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I. NAPSNet

1. US on DPRK Missile Program

Yonhap News (Hwang Doo-hyong, "N. KOREA HAS BALLISTIC MISSILES REACHING U.S. MAINLAND: U.S. ADMIRAL", Washington, 2008/12/18) reported that the DPRK possesses long-range ballistic missiles than can reach the mainland US as well as Hawaii, Admiral Timothy Keating of the U.S. Pacific Command said. "North Korea does have intercontinental ballistic missiles that can reach the United States, including Hawaii and territories of the Untied States in our responsibility in the Pacific," Keating said in a news conference at the National Press Building.

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2. Inter Korean Relations

Bloomberg (Jonathan Tirone, "NORTH KOREA SAYS IT FOILED SOUTH'S SPY PLOT TO KILL KIM JONG-IL ", 2008/12/18) reported that DPRK said it foiled an ROK plot to assassinate leader Kim Jong-Il and broke up a spy ring conducting surveillance of the communist nation's nuclear facilities. The DPRK police recently arrested a man they identified only as Ri, who started his mission early this year after being recruited by ROK intelligence officials, the official Korean Central News Agency cited the State Security Ministry in Pyongyang as saying. The agent was caught with "acoustic sensing and pursuit devices for tracking the movement of the top leader and even violent poison in the end," the ministry said.

Associated Press (Hyung-jin Kim, "SOUTH KOREA DENIES INVOLVEMENT IN ALLEGED KIM

PLOT", Seoul, 2008/12/19) reported that the ROK National Intelligence Service on Friday denied the DPRK's claim that it hired an agent to track DPRK leader Kim Jong-il in an assassination plot. "This has nothing to do with us," said an agency official on condition of anonymity. He said the comment represents the ROK's official position on the issue.

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3. DPRK-Australia Relations

AFP ("AUSTRALIA WON'T GIVE OIL TO N KOREA AMID DEADLOCK ", Tokyo , 2008/12/18) reported that Australia will not take part in the fuel aid program for energy- strapped DPRK until Pyongyang agrees to a written plan to verify its nuclear disarmament, its foreign minister said Thursday. Stephen Smith, on a visit to Tokyo, acknowledged that Washington had asked Australia to take Japan's place in the fuel aid shipments promised to DPRK under six-nation nuclear talks. "I don't see given that outcome that there is any realistic prospect that Australia will make a contribution in a short term," he said.

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4. Russo-DPRK Relations

Vladivostok Times ("DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF KOREA RAILROADERS ARRIVE IN VLADIVOSTOK FOR TRAINING", Vladivostok, 2008/12/18) reported that a railroader delegation from Democratic People's Republic of Korea continues its training at Vladivostok department of Far Eastern railroad, the press secretary of Vladivostok Far Eastern railroad department Alexander Artomonov reports. Guests from the DPRK came to Vladivostok from Khabarovsk to have training. In Khabarovsk the delegation got acquainted with personnel training system on the Far Eastern railroad. They also visited locomotive depot Khabarovsk-2.

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5. DPRK Leadership

AFP ("KIM JONG-IL ALIVE AND IN CONTROL: US PACIFIC COMMONDER ", Washington , 2008/12/18) reported that DPRK leader Kim Jong-Il is alive and in control of his country despite reports that he is ailing, the commander of the US Pacific command, Admiral Timothy Keating, said Thursday. "He's alive and he remains in control of the North Korean government," Keating told a press conference, adding he had no particular details about Kim's medical condition. "I think he's relatively in control of his faculties," Keating said.

CNN Asia ("NORTH KOREAN LEADER KIM JONG-IL PICTURED IN PUBLIC ", Seoul , 2008/12/18) reported that DPRK leader Kim Jong-Il has been making the rounds of major industrial facilities in the country's north, state-run media reported Thursday. Kim was shown bundled up in a parka with matching thick gloves. He was also wearing a fur hat and his signature dark sunglasses. The photos showed Kim engaged in conversation and active. ROK media noted it was the first time since Kim reappeared in public October 4 that his activities have been reported two days in a row.

