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I. NAPSNet

1. US-DPRK Relations

Agence France-Presse ("NKOREA SAYS US HARDLINERS TRYING TO WRECK NUCLEAR DEAL", Seoul, 2008/01/16) reported that Rodong Sinmun, the ruling communist party's daily, said US "hardline conservatives" were bent on rolling back improvements in relations between Washington and Pyongyang, as well as progress made at six-party nuclear talks. The DPRK missed a December 31 deadline to disable its main atomic facilities and give a full declaration of all nuclear programmes. The daily's commentary blamed the delay on the failure of other nations, especially the United States, to fulfil their side of the agreement. "The agreed points have not been implemented as scheduled not because of the DPRK but because of the failure of other participating nations to adhere to the principle of simultaneous action," the paper said. Especially, it said, the US has not yet removed the DPRK from the list of terror-sponsoring states or eased other restrictions on trade.

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2. Inter-Korean Relations

Joongang Ilbo ("PRESIDENT-ELECT CRITICIZED BY NORTH, BUT NOT BY NAME", 2008/01/16) reported that the DPRK made an oblique attack on the ROK's newly elected leader yesterday, but its official media stuck to a policy of not actually naming the man who has pledged to get tougher on the DPRK. "U.S. conservative hardliners broke into cheers upon hearing about the results of the 'elections' in South Korea ... asserting that the power change in South Korea marks a new occasion of strangling North Korea," the DPRK's KCNA news agency quoted the communist party newspaper as saying. Analysts say the DPRK is struggling to work out how to deal with the ROK's new leadership.

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3. ROK Policy Toward the DPRK

Yonhap ("FORMER UNIFICATION MINISTER OPPOSES SHUT DOWN OF MINISTRY", Seoul, 2008/01/16) reported that Former Unification Minister Chung Dong-young attacked the incoming government's plan to close the Unification Ministry, criticizing President-elect Lee Myung-bak for neglecting its role in achieving peaceful unification of the two Koreas. Chung, who competed against Lee in last month's presidential election on the ruling United New Democratic Party's ticket, served as the unification minister under the Roh Moo-hyun government. "The transition committee's decision to abolish the Unification Ministry shows the president-elect's lack of understanding on the importance of achieving unification and peace on the Korean Peninsula," Chung said in a statement.

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4. DPRK Government

Donga Ilbo ("IS NORTH KOREA UNDERGOING A RESTRUCTURING?", 2008/01/16) reported that the DPRK has been undergoing a "major restructuring" of its party, government and military organizations since the New Year. DPRK leader Kim Jong Il instructed on Dec. 29 that all of the regime's institutions, including the Workers` Party, the cabinet, the military and national security agency, reduce their bureaucracies and the number of senior officials by 30 percent beginning in 2008, according to a well-informed source on Pyongyang's internal affairs. Although detailed plans for the restructuring have not been announced, speculation is rife among high ranking officials that the first target of the reform will be each institution's agencies linked to earning foreign currency, given that an excessive number of those agencies had been established.

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5. DPRK Economy

IFES NK Brief ("DPRK CRUDE PETROLEUM IIMPORTS BOTTOM OUT IN 2006", 2008/01/16) reported that DPRK imports of crude petroleum in 2006 appear to have dropped to the lowest level in recent years, dipping almost to the level imported during 1997~1998, the worst point in the DPRK's economic difficulties. According to a book of figures recently published by the National Statistical Office, 'Comparison of North and South Korean Socio-economic Circumstances', the DPRK's crude imports over the past several years bottomed out at 2,325,000 barrels in 1999, then rose to 4,244,000 barrels by 2001. Since 2001, imports have steadily fallen until only 3,841,000 barrels were imported in 2006, recording the least imports in the last five years. This level of imported crude is similar to the 3,709,000 barrels imported in 1997 and 3,694,000 barrels in 1998, in the midst of mass starvation and the 'arduous march'.

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6. DPRK Human Rights

Yonhap ("FREEDOM HOUSE REPORT NAMES NORTH KOREA ONE OF WORST IN POLITICAL, CIVIL FREEDOMS", Washington, 2008/01/16) reported that the DPRK remains one of the eight countries rated lowest in civil and political freedoms, with Asia overall suffering setbacks in 2007, according to an annual report released Wednesday by a Washington-based nonprofit organization. The report by Freedom House, titled "Freedom in the World 2008: Global Freedom in Retreat," categorized the ROK as a "free" country, with the highest rating of 1 in political rights and 2 in civil liberties.

