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I. United States

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1. US-DPRK Relations

Reuters ("U.S., NORTH KOREA TO HOLD TALKS IN BERLIN -EMBASSY," Berlin, 03/10/98) reported that the US embassy office in Berlin said on Tuesday that delegations headed by US deputy assistant secretary of state Charles Kartman and DPRK deputy foreign minister Kim Gye-gwan will meet in Berlin on Friday, ahead of the next round of four-party peace talks scheduled to begin next Monday in Geneva. An embassy spokesman said he had no information about the agenda for the Berlin talks. Meanwhile a PRC foreign ministry spokesman on Tuesday said that the PRC, which will chair next week's Geneva talks, hopes progress could be made and that the negotiations would contribute to peace and stability in the region.

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2. DPRK Famine

United Press International (Hyewook Cheong, "S.KOREA GROUP SENDS FERTILIZER TO NORTH," Seoul, 03/10/98) reported that ROK National Red Cross President Chung Won-shik announced that his group is sending US\$172,000 in fertilizer to aid the DPRK. The 800 tons of fertilizer was donated by an ROK industry association to head off threatening food shortages ahead of the DPRK's pending spring harvest. Chung stated, "The fertilizer is forwarded to international non-government organizations such as Mercy Corp., which lead barley planting operations in North Korea." Chung also proposed via a telephone message to his DPRK counterpart Ri Song-ho that the two resume Red Cross talks on further food aid March 18.

The AP-Dow Jones News Service ("U.N. FOOD AGENCY SAYS N. KOREA'S GRAIN STOCKS RUNNING OUT," Rome, 03/10/98) reported that the UN Food and Agriculture Organization said Tuesday that grain stocks are running out in the DPRK, leaving the country dependent on food imports for the coming months. In its latest report, the agency said that a milder than normal winter helped ease the country's food crisis, but that now "there are mounting concerns at increased food shortages and malnutrition developing in vulnerable groups as the lean season approaches and food stocks and rations fall." It projected that grain stocks will be near depletion by late April or early May, making large food imports necessary until at least the next harvest in the fall. It estimated that the DPRK will need 1.5 million tons of grain, though some may come through commercial imports or barter agreements.

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3. DPRK Participation in World Cup

Reuters ("FIFA INVITES N.KOREA LEADER TO PARIS," Seoul, 03/10/98) reported that ROK officials said on Tuesday that Federation of International Football Associations (FIFA) president Joao Havelange has invited DPRK leader Kim Jong-il to attend the opening ceremony for the 1998 World Cup in France. Havelange in his letter also urged the DPRK to join the ROK and Japan in co-hosting the 2002 World Cup. The letter stated, "It would be desirable to have a selection formed by the two Koreas to be presented to the world as a demonstration of sportive unity at the World Cup 2002. If this were possible, I am sure that football would once again show the world the importance of human values and an example would be set which could be followed." Korean Football Association officials said they thought a similar letter had been sent to ROK President Kim Dae-jung. Chung Mong-joon, president of the Korea Football Association, said FIFA could help ease tension and speed reunification on the Korean peninsula.

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4. ROK Political Prisoners

The New York Times (Nicholas D. Kristof, "SEOUL EMBRACES DEMOCRACY, BUT POLITICAL PRISONERS STILL LANGUISH," Seoul, 03/10/98) reported that the ROK continues to hold hundreds of political prisoners, including Woo Yong-gak, who at 39 years and seven months in prison may be the longest serving political prisoner in the world. Woo was part of a DPRK military reconnaissance team whose boat was seized by ROK authorities in 1958, and continues to be held because he will not renounce his belief in Communism. Minkahyup, a leading ROK human rights group, says it knows of 478 ROK "prisoners of conscience," nineteen of whom were arrested in just the first two months of this year. 360 people are currently in jail for violating the National Security Law. [Edward J. Baker](#), a Korea scholar at Harvard University, argued, "If the prisoners renounced their views, they would not only have been released but also put on podiums." ROK President Kim Dae-jung was quoted as saying recently, "The time is not yet ripe for the release of all prisoners of conscience. But I have a strong commitment to democracy, and I will make sure that they are freed gradually."