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6. ROK Irap Deployments

Yonhap (Byun Duk-kun, "SEOUL TERMINATES 4-YEAR DEPLOYMENT IN IRAQ", Seoul, 2008/12/19) reported that the ROK on Friday completed its troop pullout from Iraq. The last group from the Zaytun contingent in Iraq and an air support unit in neighboring Kuwait arrived home earlier in the day. The unit disbanded in a ceremony hosted by Prime Minister Han Seung-soo. "The troops of Zaytun and Daiman units improved our overseas operation capabilities, and they also significantly raised the reputation of the Republic of Korea," the prime minister said. "They have proved that our decision to dispatch troops to Iraq was just and right for the interest of the Republic of Korea and world peace."

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7. Sino-ROK Military Relations

Xinhua News ("CHINA, ROK AGREE TO BOOST MILITARY TIES", 2008/12/18) reported that the PRC Defense Minister Liang Guanglie pledged to raise military ties with the Republic of Korea (ROK) to a new height. The PRC paid great attention to the development of the bilateral military ties, said Liang, adding that the two armed forces have conducted multi-level and multi-disciplinary friendly exchanges. Stable bilateral ties and military ties are of great importance to the development of both countries and of regional peace and stability, he said. He hoped the two sides could continue to enhance mutual trust and understanding, so as to lift military ties.

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8. US-ROK Trade Relations

Yonhap News (Shin Hae-in, "KOREA-U.S. FTA TABLED IN PARLIAMENT AMID PARTISAN COLLISION", 2008/12/18) reported that determined to ratify the ROK-U.S. free trade agreement (KORUS FTA) before the end of this year, the ruling Grand National Party (GNP) physically barred opposition lawmakers from a committee room and put the motion before parliament. Only 10 out of 29 committee members were present and voted in favor of paving the way for early ratification of the FTA in the absence of opposition party members.

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9. PRC-U.S. Military Relations

Reuters (David Morgan , "U.S. ADMIRAL WANTS CHINA MILITARY TIES RESUMED ", Washington , 2008/12/18) reported that the United States hopes the PRC, which suspended military contacts with Washington in October, will soon resume them to work together against piracy in the Gulf of Aden, U.S. defense officials said on Thursday. PRC said on Thursday that it preparing to send warships to the Gulf of Aden after a multilateral force rescued a Chinese ship from Somali pirates the previous day.

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10. Japan-Australia Relations

AFP (Harumi Ozawa , "JAPAN, AUSTRALIA SIGN SECURITY-SHARING PACT", Tokyo, 2008/12/18) reported that Japan and Australia on Thursday agreed to share confidential information. Foreign affairs and defense ministers of the two nations also pledged to expand joint military exercises and to set up regular consultations between officers on disaster prevention, fighting terrorism and peacekeeping. In a joint statement, Japan and Australia also pledged to work together with the United States and to cooperate with incoming president Barack Obama.

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11. Japan Renewable Energy

Agence France-Presse ("JAPAN LAUNCHES FIRST SOLAR CARGO SHIP", Tokyo, 2008/12/19) reported that the world's first cargo ship partly propelled by solar power was launched on Friday in Japan. The freighter, capable of carrying 6,400 automobiles, is equipped with 328 solar panels at a cost of 150 million yen (US\$1.68 million). The ship will initially transport vehicles being sent for sale overseas by Toyota.

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12. US Export Controls and PRC Companies

Washington Times ("U.S. TO TIGHTEN EXPORT RULES ON 5 FIRMS IN CHINA", 2008/12/18) reported that the U.S. government is taking steps to suspend a program that allows five companies in the PRC to obtain sensitive U.S. technology without an export license, according to documents and interviews. The move is driven by concerns that existing safeguards are inadequate to keep Beijing from gaining access to strategic military equipment. The Commerce Department's Bureau of Industry and Security recently drafted a new regulation, obtained by The Washington Times, that would suspend the so-called Validated End-User program.

