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Contents in this Issue:

- I. Napsnet
 - [1. DPRK Food Situation](#)
 - [2. Inter-Korean Relations](#)
 - [3. Inter-Korean Economic Cooperation](#)
 - [4. Olympic Torch in DPRK](#)
 - [5. ROK Politics](#)
 - [6. ROK-Russia Nuclear Cooperation](#)
 - [7. Cross Strait Relations](#)
 - [8. PRC-Japan Relations](#)
 - [9. Japanese Missile Test](#)

[Preceding NAPSNet Report](#)

I. Napsnet

1. DPRK Food Situation

Yomiuri Shimbun (Yuichiro Nakamura, "NORTH KOREA'S FOOD WOES TO GET WORSE IN 2008", Seoul, 2007/12/17) reported that the DPRK grain harvest took a significant plunge this year due to heavy rains and other reasons, according to a survey by the ROK's Rural Development Administration. The DPRK's gross production of grains such as rice, corn and wheat, was about 4.01 million tons in 2007, down about 470,000 tons from the year before. Torrential rains in August and a typhoon in September resulted in the flooding of about 11 percent of rice paddies in the country. As a result, rice production was 1.53 million tons, down by 360,000 tons from the previous year.

[\(return to top\)](#)

2. Inter-Korean Relations

Associated Press (Burt Herman, "SKOREA TO BE MORE CRITICAL ON NKOREA AID", Seoul, 2007/12/15) reported that Lee Myung-bak has pledged to take a more critical view of the ROK's aid to the DPRK and demand more in return if he wins the presidential election. However, analysts predict ROK assistance will still flow as long as Pyongyang continues to scale back its nuclear weapons program. "We are living in the so-called post-Cold War era," said Paik Hak-soon, director of North Korean studies at the Sejong Institute, a private security think tank near Seoul. "The competition between South Korea and North Korea is practically over." "The hope in Washington will be that the ROK coordinates its policies with the North with ours, rather than acting independently, which runs the risk of undercutting our policy," said Robert Gallucci, dean of Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service.

[\(return to top\)](#)

3. Inter-Korean Economic Cooperation

Korea Herald ("N. KOREA AIRLINE TO BE USED TO FERRY S. KOREA TOURISTS TO MT. BAEKDU", Seoul, 2007/12/17) reported that the DPRK's Air Koryo is likely to be used to ferry ROK tourists to Mount Baekdu, a government official was quoted as saying by Yonhap News Agency. He attributed the decision to concerns about safety related to Samjiyeon Airport, about 30 kilometers southeast of the mountain. He did not elaborate on the nature of safety concerns, but said it may be inappropriate for ROK flag carriers like Korean Air and Asiana to use the airport.

[\(return to top\)](#)

4. Olympic Torch in DPRK

Agence France-Presse ("NORTH KOREA GETS TO CARRY THE TORCH", 2007/12/17) reported that has confirmed it will host a leg of the 2008 Beijing Olympic torch relay. The torch will move through Seoul on April 27 before traveling over the DMZ, Yonhap news agency said, quoting PRC officials.

[\(return to top\)](#)

5. ROK Politics

Agence France-Presse (Jun Kwanwoo, "SKOREAN MPS VOTE TO PROBE ELECTION FRONTRUNNER", Seoul, 2007/12/17) reported that the ROK National Assembly voted Monday to launch a new probe into fraud allegations against presidential opposition frontrunner Lee Myung-Bak, two days before the election. A specially appointed independent lawyer will investigate claims including share-rigging, faking documents and embezzlement against Lee after a video in which Lee claims to be the founder of BBK came to light. Analysts said Lee is still expected to win Wednesday's election but the affair would cloud his first months in office.

Korea Herald (Song Sang-ho, "MINISTRY RULES OUT PROSECUTION PROBE", Seoul, 2007/12/17) reported that Justice Minister Chung Soung-jin will not reopen an investigation into fraud allegations linked to presidential frontrunner Lee Myung-bak, the ministry announced Monday. "As a special prosecutor is expected to look into the case, we've decided not to exert the (minister's) right to direct prosecutors to reinvestigate," the ministry said in a press briefing.

[\(return to top\)](#)

6. ROK-Russia Nuclear Cooperation

Joonang Ilbo ("NUCLEAR TIES WITH RUSSIA GOAL OF TALKS IN MOSCOW", Seoul, 2007/12/17) reported that the Ministry of Science and Technology said Sunday that the ROK and Russia will seek to expand cooperation in developing new atomic reactors and nuclear fuel in a science meeting on Monday and Tuesday. The ministry said the two sides are expected to touch on such areas as liquid metal reactors, new types of atomic fuel, nuclear safety and the use of radioactive isotopes. The 12th Korea-Russia atomic control committee is also likely to discuss the joint development of superconducting magnets for nuclear fusion research

[\(return to top\)](#)

7. Cross Strait Relations

China Digital Times ("HALF TAIWAN ARMED FORCES EXPECT WAR", Taipei, 2007/12/16) reported that in a Taiwan Defense Department report to its Legislative Yuan on Taiwanese armed forces' combat morale level on December 12, more than half of the island's military officials and soldiers say a war across the straits is likely, a sharp increase over the 17% who thought so before the start of a routine military education campaign on combat morale for the armed forces. Before the morale education session, 66% had "thought about" being infiltrated by enemies, now 85% think about it; 81% before said they were willing to fight for their homeland, 86% afterward.

[\(return to top\)](#)

8. PRC-Japan Relations

Kyodo ("FUKUDA TO VISIT CHINA AS EARLY AS DEC. 27", Tokyo, 2007/12/17) reported that Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda has decided to make his first visit to the PRC as premier as early as Dec. 27, government sources said Monday. It comes in response to a PRC request that Fukuda's visit be made by the year-end, given during PRC Premier Wen Jiabao's trip to Tokyo in April.

[\(return to top\)](#)

9. Japanese Missile Test

Associated Press (Audrey McAvoy, "U.S. TO AID JAPAN WITH DEFENSIVE MISSILE TEST", Pearl Harbor, 2007/12/16) reported that the Japanese navy destroyer JS Kongo was to attempt to shoot a ballistic missile out of space on Monday, a first for any U.S. ally. The Pacific Missile Range Facility on Kauai, run by the U.S. Navy, will fire the target missile into the sky. The Lake Erie, a Pearl Harbor-based guided missile cruiser, will track the missile and feed information on it to a command center.

[\(return to top\)](#)

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