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Preceding NAPSNet Report

I. Napsnet

1. Alleged DPRK-Syrian Nuclear Cooperation

Nucleonics Week (Mark Hibbs, "US EXPERT: NORTH KOREA DIDN'T DIVERT SAFEGUARDED FUEL TO SYRIAN REACTOR", 2008/12/18) reported that none of the safeguarded fresh uranium fuel produced by the DPRK at its Yongbyon nuclear research center for two of its own reactors was diverted to an alleged clandestine reactor project in Syria, Siegfried Hecker, a director emeritus of the Los Alamos National Laboratory. Hecker said in an interview that the fuel, which had been declared to the IAEA, was still at the center when he visited it in February. Last month, the IAEA reported to its board of governors that it had detected particles of uranium in ground samples it collected at Al Kibar. The IAEA's disclosure prompted rumors that the find was evidence that the DPRK exported fuel for the alleged reactor to Syria.

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2. DPRK-US Relations

Xinhua News ("DPRK OFFICIAL NEWSPAPER CALLS FOR BUILDING DETERRENT TO U.S. DOMINANCE", Pyongyang, 2008/12/22) reported that the DPRK should build a powerful deterrent

to US dominance of world affairs, the official Rodong Sinmun daily said. The United States, while talking about "nuclear disarmament" on the Korean Peninsula, is still seeking modernization of its nuclear weapons, the newspaper said in a commentary. Without a strong military deterrent, no country can safeguard its national security and strategic interests, it added.

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3. DPRK Economy

Earth Times ("DPRK'S ECONOMY IS FORECAST TO RESUME ITS SLIDE", Seoul, 2008/12/22) reported that after enjoying a minor boost in 2008, DPRK's troubled economy is forecast to be further weakened in the face of shrinking ties with its major business partner PRC, an ROK research institute reported on Monday. DPRK has set the year 2012 as the target year for the take-off of its economy so that it can celebrate the 70th birthday of DPRK leader Kim Jong Il. However, DPRK's 2012 target is becoming elusive, as the country's trade volume is forecast to slide back from its peak of 3 billion dollars in 2008.

Xinhua News ("DPRK'S TOP LEADER CONFIDENT OF NATIONAL ECONOMY'S TREMENDOUS POTENTIAL ", Pyongyang, 2008/12/22) reported that Kim Jong Il, the top leader of the DPRK, has said the country's national economy has "tremendous potential," state media reported. During an inspection tour to the Huichon Ceramic Factory in Jagang province recently, Kim stressed the need to improve officials' ability to offer better guidance on economy and enhance the role of scientists and technicians so as to bring the great production potential into fullest play. (return to top)

4. Inter-Korean Relations

Yonhap News Service ("DPRK SNUBS ROK'S DIALOGUE OFFER AS 'HYPOCRITICAL'", Seoul, 2008/12/22) reported that DPRK said Monday that ROK's offers of inter-Korean dialogue are "hypocritical," and that it will not lend an ear unless Seoul first reverses its tough policy toward Pyongyang. "Hypocritical is the 'dialogue' much publicized by those who seek confrontation with daggers hidden behind their belts. No one would lend an ear" to such offers, Rodong Sinmun, published by the DPRK's Workers' Party, said in a commentary.

Agence France Press ("DPRK DEFECTORS SEND MORE LEAFLETS TO DPRK", Seoul, 2008/12/20) reported that a group of DPRK defectors said they had flown a fresh batch of anti-Pyongyang propaganda leaflets over the border. Lee Min-Bok, who leads a group of DPRK Christians, said they sent 1.5 million leaflets into the DPRK Friday from Baekryeong island near the inter-Korean border in the Yellow Sea.

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5. Inter-Korean Economic Cooperation

IFES NK Brief ("INTER-KOREAN ECONOMIC COOPERATION OFFICE CLOSES AFTER 3 YEARS; CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION WITHERING", 2008/12/20) reported that on October 28, 2005, an office housing the Inter-Korean Council for Economic Cooperation was established in order to create a channel for routine dialog between DPRK and ROK authorities and to assist with direct business deals between the two countries. Now, three years later and as inter-Korean relations have stalled, the office has completely closed its doors, causing economic cooperation to wither.

