NAPSNet Daily Report 10 March, 2008

Recommended Citation

"NAPSNet Daily Report 10 March, 2008", NAPSNet Daily Report, March 10, 2008, https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-daily-report/napsnet-daily-report-10-march-2008/

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Preceding NAPSNet Report

I. Napsnet

1. US on DPRK Nuclear Program

Korea Herald ("U.S. URGES N. KOREA TO MOVE FORWARD", Seoul, 2008/03/10) reported that U.S. Ambassador to the ROK Alexander Vershbow urged the DPRK Sunday to make a move so that Washington will be able to take corresponding steps in the denuclearization process. "We aren't able to do that (remove sanctions) unless we get a clear signal from North Korea that they are ready to do their part on the declaration," Vershbow said during a press conference. "Sequencing and packaging are the diplomatic challenge ... but the basic deal that we agreed to still stands, and we hope the North Koreans do their part," he added.

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2. ROK Policy Toward DPRK

Korea Times (Kim Sue-young , "NOMINEE OPPOSES LINKING NK AID TO HUMAN RIGHTS", Seoul, 2008/03/10) reported that ROK Unification Minister-designate Kim Ha-joong said Monday said he would not link humanitarian aid to the DPRK to issues on prisoners of war (POWs) and kidnap victims. During his confirmation hearings, Kim stated, "I think the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun governments did their utmost to improve relations between the two Koreas. I will maintain the existing tone but change the means and how fast to drive the policy." He added, "I would support economic cooperative projects that Seoul and Pyongyang had agreed to before but consider several things like progress in the dismantling of nuclear facilities in the North and the economic feasibility of the projects."

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3. Inter-Korean Relations

Korea Times (Jung Sung-ki, "NORTH OPENS CRITICISM ON SOUTH", Seoul, 2008/03/09) reported that the DPRK on Friday criticized the Lee Myung-bak administration's tougher line. In a statement issued by the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland, the mouthpiece of the Workers' Party, Pyongyang called "ruling conservative forces" in the South the "descendants of the previous dictatorial governments that ruined human rights." It added, "Recently, the conservative ruling forces of the ROK took issue at the seventh U.N. Human Rights Council with a so-called `human rights problem,' that does not even exist. We strongly reject the remarks, which we shall brand as ignominious speech that forces the North and South into confrontation and completely

negates the spirit of the June 15 joint declaration."

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4. US-DPRK Cultural Exchanges

Los Angeles Times (Barbara Demick, "NORTH KOREA KEEPS UP APPEARANCES", Pyongyang, 2008/03/10) reported the delegation delegation traveling with the New York Philharmonic were allowed to rent cellphones and given broadband Internet access. "As soon as you guys left, it was pitch dark again," said Jean-Pierre de Margerie, country director of the United Nations World Food Program in the DPRK. The DPRK is "very good at putting on a show," he said in a telephone interview from Pyongyang. "Kim Il Sung needed an exemplary communist city for pure propaganda reasons to show that North Korea is a rich, prosperous nation, a perfect society under a wise leader," said Andrei Lankov, a DPRK scholar in Seoul.

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5. DPRK Syria Relations

Associated Press ("N. KOREA HOPES FOR FRIENDSHIP WITH SYRIA", Seoul, 2008/03/08) reported that DPRK leader Kim Jong-il hopes for stronger friendship with Syria, the Korean Central News Agency reported Saturday. Kim expressed the hope in a message to Syrian President Bashar Assad on the anniversary of a 1963 coup that brought Syria's Baath Arab Socialist Party to power. "I express my firm belief that the friendly cooperative relations between the two countries will be further expanded and strengthened in various areas," Kim said in the message.

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6. DPRK-African Relations

Korea Times ("N. KOREA'S NO. 2 LEADER TO VISIT AFRICA", Seoul, 2008/03/09) reported that Kim Yong-nam, president of the DPRK Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly, is about to embark on a trip to three African nations, the Korean Central News Agency reported Sunday. It said Kim will "soon pay an official good-will visit to Namibia at the invitation of its president Hifikepunye Pohamba." It added that Kim also plans to visit Angola and Uganda.