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7. Japan SDF Indian Ocean Mission

Kyodo ("ISHIBA SET TO ISSUE ORDER FOR MSDF DISPATCH ON THURS.", Tokyo, 2008/01/16) reported that Japanese Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba is set to order the top commander of the Maritime Self-Defense Force fleet to dispatch a convoy to resume the antiterrorism refueling mission in the Indian Ocean as the Cabinet endorsed its implementation plan on Wednesday, Ishiba

indicated. Chief Cabinet Secretary Nobutaka Machimura told a press conference an MSDF fleet will leave Japan "next week" and reach the region "in three weeks or so." Ministry officials suggested the first fleet is likely to leave Japan on Jan. 24.

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8. Japan Politics

Kyodo ("DPJ CHIEF OZAWA PLEDGES TO STAKE POLITICAL LIFE TO FORM GOV'T", Yokohama, 2008/01/16) reported that Democratic Party of Japan President Ichiro Ozawa pledged to stake his political life on trying to defeat the ruling Liberal Democratic Party in the next general election and form a government that will pursue a political agenda that responds to the needs of the general public. "The next general election will be my last battle as a politician. At the same time, I believe it will be the last decisive contest for me and the DPJ as well as for Japan," Ozawa said at the DPJ's one-day annual convention in Yokohama. The next general election must be held by September 2009, when the current term of lower house lawmakers expires. But Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda is expected to decide to dissolve the lower house for an election possibly around this summer.

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9. Sino-US Relations

Agence France-Presse (Robert J. Saiget, "US, CHINA HOLD TALKS AS RIGHTS ISSUE FLARES UP", Beijing, 2008/01/16) reported that US Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte held talks with PRC Premier Wen Jiabao as US diplomats pressured Beijing over the arrests of an AIDS campaigner and other activists. Negroponte arrived in the PRC as the US expressed concern over the arrest of the high-profile activist Hu Jia and the detentions of journalists, social activists and lawyers advocating greater rights. "This year we hope we can work together to make more progress in the constructive and cooperative relationship which is in the interests of our two peoples and the peace and stability in the region and the world at large," Yang told Negroponte before the talks.

The Financial Times (Mure Dickie, "US COMMANDER OPTIMISTIC ON CHINA TIES", Beijing, 2008/01/16) reported that the top US military commander for the Asia-Pacific on Tuesday struck an upbeat tone on ties with PRC counterparts, despite a high-profile dispute over US naval ship visits to Hong Kong. During his second visit to Beijing as head of US Pacific Command, Admiral Timothy Keating said he had developed an "honest and true friendship" with PRC military leaders including Guo Boxiong, the central military commission vice-chairman. "General Guo - he's going to be a pal," Adm Keating told a news briefing. Adm Keating's remarks suggest the US is determined to prevent a dispute over port visits late last year from undermining a recent warming in cross-Pacific military ties.

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10. PRC Environment

The Wall Street Journal (Jane Spencer and Juliet Ye, "TOXIC FACTORIES TAKE TOLL", 2008/01/16) reported that over the holidays, millions of American children received PRC-made toys powered by cadmium batteries. Cadmium batteries are safe to use. They are also cheap, saving American

parents about \$1.50 on the average toy, compared with pricier batteries. But cadmium batteries can be hazardous to make. But in the PRC, workers making goods for American consumers have long borne the brunt of a global manufacturing system that puts cost cutting ahead of safety. The search for cheaper production means dirty industries are migrating to countries with few worker protections and lenient regulatory environments. The nickel-cadmium battery illustrates this trend. Once widely manufactured in the West, the batteries are now largely made in the PRC, where the industry is sickening workers and poisoning the soil and water.

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11. PRC Energy Supply

Reuters ("CHINA COAL SHORTAGE TO CONTINUE", 2008/01/16) reported that the PRC, the world's largest coal consuming nation, used more coal than it produced in 2007 and will stay short through at least 2010, a coal industry official said. The PRC's demand for coal is expected to rise to 2.76 billion tonnes in 2008, from 2.62 billion tonnes in 2007, said Wu Chenghou, executive director of the Coal Sale and Transportation Association of the PRC. He did not comment on whether the country had drawn down coal stocks in 2007 to remain a net exporter, despite producing less than it consumed. The PRC has not yet issued official output data for 2007, and often revises that figure several times.

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12. PRC Anti-Corruption Measures

BBC News ("CHINA IN ANTI-CORRUPTION STRUGGLE", 2008/01/16) reported that tackling corrupt practices that have become widespread among PRC officials will be a very tough task, President Hu Jintao has acknowledged. Addressing the problem would be a "long-term, complicated and difficult struggle", he told the Communist Party's anti-corruption watchdog. The all-pervasive corruption is seen as a major source of social discontent across the country - which the authorities fear could develop into unrest. Mr Hu said that tackling corruption required stronger measures and a more resolute attitude. Better education and more checks and balances were needed, as well as tough punishments for corrupt officials.

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