-friendly reforms in July 2002, organizers said Friday. The forum, titled "Economic Reforms of July 1, 2002 and North Korean Films," will open on Wednesday, the government-funded ROK Film Council said.

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4. DPRK Refugees

Agence France Press ("ROK EXPANDS RESETTLEMENT CENTER FOR DPRK REFUGEES", Seoul, 2008/12/15) reported that ROK has expanded its resettlement center for DPRK refugees to cope with a steady increase in arrivals, officials said Monday. The ROK's unification ministry in charge of cross-border ties said it has doubled the capacity of the crowded Hanawon center in Anseong, around 75 kilometers south of Seoul, from 300 to 600 refugees. "This expansion will help create a pleasant educational environment for defectors and stabilize them emotionally," a ministry official told Yonhap news agency.

Reuters ("DPRK UPS BORDER PUNISHMENTS AFTER KIM'S ILLNESS", Seoul, 2008/12/14) reported that DPRK has imposed stiffer punishments on those caught trying to flee, relief groups said. "The penalties are getting stronger and they have increased after Kim Jong-il's stroke," said Tim Peters, the founder and director of Helping Hands Korea, a Christian aid group that helps DPRK citizens seek asylum. Kim Sung-han, a former U.N. official who now helps DPRK citizens escape to places such as ROK where they are almost always granted citizenship, said defectors have told him of the increased penalties. "They get sentences of more than a year, a much longer term compared to the previous six-month sentence on average."

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5. DPRK Leadership

Korea Herald ("N.K. MEDIA WARNS PEOPLE NOT TO BETRAY THE REGIME ", 2008/12/15) reported that the DPRK's state media urged its people not to "betray" the regime. "The inalterability of comradeship is clearly shown at the time of radical transition in the political status. Whenever we faced critical or unfavorable moments during our revolution days, people who cherished their faithfulness to comrades won their fame as revolutionists, but those who failed to do fell into the road of traitors," the DPRK's Korean Central News Agency said, quoting the Rodong Sinmun. The DPRK's media has recently put more emphasis on the "unity of people".

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6. ROK Government

Yonhap News Service (Yoo Cheong-mo, "LEE VOWS MASSIVE INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS IN PROVINCIAL AREAS", Seoul, 2008/12/15) reported that President Lee Myung-bak said Monday that his government is planning to interlink all roads and railways across the nation and intensively implement other infrastructure expansion projects outside the Seoul metropolitan areas, as part of its economy-boosting measures. Lee also instructed his Cabinet to immediately embark on projects to refurbish the basin areas of the nation's four major rivers to drastically upgrade business, cultural and tourism infrastructures of the provincial areas.

Yonhap News Service ("SEOUL UNVEILS FURTHER STEPS FOR BALANCED DEVELOPMENT", Seoul, 2008/12/15) reported that ROK said Monday that it will expand tax benefits and other incentives for companies planning to move into provincial areas as part of its efforts to foster balanced development. The Ministry of Strategy and Finance said that it will cut corporate taxes on companies moving to less-developed provincial areas for up to 10 years from the current 7 years, while promising to give financial support for relocation. The ministry added that it will also step up efforts to build "quality" high schools in provincial areas as part of efforts to induce more companies to relocate.

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7. ROK in Afghanistan

Korea Times (Jung Sung-ki, "NO TROOP REDEPLOYMENT TO AFGHANISTAN", 2008/12/15) reported that the Ministry of National Defense reaffirmed its position Monday not to re-deploy troops to Afghanistan. "The United States wants the international community to give more support to stabilizing Afghanistan," he said. "Our government is reviewing an option to dispatch police officers to Afghanistan to help train local police. But there is no plan to deploy troops again, that's our official position at the moment."

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8. Japan Politics

Yomiuri Shimbun ("CRACKS SHOW IN LARGEST LDP FACTION", 2008/12/15) reported that the confrontation between former Chief Cabinet Secretary Nobutaka Machimura and Hidenao Nakagawa, former secretary general of the Liberal Democratic Party, is rocking the party's largest faction, to which the two belong, sparking fears that it might split in two. Machimura and Nakagawa are famous for their rivalry, and the friction between them is now being fueled by the controversy within the faction over whether it should cozy up to Prime Minister Taro Aso, whose popularity has tumbled, or keep him at arm's length. Observers point out the possibility that their struggle for the faction's leadership might cause it to fracture.

