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I. NAPSNet

1. US, ROK on Six Party Talks

Chosun Ilbo ("SIX-PARTY TALKS TO CONTINUE: SEOUL, WASHINGTON VOW", 2008/04/30) reported that the ROK and the US reaffirmed that six-nation talks on denuclearization of the DPRK will continue. Kim Sook, the newly appointed ROK envoy to the talks, met his U.S. counterpart Christopher Hill in Washington D.C., and the two agreed to resume the talks soon and put priority on the plutonium extracted from the Yongbyon nuclear reactor. "We discussed various aspects of the six-party process... what we would expect to see as we continue on this process," said Hill. He continued that "as the North Koreans complete all of their requirements, all of their obligations, we will certainly complete ours."

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2. US-DPRK Liaison Office

Yonhap (Lee Chi-dong, "N. KOREA, U.S. TO SET UP LIAISON OFFICES IN CAPITAL: FM", Seoul, 2008/05/01) reported that ROK Foreign Minister Yu Myung-hwan said Thursday that the DPRK and the United States are expected to set up government offices in each other's capitals to oversee the denuclearization process. Yu said that the office, if established, will monitor the DPRK's implementation of its obligations under last year's multilateral deal and the agreed U.S. responses. "It will be discussed within the framework of the six-way talks," he stated.

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3. US on DPRK Terror List Status

Yonhap ("U.S. RETAINS N.K. ON TERRORISM LIST BUT REAFFIRMS POSSIBLE REMOVAL ", Washington, 2008/04/30) reported that the US on Wednesday retained the DPRK on its list of terrorism-sponsoring states, but reaffirmed in stronger language its commitment to remove the DPRK once Pyongyang fulfills its denuclearization obligations. On the ROK, the annually announced report expressed satisfaction on Seoul's law enforcement and intelligence capabilities, and said it remains a valuable partner in the fight against terror financing and money laundering.

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4. Russo-DPRK Trade Relations

ITAR-TASS ("NORTH KOREA MINISTER PRAISES AGREEMENT TO SET UP JVC WITH RUSSIAN RAILWAYS COMPANY ", Pyongyang, 2008/04/28) reported that DPRK Railways Minister Kim Yong Sam praised highly the Moscow agreement signed last Thursday to set up a joint venture company with the Russian Railways Company (RZD). The sides agreed to reconstruct the Khasan-Rajin railway line. The countries will build jointly a container terminal at the port Rajin. The interlocutors also agreed on further operation of this infrastructure. Under the bilateral agreement a joint venture company established for 49 years will attract investments for the funding of the project and will hire subcontractors for the railway reconstruction. The sides also agreed to facilitate customs and border controls for free freight border transshipments.

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5. DPRK Food Supply

Agence France-Presse ("NKOREA HEADED FOR OUTRIGHT FAMINE: US THINK-TANK ", Seoul, 2008/04/30) reported that the DPRK again runs the risk of outright famine, ten years after up to one million of its people died of starvation, a leading US research institute said. "The country is in its most precarious situation since the end of the famine a decade ago," said Peterson Institute senior fellow Marcus Noland. Noland and fellow researcher Stephan Haggard of the University of California, San Diego, forecast that the regime would weather the challenge politically "by ratcheting up repression and scrambling, albeit belatedly, for foreign assistance."

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6. Inter-Korean Relations

Washington Post (Blaine Harden, "S. KOREAN PRINCIPLES VS. HUNGER IN NORTH", Seoul, 2008/04/30) reported that this spring on the Korean Peninsula, human rights are on a collision course with hunger. Amid worsening shortages that the U.N. World Food Program says may soon become a catastrophe, Lee's government has yet to dispatch large shipments of free food and fertilizer that over the past decade have become an essential crutch for the DPRK's crippled economy, helping millions to avoid famine. "The delay in shipping food and fertilizer could end up hurting the average North Korean," said Kim Am-soo, a research fellow at the Korea Institute for National Unification, a government-financed think tank in Seoul. "It is a very delicate situation, and tension has increased on both sides of the border."

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7. DPRK Bird Flu Measures

Yonhap ("N.K. FORMS EMERGENCY OFFICE TO PREVENT BIRD FLU OUTBREAK ", Seoul, 2008/04/30) reported that the DPRK has established an emergency state committee overseeing efforts to prevent the possible spread of bird flu, which has inflicted serious damage in the ROK, according to DPRK television. "The emergency state quarantine committee was formed to work out national plans to prevent a possible outbreak of bird flu," the DPRK's Central TV said. The Central TV said the committee is orchestrating provincial administrations' sanitation measures, livestock quarantine as well as other programs to prevent bird flu.

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8. DPRK Energy Supply

Yonhap ("N. KOREA PLANTING TREES FOR FRUIT OIL ", Seoul, 2008/04/30) reported that the DPRK is intensively planting trees across the country to provide badly needed oil from their berries, the DPRK's official news agency said. The DPRK, which suffers from a chronic oil shortage, has created Tetradium tree forests covering tens of thousands of hectares in several regions near the western and eastern coasts during the national tree-planting season, according to the North's Korean Central News Agency (KCNA).