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6. DPRK Refugees

Reuters (Aung Hla Tun, "DPRK REFUGEES MAY FACE TRIAL IN MYANMAR", Yangon, 2008/12/21) reported that nineteen DPRK refugees, detained at a Myanmar border town early this month, were expected to be tried for illegal entry soon, an official source said on Sunday. "They were arrested in Tachilek, a town on the Myanmar-Thai border about 600 kms (375 miles) northeast of Yangon, on December 2. Arrangements are underway to put them on trial for illegal entry," said an official source who declined to be identified. "I should say they may get two or three years in jail. I just don't know for sure what will happen to them after that," he said, adding that 15 of the refugees were women.

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7. ROK Afghanistan Dispatch

Donga Ilbo ("US ASKS FOR ZAYTUN`S REDEPLOYMENT TO AFGHANISTAN ", 2008/12/22) reported that the US has reportedly asked the ROK to redeploy its Zaytun unit to Afghanistan, military sources said yesterday. This is the first time for Washington to mention the name of a unit in repeating the request. The sources said that when the Zaytun unit withdrew from Arbil to Kuwait Dec. 10-14, the United States asked if the withdrawing troops could go to Afghanistan via Multinational Forces – Iraq. An ROK official said his government has made no official reply, saying, “It is important to pull our troops and bring them to Korea safely for now.”

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8. ROK-Indonesia Anti-Terror Drill

Xinhua News ("INDONESIA, SOUTH KOREA STAGE DRILL TO PREVENT TERRORIST STRIKES ",

Jakarta, 2008/12/22) reported that Indonesia and the ROK started a month-long joint anti-terrorist exercise on the outskirts of Jakarta to prevent terrorist attacks during the upcoming holidays in their countries, spokesman of Indonesian military Brig. General Bibit Sontoso said. The drill taking place at Bogor town was participated by more than 120 Indonesian military officers and 30 ROK military personnel, said the spokesman.

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9. ROK Environment

Yonhap News Service ("'NEW DEAL' GETS A GREEN FACE-LIFT", 2008/12/23) reported that the ROK will invest billions of dollars to foster green businesses and create jobs to counter the global financial crisis, the Environment Ministry said yesterday. "The new plan aims at overcoming the economic crisis through a 'green new deal' and satisfying people's enthusiasm for clean environment projects," the ministry said in its 2009 policy report to the president. "We will create some 43,000 jobs in the environmental sectors and boost environmental safety."

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10. ROK Food Safety

Yonhap News Service ("ROK ESTABLISHES MELAMINE CONTENT STANDARD FOR FOOD", Seoul, 2008/12/19) reported that ROK has established a set standards limiting the amount of melamine found in all food products to better protect public health, the government said Friday. The ROK Food and Drug Administration (KFDA) said it will not permit any traces of the chemical, linked to kidney complications, in milk and food products given to babies and toddlers while allowing up to 2.5 parts per million (ppm) in other types of food.

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11. Japan SDF Reform

Kyodo News ("DEFENSE MINISTRY REFORM TO SHIFT MORE POWER TO SDF OFFICERS", Tokyo, 2008/12/22) reported that the Defense Ministry on Monday finalized a basic reform policy for the ministry that will beef up the authority of ranking uniformed officers over the operations of the Self-Defense Forces. The ministry fell short of including in the basic policy measures to handle situations similar to the recent issue involving former Air Self-Defense Force Chief of Staff Gen. Toshio Tamogami, who was removed from his post after questioning in an essay the government's position that Japan invaded Asian neighbors during World War II.

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12. Japan Energy

Time Magazine (Coco Masters, "A JAPANESE TOWN THAT KICKED THE OIL HABIT", Tokyo, 2008/12/22) reported that Kuzumaki (population 8,000) has over the past decade transformed itself into a living laboratory for the development of sustainable and diversified energy sources. Atop Mt. Kamisodegawa, the 12 wind turbines, each 305 feet (93 m) tall, have the capacity to convert mountain gusts into 21,000 KW of electricity — more than enough to meet the needs of the town's residents. The excess is sold to neighboring communities. At Kuzumaki Highland Farm, 200 dairy cows share the power load. Their manure is processed into fertilizer and methane gas, the latter used as fuel for an electrical generator at the town's biomass facility. All told, clean energy generated 161% of Kuzumaki's electricity last year.