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9. Japan in Iraq

Associated Press (Mari Yamaguchi, "JAPAN BEGINS WITHDRAWING IRAQ AIRLIFT MISSION", Tokyo, 2008/12/15) reported that Japan withdrew one of three planes involved in airlift operations to Iraq on Monday, as it neared the close of its nearly five-year noncombat mission in the region, the

Defense Ministry said. An Air Self-Defense Forces C-130H cargo plane left the Ali Al Salem Air Base in Kuwait and the other two will leave later this month, a ministry official said on condition of anonymity citing department policy.

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10. Japan Climate Change

Mainichi ("KOCHI PREFECTURE TO OFFER FIRST-EVER DOMESTIC CARBON OFFSET SCHEME", 2008/12/15) reported that a project to power factories in Kochi Prefecture using wood from sustainable sources instead of fossil fuels has become the first to be submitted to the Ministry of the Environment under the national carbon offset guidelines. If the ministry approves the application, Tokyo-based retailer Lumine is planning to purchase the credits in order to offset the carbon dioxide emissions generated by employees' commutes. In Kochi, cement factories commissioned by the prefecture have already begun to use fuel made from wood, produced by sustainable thinning of lumber forests, in lieu of coal and other conventional fuels. The prefecture claims that there has been a 2,000 ton reduction in carbon dioxide this fiscal year as a result.

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11. PRC Chemical Weapons Disposal

Xinhau Net ("JAPAN BEGINS TRYING TO REMOVE CHEMICAL WEAPONS ABANDONED IN CHINA DURING WWII", Beijing, 2008/12/15) reported that a Japanese commission began trying to remove abandoned chemical weapons in the Harbaling area of the PRC's Jilin Province. The weapons had been buried there since World War II. The number of weapons and length of excavation was not made public. The PRC Foreign Ministry said, commencement of the work marks real progress by Japan to destroy weapons which still pose threats to peoples' lives, property and the local environment.

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12. PRC Environment

Associated Press (Elaine Kurtenbach, "PRC BATTERY COMPANY LAUNCHES PLUG-IN HYBRID CAR", Shanghai, 2008/12/15) reported that battery maker turned car company BYD Co. has launched PRC's first homegrown hybrid vehicle for the retail market, seeking an edge over its crisis-stricken international rivals. BYD presented the vehicle, known as the F3DM, in a ceremony in the southern city of Shenzhen, where local officials have pledged to buy some of the cars in support of the project. The vehicle can run up to 100 kilometers (62 miles) on its electric engine. The car will sell for 149,800 yuan (\$22,000), about the same as many PRC-made mid-sized cars, it said.

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13. PRC Energy Supply

Xinhua Net ("BIG ENERGY PROJECT LAUNCHED IN NW NINGXIA ", Yinchuan, 2008/12/15)

reported that the PRC began the construction of eight coal mining, power and chemical projects worth about 40 billion yuan (5.8 billion U.S. dollars) in the northwest in an effort to drive domestic demand and promote economic growth. The projects in the Ningdong area in Lingwu City and Wuzhong City, Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, included three coal mines with a total annual capacity of 22 million tonnes and three power plants with a combined capacity of 4.4 million kw.

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14. PRC Human Rights

Agence France-Presse ("CHINA'S HU IN HUMAN RIGHTS PLEDGE", Beijing, 2008/12/15) reported that President Hu Jintao has vowed that the PRC will work with the international community in promoting human rights, state media said, but the promise follows recent arrests of leading activists. Hu said the PRC would "base its human rights development on the basic situation of the country," Xinhua news agency said, a caveat used by the PRC to apply its own human rights standards.

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15. PRC Space Program

Indo-Asian News Service ("PRC LAUNCHES YAOGAN V REMOTE-SENSING SATELLITE", Taiyuan, PRC, 2008/12/15) reported that PRC Monday launched remote-sensing satellite Yaogan V from the Taiyuan launch centre in the northern province of Shanxi. It will be used for data collection and transmission involving land resources surveys, environmental surveillance and protection, urban planning, crop yield estimates, disaster prevention and reduction, and space science experiments.

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16. PRC Food Safety

Dong-A Ilbo ("TAINTED PRC EELS CIRCULATED IN ROK MARKET", 2008/12/11) reported that twenty-three tons of PRC eels tainted with carcinogens have been distributed on the ROK market, according to a report released by the ROK Food and Drug Administration. The food watchdog launched an investigation after fried eels were found to have triggered massive food poisoning last month at an elementary school in Yeongi, South Chungcheong Province. 24.6 tons of products were contaminated with malachite green and crystal violet, toxic chemicals that are known to cause cancer.