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9. DPRK Athletics

Yonhap ("N. KOREA EXPECTS TO SEND OVER 60 ATHLETES TO OLYMPICS: REPORT ", Seoul, 2008/04/30) reported that Pyongyang looks to send a team of over 60 athletes to the Beijing Olympics, one of the largest it has ever sent to the global event, Japan's Kyodo News Agency reported Wednesday, quoting a DPRK official. About 50 North Koreans have qualified for the Games in August, Ri Kyong-il, a director at the Physical Culture and Sports Guidance Commission, told Kyodo, with about a dozen more expected to do so in the coming months. The squad would make one of the largest athletic groups the DPRK has sent to the quadrennial event, after the DPRK sent 65 competitors to the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, Ri was quoted as saying.

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10. US-ROK Security Alliance

Korea Herald (Jin Dae-woong, "KOREA NOT TOLD OF U.S. CHOPPER WITHDRAWAL' ", 2008/04/30) reported that the Defense Ministry yesterday said it has not been informed of a US plan to deploy a squadron of 20 attack helicopters stationed here to Afghanistan. Reports here said that the U.S. military is planning to pull out an AH-64D Apache Longbow helicopter squadron and 500 operating personnel from the Korean Peninsula to relocate them to Afghanistan. The U.S. plan is linked to the Seoul government's recent refusal of a U.S. request to redeploy ROK troops to Afghanistan, local reports said.

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11. US-Japan Security Alliance

Agence France-Presse ("US NAVY IN JAPAN TO SCREEN SERVICE MEMBERS: OFFICIALS", Tokyo, 2008/04/30) reported that the US Navy will conduct background checks on its 20,000 sailors and civilians in Japan after a series of crimes including the murder of a taxi driver, a local city office said. Rear Admiral James Kelly, commander of US naval forces in close ally Japan, explained the plan in a visit to the mayor of Yokosuka, a port city near Tokyo that hosts the largest US naval base overseas. In the survey starting next month, the first of its kind for US forces in Japan, the military will ask all 20,000 naval service members and civilian personnel about their lifestyles and attitudes. If the military finds those with problematic attitudes or violent tendencies, it would give them intensive training and counselling, according to a document that the US Navy gave to the city.

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12. Japan Politics

The Asahi Shimbun ("RULING PARTIES STEAMROLL GAS TAX BILL THROUGH THE LOWER HOUSE", 2008/04/30) reported that with the opposition helpless to act, the ruling coalition used a seldom-used rule and steamrolled bills through the Lower House to revive higher gas tax rates and other road-specific taxes. Members of Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan), the largest opposition party, tried to physically prevent the opening of the Lower House plenary session, but in the end, all the party could do was to abstain from voting. The opposition parties have criticized what they describe as the ruling coalition's strong-arm tactics in Diet.

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13. Japan Bird Flu Outbreak

The Asahi Shimbun ("BIRD FLU FOUND NEAR LAKE TOWADAKO", Akita, 2008/04/30) reported that a highly virulent strain of H5N1 bird flu was detected in swans found dead near Lake Towadako in Kosaka, Akita Prefecture, the prefectural government said Tuesday. The dead birds were discovered April 21. As a precaution, the Akita, Aomori and Iwate prefectural governments are checking poultry farms within 30 kilometers of where the dead swans were found.

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14. Sino-Japanese East Sea Gas Dispute

Kyodo News ("JAPAN, CHINA NOT YET CLOSE TO RESOLVING GAS DISPUTE: MACHIMURA ", Tokyo, 2008/04/30) reported that Japan and the PRC are not yet close to resolving the dispute over gas exploration rights in the East China Sea despite efforts to come up with a solution on the occasion of PRC President Hu Jintao's visit to Japan next week, Chief Cabinet Secretary Nobutaka Machimura said. "We will have to see what kind of conclusion will be reached in the talks between the leaders (of the two countries), but I believe working-level negotiations will continue until the last minute," Machimura told a press conference.

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15. Cross Strait Relations

The Financial Times (Kathrin Hille, "HARDLINER WON'T STRAIN CHINA-TAIWAN TIES", Taipei , 2008/04/30) reported that the PRC government and Taiwan's incoming chief PRC negotiator have both played down the impact of a decision to pick a hardliner to coordinate policy towards the PRC in the Taiwanese cabinet. President-elect Ma Ying-jeou's appointment this week of Lai Shin-yuan, a former lawmaker of a pro-independence party, as chairwoman of the Mainland Affairs Council has sent shockwaves through the PRC policy community. "Getting here has not been easy, and the people on both sides of the Strait hope for the resumption of dialogue, especially on charter flights and tourism," said Li Weiyi, spokesman for the Taiwan Affairs Office. "We are making efforts to achieve this. The people on both sides of the Strait do not want to see this progress being disrupted by someone."