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7. US-ROK Alliance

BBC News (John Sudworth, "NEW DAWN FOR US-S KOREAN MILITARY TIES", Seoul, 2008/03/08) reported that General Burwell Baxter Bell, the commander of US forces in the ROK, said he welcomed proposals by the Lee Myung-bak administration to strengthen the military alliance between the two countries. "Certainly the pronouncements of the new government here, with respect to the alliance, I think are very positive and reassuring and I know my government is heartened by it," Gen Bell told the BBC. He dismissed criticism by the DPRK of joint military exercises. "These are not aggressive exercises and North Korea knows that," he said. "North Korea

also exercises vigorously, it has just concluded a very significant winter training exercise, not publicised by North Korea and certainly no reporters were able to go up and cover that."

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8. ROK Government Reorganization

Korea Times (Jung Sung-ki, "ROLE OF UNIFICATION MINISTER DOWNGRADED", Seoul, 2008/03/09) reported that Cheong Wa Dae Saturday launched a new presidential coordination body on foreign and security affairs, replacing the previous National Security Council (NSC), officials of the presidential office said. The new coordination body reflects a major shift in the Lee Myung-bak government's policy priority from inter-Korean relations to international cooperation, as it is headed by the foreign minister, said experts on foreign affairs and the DPRK.

Members include the minister of foreign affairs and trade, minister of unification, minister of national defense, director of the National Intelligence Service and the top presidential secretary on foreign affairs and trade, an official stated.

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9. Koreans in Japan

Yonhap ("S. KOREA CALLS FOR SUFFRAGE OF KOREANS IN JAPAN", Seoul, 2008/03/10) reported that ROK Foreign Minister Yu Myung-hwan asked Japan on Monday to start a full-fledged campaign to grant suffrage to ethnic Koreans in Japan, ministry officials said. Yu delivered the request during his meeting with Akihiro Ota, president of the New Komeito, the third-largest party in Japan that is a ruling coalition partner of the Liberal Democratic Party. "It has been most active (among Japanese political parties) in dealing with the suffrage issue," a ministry official said, adding that Yu and Ota also discussed ways of improving ties between the neighboring nations.

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10. Japanese Whaling

Asahi Shimbun ("SEA SHEPHERD ATTACKS WHALING SHIP AGAIN", Tokyo, 2008/03/08) reported that activists aboard the anti-whaling vessel of the Sea Shepherd group hurled bottles and packets of white powder at the Nisshin Maru research whaling ship in Antarctic waters Friday. The bottles were filled with chemicals, officials said. Japan Coast Guard members aboard the Nisshin Maru issued radio warnings before responding with seven flash grenades, one of which landed on the deck of the Sea Shepherd's vessel. No one was injured, Japanese Fisheries Agency officials said. But a Sea Shepherd member said one activist was slightly injured.

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11. Taiwan Politics

Agence France-Presse (Benjamin Yeh, "TAIWAN PRESIDENTIAL RIVALS TRADE BARBS IN LAST

DEBATE", Taipei, 2008/03/10) reported that former Taipei mayor Ma Ying-jeou of the opposition Kuomintang and Frank Hsieh of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) on Sunday held their last head-to-head debate before the March 22 presidential vote. Ma pledged to revitalise the economy by allowing mainland Chinese to invest in the local property market, introducing more PRC tourists and launching direct transport links with the PRC. "I do agree on opening up chartered flights, allowing more Chinese tourists and things like that," Hsieh retorted, "but Taiwan's sovereignty must not be sacrificed." He said he was strongly opposed to Ma's proposal of a "common market" with the PRC and said that recognising PRC qualifications would threaten the jobs of Taiwanese workers. "No national leader should rest the hopes of his country on the 'goodwill' of another country," particularly one hostile to Taiwan, he added.

