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I. NAPSNet

1. US on DPRK Nuclear Program

Agence France-Presse ("US EXPERT VISITS NKOREA TO MONITOR DISABLEMENT: EMBASSY", Seoul, 2007/12/19) reported that a US State Department expert visited the DPRK Wednesday to review work on disabling its key nuclear plants, the US embassy said. Sung Kim, the state department's top expert on Korean affairs, will stay until Friday to inspect the work at the DPRK's Yongbyon complex, said US embassy spokesman Max Kwak. Kim heads a US team of experts which is supervising the operation.

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2. PRC on DPRK Nuclear Program

Reuters ("NORTH KOREA NUCLEAR DISABLING GOING "SMOOTHLY": CHINA", Beijing, 2007/12/19) reported that the DPRK's disabling of its key nuclear complex is proceeding "smoothly," PRC state media quoted a visiting deputy foreign minister as saying. "Denuclearization work is proceeding smoothly in accordance with steps agreed by the six parties," the official People's Daily quoted Wu Dawei as saying. "North Korean and U.S. engineers and technicians are working hard at this." All sides should "seriously fulfill their obligations," added Wu, who is also the PRC's point man on denuclearization talks with the DPRK.

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3. UN on DPRK Human Rights

The Associated Press (Edith M. Lederer, "UN CONCERNED OVER NKOREAN RIGHTS ABUSES", United Nations, 2007/12/19) reported that the U.N. General Assembly adopted a resolution expressing "very serious concern" at reports of widespread human rights violations in the DPRK, including torture and public executions. The resolution is not legally binding but carries moral weight and reflects the majority view of world opinion. The resolution cites the DPRK's "all-pervasive and severe restrictions on the freedoms of thought, conscience, religion, opinion and expression, peaceful assembly and association" by persecuting people exercising these rights, and barring their freedom of movement and travel abroad.

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4. Inter-Korean Relations

Yonhap (Byun Duk-kun, "S. KOREA'S PRESIDENT-ELECT VOWS COOPERATION FOR N. KOREA, CLOSER TIES WITH U.S.", Seoul, 2007/12/19) reported that Lee Myung-bak, the ROK's next president, will likely continue engaging the DPRK through economic cooperation, but the extent should rely deeply on Pyongyang's commitment to full denuclearization, unlike his predecessor who has often been under fire for granting unconditional aid to the DPRK, analysts said. Closer ties with Washington will also be prioritized by the incoming administration of conservative Lee, who has criticized President Roh Moo-hyun for alienating the U.S. in dealing with the nuclear-armed DPRK. The entrepreneur-turned-politician says he can and will increase the DPRK's per capita income to US\$3,000 in 10 years, if Pyongyang completely abandons its nuclear ambitions.

Associated Press (Burt Herman, "SKOREA'S PRESIDENT-ELECT URGES NKOREA", Seoul, 2007/12/20) reported that ROK President-elect Lee Myung-bak said Thursday he would not shy from criticizing the DPRK. "I think unconditionally avoiding criticism of North Korea would not be appropriate," Lee told a news conference the day after the election. "If we try to point out North Korea's shortcomings, with affection, I think that would make North Korean society healthier." "The most important thing is for North Korea to get rid of its nuclear weapons," he added. "Full-fledged economic exchanges can start after North Korea dismantles its nuclear weapons."

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5. ROK Election

Chosun Ilbo ("LEE MYUNG-BAK ELECTED PRESIDENT BY A LANDSLIDE", 2007/12/19) reported that Grand National Party presidential candidate Lee Myung-bak soared to victory in the 17th presidential election on Wednesday, missing an absolute majority by a hair's breadth. As of 11.55 p.m. on Wednesday, with 92.8 percent of the votes counted, Lee had won 10,578,817 votes or 48.3 percent, outdistancing his closest rivals by a margin of over 20 points. Lee held a press conference when it became certain that he had enough votes to win. "I'll serve the people in a very humble and modest way," he pledged. "I'll revive the economy of the Republic of Korea, which is in a crisis, as the people wish. I'll do everything to achieve unity and national integration."

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6. US Forces Troop Realignment

Agence France-Presse ("US MILITARY BASE IN JAPAN BECOMES KEY ASIA HUB", Camp Zama, 2007/12/19) reported that the US Army upgraded a base in Japan into a key Asian operational hub, despite protests by local leaders who oppose a greater influx of US troops. Camp Zama on Tokyo's outskirts was named a forward headquarters of the I Corps, which is under the Pacific Command but whose troops have also been sent to Iraq. Edward Roper, who handles host nation relations for the US army in Japan, said that "in addition to defending Japan, the unit is also for contingencies in areas surrounding Japan."