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13. Sino-Russian Trade Relations

Xinhua News ("LONGEST CHINA-RUSSIA LAND CARGO TRANSPORT ROUTE OPENS", 2008/12/18) reported that a land cargo transport route between northeast PRC and Russia's Far East opened. More than 10 cargo trucks started the four-hour trip along the 309-km road from Jixi City in Heilongjiang province to Ussuriysk city in Primorsky of Russia, the longest between the two countries. Opening of the route would lay a foundation for Heilongjiang to broaden its trade with Russia and other nearby regions, said Li Lun, deputy director of the provincial transportation department.

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14. PRC Government Reform

Shanghai Daily ("HU CALLS ON CHINA TO MAINTAIN REFORM DRIVE", 2008/12/18) reported that President Hu Jintao said Thursday that the PRC must continue to press ahead with its "reform and opening drive". Hu said the PRC's significant progress had proved that the path of reform was "completely correct." "Standing still or regressing will lead only to a dead end," Hu told an audience of more than 6,000, which included former President Jiang Zemin and such present PRC leaders as National People's Congress Chairman Wu Bangguo and Premier Wen Jiabao.

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15. PRC Unrest

The Washington Post (Ariana Eunjung Cha, "WITH STRIKES, CHINA'S NEW MIDDLE CLASS VENTS ANGER", Chongqing, 2008/12/17) reported that from the far western industrial county of Yongdeng to the southern resort city of Sanya and the commercial center of Guangzhou, members of the PRC's upwardly mobile working class -- taxi drivers, teachers, factory workers and even auxiliary police officers -- have mounted protests since the Chongqing strike, refusing to work until their demands were met. The strikes, driven in part by the PRC's economic downturn, have caught officials off guard.

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16. PRC on Bird Flu

BBC News ("CHINA CULL AMID BIRD FLU OUTBREAK ", 2008/12/17) reported that more than 370,000 chickens have been culled in PRC's eastern province of Jiangsu after an outbreak of the H5N1 strain of bird flu, say officials. The outbreak is thought to be the first in mainland PRC since June. Meanwhile, a man has reportedly contracted the virus in Cambodia, while Taiwan is investigating suspected infection among birds. The death of a teenage girl from H5N1 was announced in Egypt on Tuesday, and a bird cull is also under way in India.

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17. PRC Human Rights

Reuters (Emma Graham-Harrison, "CHINA TO TEACH CHILDREN 'ETHNIC UNITY' ", Beijing , 2008/12/16) reported that Chinese children will study "ethnic unity" from primary school, the Education Ministry said. An outline of the new policy suggested Beijing is worried about discontent among minority groups. The new classes will run all the way through school, with high school students getting up to 14 hours a year to help them "recognize the superiority of our government and Communist Party's ethnic policies," and ensure they reflect them in their work.

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18. PRC National Security

New York Times (Edward Wong , "2 UIGHURS SENTENCED TO DEATH FOR WEST CHINA POLICE ASSAULT ", Beijing , 2008/12/17) reported that a court in Xinjiang has sentenced two men to death for an attack in August that killed 17 paramilitary officers, according to a report on Wednesday by Xinhua. The men, Abdurahman Azat, 33, and Kurbanjan Hemit, 28, are ethnic Uighurs. The report did not give any details on what kind of evidence was reviewed by the court in Kashgar during the trial of the two men. It also did not mention the East Turkestan Islamic Movement. The day after the assault, the party secretary of Kashgar, Shi Dagang, told reporters that it appeared that the two men were members of that group.