Xinhua ("HU JINTAO CALLS FOR MUTUAL TRUST, CONSENSUS WITH TAIWAN", Beijing, 2008/04/30) reported that Hu Jintao, general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, on Tuesday urged Taiwan to work together with the mainland based on four principles: "Building mutual trust, laying aside disputes, seeking consensus and shelving differences, and creating a win-win situation." He called for substantial efforts for the welfare of Chinese compatriots on both sides, to seek peace across the Taiwan Strait and create a new situation for the peaceful development of cross-strait relations.

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16. PRC Viral Outbreak

Agence France-Presse ("CHINA WARNS DEADLY VIRUS COULD KILL MORE ", Beijing, 2008/04/30) reported that the PRC government warned that a lethal intestinal virus that killed 20 children in east PRC could cause more deaths. The virus, known as Enterovirus 71, or EV71, has already killed 20 children in Fuyang city in Anhui province, and has infected 1,884 kids, the state-controlled Xinhua news agency said on Wednesday. "We estimate that the hand, foot and mouth disease [caused by EV71] in Fuyang city will still continue for some time, the number of cases will continue to increase, and serious and fatal cases might still continue to happen," the Health Ministry said in a statement on its website.

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17. Tibet Unrest

The Associated Press (Tini Tran, "ACTIVISTS: CHINA PERSECUTING BUDDHIST MONKS IN TIBET ", Beijing, 2008/04/30) reported that the PRC has stepped up persecution of Buddhist monks with mass detentions, Tibet activists said, as the PRC prepares to take the Olympic torch to the top of Mount Everest. The actions came a day after six monks were given lengthy prison sentences in the first trial of rioters since deadly violence in Tibet's capital last month. The International Campaign for Tibet said groups of Buddhist monks have been detained from several Lhasa monasteries, which have been sealed off by armed troops.

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18. PRC Food Supply

BBC News ("CHINA 'MAY LEASE FOREIGN FIELDS'", 2008/04/30) reported that the PRC could lease overseas farming land to beat rising food prices, according to reports from Beijing. Soaring grain prices have encouraged the ministry of agriculture to consider the scheme, according to the Beijing Morning newspaper. PRC enterprises would lease or even buy farmland in Latin America, Australia and the former Soviet Union. The land in production could replace PRC farmland lost to rapidly growing cities and industrial zones.

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II. ROK Report

19. DPRK-Syria Nuclear Cooperation

("DR. HECKER: 'DPRK'S AID IN SYRIAN NUCLEAR FACILITY VERY LIKELY' ", Yonhap News, 2008/05/01) reported that Siegfried Hecker, director of Stanford University Center for International Security and Cooperation, said he is confident regarding the suspicion of the DPRK's aid in constructing a nuclear reactor in Syria. He added that although the nuclear facility at Yongbyon is close to permanent abandonment, in case of failure in negotiations, DPRK has the means to re-activate the facility.

Donga Ilbo ("WHY US HID DPRK-SYRIA INFORMATION", 2008/05/01) wrote that the information regarding DPRK-Syria nuclear connection gathered by US CIA was noteworthy. Specialists evaluate "it is not work done through catching a good source by luck." However, the evaluation of the rest of the world is not so friendly. The US Congress criticizes President George W. Bush for losing an opportunity for the global society to verify the suspicion by hiding the fact for seven months without informing the IAEA. The Bush administration's excuse sounds pitiful: eager for progress in DPRK nuclear negotiation, not wanting an obstacle.

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20. DPRK Nuclear Program

Yonhap News ("IN ORDER FOR DENUCLEARIZATION IN DPRK, PEACE, SECURITY, AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION MUST BE PROGRESSED SIMULTANEOUSLY", 2008/05/01) reported that Leon Sigal, a senior researcher at US Social Science Research Council, claimed that establishment of a peace structure in the Korean Peninsula, local security talks in Northeast Asia, and economic cooperation must be progressed simultaneously for complete denuclearization of the DPRK. He explained that if there is no assurance of US animosity toward DPRK changing after the DPRK's abandonment of nuclear materials, DPRK will not cooperate in the nuclear facility elimination process, and even then it is not certain whether the DPRK will eliminate the nuclear facility, the lever of DPRK negotiation. However, he added that this will not hinder inter-Korean economic cooperation or progress toward peace.

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21. Inter-Korean Relations

Kyunghyang Shinmun (Kim Keun-sik, "TIME FOR 'PRACTICAL' INTER-KOREAN CONVERSATION TO STEP FORWARD", 2008/04/30) carried an article by the head of the inter-Korean cooperation sector at the Kyungnam University Institute for Far Eastern Studies, who wrote that the DPRK has turned down President Lee Myung-bak's proposal for a liaison office. Although predicted, it threatens a serious deadlock of inter-Korean relations. Once the ROK loses its leverage in inter-Korean relations, the ROK government's intervention power will steeply decrease not only in the six-party talks and the DPRK nuclear issue but also in the political situation of the Korean Peninsula. Recently, US-DPRK relations show a unique phenomenon as the momentum for negotiation is maintained even after publication of evidence related to DPRK-Syria nuclear connection by US. The realization of so-called "open to US, isolate ROK" is feared. A practical government ought to choose the utility that simultaneously realizes the spirit of the basic agreement respecting the 10.4 declaration, and solves the inter-Korean relations deadlock.

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