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13. Japan Nuclear Policy

Kyodo News ("NO-NUKE POLICY RULED OUT YEARS BEFORE DECLARATION", 2008/12/22) reported that the Foreign Ministry compiled a document in 1959 warning that making a declaration of not going nuclear could hamper Japan's flexibility in pursuing national security, eight years before the country declared its three nonnuclear principles, according to documents that were part of a series of diplomatic papers officially declassified Monday by the Foreign Ministry.

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14. Japan Nuclear Power

Mainichi ("CHUBU ELECTRIC POWER CO. DECIDES TO DECOMMISSION 2 REACTORS, BUILD REPLACEMENT", Omaezaki, Japan, 2008/12/23) reported that Chubu Electric Power Co. formally decided Monday to decommission two reactors at its Hamaoka Nuclear Power Plant here and replace them with one new reactor. Dismantling of the No. 1 and No. 2 reactors will commence this fiscal year. The company plans to commence work on the No. 6 reactor in 2015, aiming to have it in operation by 2018 at the earliest.

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15. Japan Energy

Asahi Shimbun ("SHIBUYA TESTS FOOT-POWER PANELS", 2008/12/22) reported that Tokyo's Shibuya Ward is a step closer to becoming more eco-friendly since installing power-generating panels beneath the feet of pedestrians on a busy concourse in front of JR Shibuya Station.The panels installed in the experiment at the Hachiko-Mae Hiroba square, where about 900,000 people pass by daily, are capable of generating up to 0.5 watts per second when a 60-kilogram person takes two steps across them, ward officials said.

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16. Cross Strait Relations

The Financial Times (Kathrin Hille and Robin Kwong, "CHINA AND TAIWAN SPLIT BY MORE THAN THE STRAIT",) reported that when the PRC and Taiwan resumed direct flights this month after an almost 60-year hiatus it was “a dream come true”, according to Yang Jianrong, a PRC official in Shanghai. A recent attempt at cultural exchange, however, has reminded Beijing that many Taiwanese have different dreams and highlighted the PRC’s lack of understanding about the island. A plan to bring Cape No 7, Taiwan’s biggest-ever box office hit, to Chinese cinemas has been delayed over nationalist sentiment in PRC online forums against its pro-Japanese message.

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17. Sino-US Trade Relations

Associated Press ("PRC SEEKS WTO PROBE OF US TAXES ON PRC GOODS", Geneva, 2008/12/22) reported that PRC has asked the World Trade Organization to investigate whether the United States is illegally taxing PRC goods such as steel pipes and off-road tires. It's the first time Beijing has ever sought a WTO panel in a trade dispute. Washington delayed the panel's establishment at a meeting of the WTO's dispute body on Monday, but an investigation will likely be launched early next year.

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18. PRC Censorship

Bloomberg (Chris Dolmetsch, "PRC LIFTS BLOCK ON NEW YORK TIMES WEB SITE, NEWSPAPER SAYS", 2008/12/22) reported that PRC lifted restrictions on the New York Times Web site today after blocking mainland Internet users from viewing the page for the past three days, the newspaper reported. The PRC government started restricting the website without explanation on Dec. 18, the

newspaper reported.

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19. PRC Government

CNN ("PRC PLANS NEW ANTI-GANG EFFORT", 2008/12/22) reported that organised crime is on the rise in PRC, and courts across the country saw a 160% annual increase in gang-related crime in 2007. "Gang-related crimes have become a threat to our social stability and the economy," one unnamed official from the Public Security Bureau told the China Daily. He said the construction, transport and mining sectors were all areas that attracted gang crime, but warned that other industries were also increasingly being affected. With the economic downturn, PRC authorities are worried that the problem will get even worse, and the new campaign aims to make sure this does not happen.

Dong-A Ilbo ("PRC CRACKING DOWN ON 'FLY-BY-NIGHT' FOREIGN COMPANIES", 2008/12/22) reported that PRC regulators are cracking down on the growing number of foreign investor companies that flee without undertaking the legal liquidation process. PRC authorities have released joint guidelines on the "abnormal withdrawal of foreign investor companies," saying the PRC government will sue offending companies to hold them responsible for their liquidation. According to the guidelines, companies and workers adversely affected by the abnormal liquidation of foreign investor companies can file a lawsuit. The court will then hold the companies responsible based on specific circumstances according to treaties on judicial assistance in civil, commercial and criminal matters with other nations.