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II. PRC Report

19. PRC Nuclear Energy

Xinhua Net ("CONSTRUCTION STARTS ON NUCLEAR POWER PLANT IN GUANGDONG", 2008/12/17) reported that construction began on a nuclear power plant expected to generate 45 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity annually. The Yangjiang nuclear power plant in Dongping Town, Yangjiang City, is being built by China Guangdong Nuclear Power Group with an investment of 70 billion yuan. The plant will have six 1,000-megawatt units with the first unit to begin operations in 2013. All the units will be built by 2017. The plant will save 16 million tons of coal and reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 36 million tons, according to Zhang Guobao, vice minister of the National Development and Reform Commission.

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20. PRC Environment

Beijing Evening News (Zhang Nan, "BEIJING ADOPTS NEW POLLUTION CONTROL MEASURES", 2008/12/17) reported that Beijing has created a series of new pollution control measures including an odd-and-even license plate rule in extreme weather conditions. High-emission, or "yellow-labelled" vehicles, will be banned from all Beijing roads inside the fifth Ring from January 1 next year. This does not include vehicles involved in city maintenance and production, but their emissions must also be lowered by October 1, 2009. Construction sites should meet the standards of dust prevention and control before March 1, 2009. Earth and stones excavated during road maintenance and forestation projects within the 5th ring road should be gathered in bags.

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III. ROK Report

21. DPRK Nuclear Program

Hankyoreh (Taeho Kang, "PROFESSIONAL NORTH-SOUTH RELATIONS REPORTER, WRONG BETTING?", 2008/12/19) stated that at a daily briefing, Yu Myung-hwan, ROK Minister of Foreign Relations, said that delaying the matter to the next US administration rather than agreeing to a verification protocol would be "a wrong bet". From the DPRK's standpoint, the results of the 2007 summit meeting between DPRK and ROK changed only 2 months after Lee Myung-bak's election. Considering the results, the DPRK learned a lesson not to bet with an administration with only a few more months to serve. They had similar experience with the Clinton administration as well. In fact, DPRK has not much to lose from denying to agree to sampling; from their point of view, there is no reason to give a present to Bush Administration which is to leave soon.

Kookmin Ilbo (Sangon Kim, "WHERE IS THE END OF DPRK'S NUCLEAR ISSUE?", 2008/12/19) wrote that Haksong Kim, chairperson of the ROK National Defense Committee, said on December 16 that as long as their system exists, the DPRK will remain as a nuclear power state. In order to make DPRK give up nuclear powers, we need to make them realize either that nuclear powers will not sustain the current system, or that their system will be under so much threat that not even nuclear weapons will be able to save it. Connecting inter-Korean cooperation with denuclearization under the excuse that it is for improving the political situation between the DPRK and ROK will only instigate DPRK to remain as a nuclear power state.

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22. Inter-Korea Relations

Yonhap News ("DPRK, MORE RESTRICTIONS? DPRK'S MESSAGES COMPLEX, IMMEDIATE ADDITIONAL RESTRICTIONS SEEM UNLIKELY", 2008/12/18) wrote that since the DPRK's investigation of conditions in Kaesong Industrial District, whether the DPRK will make any further restrictions to pressure ROK or not has been stimulating interest. Specialists and other people in authority say that it is difficult to foretell their future moves due to the complex message that DPRK seems to be trying to deliver through the investigation, but the DPRK has made it clear that as long as Lee administration adheres to the position of "stick to the principles and wait for DPRK to change," the restriction on border crossings cannot be mitigated. However, most people think that the DPRK will decide whether or not to have additional restrictions after carefully considering many conditions including DPRK-US relations and the reactions of the ROK government.

PRESSian (Keunshik Kim, "MB'S LIMITED SCOPE IN DPRK ISSUE", 2008/12/19) wrote that Lee Myung-bak's policy toward DPRK - to wait - on the one hand means he won't do anything before DPRK changes, but on the other, it also implies Lee's helplessness and sense of shame that there is actually nothing to do. The reason Lee administration is sticking to such a hard line despite its failure is because Lee is surrounded with an unrealistic, limited belief that such waiting will eventually bring change to the DPRK. It is time that Lee creeps out of his little cave and looks around at the outside world.

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