Young Jack-lee, a relative of the Kim's who runs the US-based Korean Institute for Human Rights, stated, "If Kim Dae-jung releases them right away, that would distract from his economic program. First things first. First we must rebuild the economy." Kim Min-seok, a National Assembly member from the National Congress for New Politics and former political prisoner, stated, "It will be very hard to let them free, because of public feeling. It will be very hard to release pro-North prisoners who don't give up their pro-North ideology." Suzy Kim, the international secretary for Minkahyup, likewise said that Kim Dae-jung is "definitely concerned. But it's politics, and he's cautious for a reason. It's up to us to create support for releasing these people."

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5. ROK Financial Crisis

Dow Jones Newswires (Cecilia Kang and Park Kyung-Hee, "KOREA'S PROGRAM TO RESCHEDULE DEBTS SPURS UNOFFICIAL PLEDGES," Seoul, 03/10/98) reported that an official at the ROK Ministry of Finance and Economy said that the ROK's promotion of its debt-rescheduling program has yielded unofficial promises by international creditors to roll over US\$20 billion in short-term debt from local financial institutions. The official said that international creditors are sending in official letters of promise to Citicorp, which is coordinating the program, to roll over their credits to the ROK financial system. In a separate announcement, the ministry said that the country's external debts shrank to US\$151.2 billion on January 31, down from US\$154.4 billion on December 31.

II. Republic of Korea

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1. Rumors of DPRK Unrest

The ROK government has been in alert to collect as much information as possible regarding rumors of a coup d'etat in the DPRK. After zealous research and analysis, the ROK government tentatively concluded on March 9 that the rumor of a coup d'etat was, in actuality, an exaggeration of friction between powerful organizations in the DPRK. The organizations under tension are the military and the social security agency (police). Analysts said that Kim Jong-il has tried to maintain good relations with the military since his inauguration in 1995. As a consequence, the power of the military has been growing. The military is now involved in maintaining domestic order and sorting out dissidents. For the social security agency, such infringement of turf is only acting as catalyst for dissatisfaction and distrust, according to analysts. (Joongang Ilbo, Kim Min-suk, "BEHIND THE RUMORS REGARDING DPRK COUP D'ETAT," 03/09/98)

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2. DPRK Famine

The government on March 9 announced that it will donate about 50 thousand tons of grain or other materials of the same value to the DPRK, in response to the World Food Program's (WFP) US\$378.2 million food appeal in 1998. ROK Minister of National Unification Kang In-duck said the aid could be provided in other forms of agricultural fertilizer or medicine for children. Ministry officials estimate that 50 thousand tons of grain will cost US\$9 million to US\$10 million. In addition, the ROK government said that it will provide aid worth US\$4.8 million carried over from last year. Meanwhile, the ROK National Red Cross (KNRC) this week is expected to propose inter-Korean Red Cross talks to the DPRK regarding food donation by the private sector, which will amount to 50

thousand tons of grain. Kang said that the ROK will continue to use both the inter-Korean Red Cross channel and international relief organizations to donate aid to the DPRK. (Korea Times, Kim Ji-soo, "SEOUL TO GIVE 50 THOUSAND TONS OF GRAIN TO DPRK," 03/10/98)

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3. Opening of DPRK Airspace

Neil Jonasson, assistant director of the International Air Transport Association (IATA), said on March 9 that the recent test flights over DPRK air space were successful. Accordingly, the new inter-Korean air route, agreed upon during a Bangkok meeting last year, will be opened as scheduled to all civilian flights on April 23. (Korea Times, Oh Young-jin, "IATA CONFIDENT INTER-KOREAN AIR ROUTE TO OPEN AS SCHEDULED," 03/10/98)

The NAPSNet Daily Report aims to serve as a forum for dialogue and exchange among peace and security specialists. Conventions for readers and a list of acronyms and abbreviations are available to all recipients. For descriptions of the world wide web sites used to gather information for this report, or for more information on web sites with related information, see the collection of [other NAPSNet resources](#).

We invite you to reply to today's report, and we welcome commentary or papers for distribution to the network.

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