Associated Press ("LYE, BORIC ACID BANNED AS FOOD ADDITIVES IN PRC", Beijing, 2008/12/15) reported that substances commonly used as industrial dyes, insecticides and drain cleaners were included on a list of illegal food additives PRC released Monday as part of a month long government crackdown aimed at improving the country's shoddy food safety record. Among the 17 banned substances was boric acid, commonly used as an insecticide, which is mixed with noodles and meatballs to increase elasticity, a statement posted on the Ministry of Health website said. Also forbidden was industrial formaldehyde and lye, used in making soap and drain cleaner and added to water used to soak some types of dried seafood and industrial dyes that are added to improve the appearance of food products. Along with the banned additives, the government named 10 substances

such as colorings, preservatives and artificial flavorings that should not be used excessively.

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17. ROK, PRC, Japan Environmental Cooperation

People's Daily Online ("CHINA, JAPAN, ROK ISSUE ACTION PLAN FOR SPURRING TRILATERAL COOPERATION", 2008/12/15) reported that the leaders of the PRC, Japan and ROK issued an Action Plan for Promoting Trilateral Cooperation among in Fukuoka, Japan on Dec. 13th, calling for trilateral cooperation in about 30 areas including environmental protection and human exchanges. The three countries will launch East Asia Climate Partnership plan to deal with climate change impacts and early-stage warning system and to cope with air pollution in the region. The countries will enhance scavenging on seas and protection and monitoring of migratory birds.

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II. PRC Report

18. PRC Civil Society

Xinhua Net (Zhang Xu, "BEIJING HAS OVER ONE MILLION NEW ECONOMIC ORGANIZATIONS", 2008/12/15) reported that according to Deputy Director of Sociology Center of Beijing Social Science Academy Dai Jianzhong, as at September 2008, Beijing has 1.067 million new economic organizations and 28,000 new social organizations. The new economic organizations refer to all kinds of non-state-owned organizations established after reform and opening up, including private enterprises, foreign invested enterprises and Hong Kong-, Macao- or Taiwan-invested enterprises. The new social organizations refer to civil organizations established after reform and opening up, including social organizations, foundations, private non-enterprise units, intermediate organizations and so on.

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19. PRC Civil Society and Poverty Alleviation

China News Network (Bi Yongguang, "ANNUAL CHARITY CARNIVAL HELD IN MACAO", 2008/12/15) reported that the annual charity carnival sponsored by Public Welfare Foundation of Macao Daily Readers was held today. Over 30,000 people from Macao government sectors, organizations, schools, and companies participated in the activity. The sponsor also arranged martial arts performance for people. The Foundation focuses on poverty alleviation and education, and hopes to use the charity money on needy people.

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20. PRC Energy Supply

Xinhua Net (Jiang Jinghua, "MAJOR GAS FIELD FOUND IN XINJIANG", 2008/12/15) reported that the China National Mineral Resource Committee disclosed that it found a major gas field with a proven reserve of 100 billion cubic meters in northern Xinjiang. It is the first reserve of this size ever discovered around the Junggar basin, according to Chen Xinfu, general manager of Xinjiang Oilfield Company, a subsidiary of China National Petroleum Corporation. "Klameli gas field is also our company's first complete gas field ever found. Its exploitation will alleviate the gas shortage in northern Xinjiang," said Chen.

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III. ROK Report

21. DPRK Nuclear Program & Six-Party Talks

Ohmynews (Wookshik Jung, PeaceNetwork Representative, "RUPTURE OF 6 WAY TALKS, DPRK'S FAULT? ", 2008/12/15) wrote that the DPRK's rejection of the verification protocol carries most of the blame for the rupture of the six-party talks. The DPRK has limited inspections only to Yongbyon Nuclear Complex, ROK, the U.S., and Japan wants to extend it to everything in the nuclear declaration. According to 10.3 Agreement, the inspection limit is recorded as the nuclear complex, not the declaration. Despite this, the ROK, along with Japan, connected energy aid to the verification protocol and set the inspection limit to the nuclear declaration, trying to attain sampling by force. However, this is clearly ignoring the agreement. Therefore, the Lee administration must do the following. First, they must officially confirm energy support and start shipping fuel oil; the other is to write a Korean version of "verification protocols." Recharging the 6-party talks and opening up relationships between the North and the South will be the wise key to chasing two hares at once.

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