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7. Japan SDF Indian Ocean Mission

The Associated Press (Joseph Coleman, "US URGES JAPAN NOT TO EXIT WAR ON TERROR", Tokyo, 2007/12/19) reported that the US ambassador urged Japan on Wednesday to extend its naval mission in the Indian Ocean, saying it would be "a real tragedy" if Tokyo dropped out of the battle against terrorism. U.S. Ambassador Thomas Schieffer said Japan would have to decide whether it wants to be part of the international effort to combat terrorism or not. "It would be a real tragedy if somehow Japan tried to opt out of the war on terror," he told reporters at his Tokyo residence. "It's just an issue that requires a unified international community to make any headway against."

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8. Russo-Japanese Relations

The Associated Press (Carl Freire, "RUSSIA TO FREE SICK JAPANESE FISHERMAN", Tokyo, 2007/12/19) reported that Russia plans to release the captain of one of four Japanese fishing boats seized in disputed waters last week because of his poor health, Japan's Foreign Ministry said. Russian authorities informed Japan they will free Shigemi Fujimoto Thursday afternoon, the ministry said in a statement. A Japanese Coast Guard ship, to be dispatched from the port of Nemuro in northern Japan, will pick up the captain, who suffers from an unspecified chronic ailment, it said. Foreign Minister Masahiko Komura welcomed his release, adding Japan was also negotiating the handover of the remaining 11 crew members.

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9. Japan Textbook Issue

The Asahi Shimbun (Mayumi Maruyama, "AUTHORS, HISTORIANS CLAMOR FOR CHANGE IN MINISTRY'S TEXTBOOK SCREENING", 2007/12/19) reported that the controversy over textbook screening is coming to a head with calls by influential historians and textbook authors for the government to overhaul the system. They say a recent demand by the education ministry to drop references to the military's role in wartime civilian suicides in Okinawa has exposed inherent flaws in the screening process. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology reviews draft textbooks for public schools and authorizes their use only after changes are made in accordance with its instructions. The instructions are based on recommendations from the Textbook Approval Research Council. The council meets in closed sessions and does not even prepare minutes of its gatherings.

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10. Japan Missile Defense Program

Kyodo ("LDP APPROVES REVISIONS TO GOV'T MISSILE DEFENSE GUIDELINES", Tokyo, 2007/12/19) reported that a government proposal to revise its action guidelines on a ballistic missile attack cleared a policy panel of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party on Wednesday in light of Monday's successful interceptor test, paving the way for a Cabinet endorsement next Monday. The so-called emergency response guidelines in the event that another country launches a ballistic

missile against Japan have so far been based on interceptor missiles fired from the ground, but are being revised with the upcoming introduction of sea-based ones.

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11. Cross Strait Relations

United Press International ("WU: CHINA HAS NO AUTHORITY OVER TAIWAN", Washington, 2007/12/19) reported that Taiwan's economic and cultural representative office spokesman told a Washington audience Tuesday the PRC has no right to claim authority over the island nation. In a keynote address to the Heritage Foundation, Jaushieh Joseph Wu accused the People's Republic of China of attempting to block every move Taiwan makes to participate in world organizations, including the United Nations. Wu said the PRC has "actively opposed and lobbied others against our inclusion in every multinational organization to which we have sought membership or tried to contribute our expertise." He also accused the PRC of a "dramatic military buildup along the Taiwan Strait that threatens" Taiwan's "peace and security."

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12. PRC Media Control

Agence France-Presse ("CHINA DETAINS CYBER-DISSIDENT WHO CRITICISED OLYMPICS", Beijing, 2007/12/19) reported that a PRC cyber-dissident who criticised the government over human rights abuses ahead of the Beijing Olympic Games has been detained on suspicion of subverting state power, his wife said. Wang Dejia, better known by his pen name Jing Chu, was hauled off by police who raided his home in the southern province of Guangxi last Thursday, his wife Wen Zhenyan told AFP. "They said his crime was incitement to subvert state power," said Wen, who has been barred from seeing her husband.

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II. ROK Report

13. ROK Presidential Election

Chosun Ilbo (Editorial, "THE ELECTED'S MISSION", Seoul, 2007/12/20) reported that Lee Myeong-bak was elected the 17th president in the ROK with almost 50% of the vote. First of all, this outcome indicates the mind of the ROK people. Accordingly, the investigation of the special prosecutor on Lee's alleged stock fabrication is against the public sentiment. The recovery of the economy, restoration of ROK-US relations, and the resolution of DPRK's nuclear issue should be his priorities to resolve as the new president.

Hangyoreh (Editorial, "LEE HAS TO EXACTLY READ THE MIND OF KOREAN PEOPLE", Seoul, 2007/12/20) reported that although Lee Myeong-bak gained the final victory in the presidential election, he still has to comprehend popular feelings. The lowest voting turnout in ROK history

means that people did not willingly support him due to his moral scars. Lee must not betray people's confidence on economic growth, especially for the common people. He should also remember that a growth-centered policy would not lesson the gap between the rich and the poor.

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