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20. PRC Unrest

Reuters ("PROPERTY DISPUTE HOLDS UP RAIL WORK IN S. CHINA", Beijing, 2008/12/19) reported that a number of rural residents in southern PRC are refusing to budge from their homes to make way for a railway, forcing more than 1,000 workers to stand down and sparking violence between residents and demolition workers. Police had arrested five "trouble-makers" after a scuffle broke out in Liwan district, near southern Guangdong province's capital, Guangzhou, over a dispute over compensation, the Beijing News said, citing a local media report.

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21. Sino-Indonesian Energy Cooperation

Agence France-Presse ("INDONESIA, CHINA SIGN US$4B IN ENERGY AND TRADE DEALS", Jakarta, 2008/12/22) reported that Indonesia and the PRC signed energy and trade deals worth more than four billion dollars on Monday during a visit by PRC First Vice Premier Li Keqiang. Li, who is in Indonesia for a four-day official trip, paid a visit to President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono after witnessing the signing of the deals which included plans to build three coal-fired power plants in Indonesia. The China National Technical Import and Export Corporation will also build a 605 million dollar, 660-megawatt coal-fuelled power plant in Cilacap, Central Java.

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II. PRC Report

22. PRC Civil Society and Poverty Alleviation

Farmers Daily (Song Xiuwei, "CHINA ASSOCIATION FOR POVERTY ALLEVIATION AND DEVELOPMENT ESTABLISHES TEN CULTURAL AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROJECTS", 2008/12/21) reported that the PRC Association for Poverty Alleviation and Development recently established ten cultural and poverty alleviation projects, and also set up an special committee for publishing and education, to further flourish rural culture. The ten projects include research of cultural poverty alleviation development, construction of cultural industry base, training of cultural technical talents, and so on.

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23. Cross Strait Relations

Xiamen Business News ("XIAMEN ASSOCIATION OF TAIWAN ENTERPRENEURS CELEBRATES ITS 16 BIRTHDAY", 2008/12/21) reported that the ceremony of the 16th founding anniversary of Xiamen Association of Taiwan Entrepreneurs was held in Xianglu Hotel in Xiamen city, Fujian province yesterday evening. Xiamen Association of Taiwan Entrepreneurs is one of the earliest associations set up in mainland, and it has contributed a lot to economic and cultural exchange of the two sides. Vice chairman of The Straits Exchange Foundation Gao Konglian was also invited to the ceremony and hoped Taiwan entrepreneurs advance both outside and inside power to ride out the economic winter.

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III. ROK Report

24. Inter-Korea Relations

Yonhap News ("TIME TO FIND A NEW STRATEGY FOR NORTH-SOUTH RELATIONS", 2008/12/23) writes that the outlook of inter-Korean relations doesn't seem to have a bright future, but there is still hope for a turnaround if the expectations for a summit meeting and Barack Obama's influence can balance each other. Specialists agree that for a positive outcome, the ROK government must form an atmosphere for DPRK to return to the table without hurting its image by controlling messages that could unnecessarily irritate DPRK. Moreover, much effort must be put into communicating with the U.S. administration so that DPRK could realize it cannot pursue normalization of diplomatic relations with the U.S. without recovering the ones with the ROK.

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25. U.S. Policy toward DPRK

Kyunghyang Shinmun (Seungcheol Lee, "SPRING IN THE PENINSULA IS SUSPICIOUS", 2008/12/23) writes that with the inauguration of the Obama administration coming soon, there are two possible scenarios. One is that the DPRK policies will remain centered around six-party talks, as it was during Bush administration; the other is that Obama will focus on "direct talks" with the DPRK, Iran, and others as he has previously declared. In the latter scenario, the specialists are expecting the U.S. to send a special envoy and directly hold a negotiation with DPRK, and if so, a transformation of the role of six-party talks will be inevitable. The answer to which scenario will be right seems entirely up to the U.S. and DPRK, and warns that in either scenario, the role of ROK, the country most concerned, is nowhere to be found. Much disappointment is due to the Lee administration, which doesn't realize its failures, and is rather focusing only on figuring out the Obama administration.

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