Los Angeles Times (Mark Magnier and Tsai Ting-I, "A LEGACY OF LOST HOPES IN TAIWAN", Hsichuang, 2008/03/10) reported that Taiwan President Chen Shui-bian's weak record and continued maneuvering have hurt Democratic Progressive Party candidate Frank Hsieh's prospects in the upcoming election. Shelley Rigger, a political science professor at Davidson College in North Carolina, likens the situation to a cartoon of Wile E. Coyote running off a cliff. Chen's people "assumed they had support from the Bush administration when they really didn't, and they kept on running," she said. "I'm not sure they've yet hit the bottom of the canyon."

Reuters ("CHINA-FRIENDLY MA LEADS TAIWAN PRE-ELECTION POLLS", Taipei, 2008/03/10) reported that Taiwan presidential candidate Ma Ying-jeou of the Nationalist Party (KMT) holds a big lead over rival Frank Hsieh, three polls published on Monday suggest. Ma, a former Taipei mayor, has 49 to 54 percent of voter support. The polls gave Hsieh, an ex-premier, support rates of 22 to 28 percent. "There are still 12 days left, and to say Hsieh is still behind Ma is believable, but that the gap being so big is something I'm not so sure about," said George Hou, a mass communications lecturer at I-Shou University in Taiwan.

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12. PRC Separatist Movements

Associated Press ("CREW SAID TO FOIL CHINA PLANE CRASH TRY", Beijing, 2008/03/09) reported that a flight crew prevented an apparent attempt to crash a China Southern Airlines flight Friday morning, an official said Sunday. The ncident occurred Friday morning shortly after the airplane left the far western city of Urumuqi at 10:35 a.m., said Nur Bekri, the governor of the Xinjiang region. He talked about the incident in a discussion about terrorism in Beijing on Sunday, but did not specify who was suspected to be behind the attempt, saying it remains under investigation.

Agence France-Presse ("SECRECY OBSCURES LEVEL OF 'TERROR' THREAT TO CHINA: EXPERTS", Beijing, 2008/03/10) reported that the PRC may be overstating the danger of the terrorism threat emanating from its Muslim-majority far northwest, experts said Monday. "When it comes to Xinjiang, the terrorist threat is not too serious. But of course you can't avoid it completely," said Zhang Jiadong, a counter-terrorism expert at Shanghai's Fudan University. "We don't have any other real evidence that I have seen," said James Millward of Georgetown University. "As to what's actually going on, whether there is an organised group, either a militant group or a potential terrorist group, or a separatist group, we only have Chinese reports to go on."

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13. PRC Tibet Development

Agence France-Presse ("CHINA PLANS 'MOST LUXURIOUS TRAIN IN THE WORLD' TO TIBET", Beijing, 2008/03/09) reported that the PRC will launch "the most luxurious train in the world" to ply the route from Beijing to Tibet's capital Lhasa, state media reported Sunday. However, a ride on the train, which will begin operations on September 1, will be about 20 times more expensive than the ordinary fare of about 2,000 yuan (280 dollars), Xinhua News Agency said.

Associated Press (Ashwini Bhatia, "TIBETANS LAUNCH ANTI-BEIJING PROTEST", Dharmsala, 2008/03/10) reported that hundreds of Tibetan exiles began a six-month march from India to Tibet on Monday to protest the PRC's hold on the Himalayan region and hosting of the Olympics. The march will be one of several protests around the world before the Aug. 8-24 Beijing Games, Tibetan exile groups said.

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II. Republic of Korea

14. Inter-Korean Sports Exchanges

Saegye Ilbo ("DPRK THAT ANNULLED 'SOCCER MATCH IN PYONGYANG' MUST CHANGE", 2008/03/10) wrote that it is difficult to understand the DPRK's cancellation of the inter-Korean soccer match in Pyongyan considering the general attitude of DPRK that has emphasized “between fellow Koreans.” It has shown its ideological rigidity in not accepting ROK as a legitimate government. It is a noteworthy fact that ROK, unyielding to the fact that the Pyongyang match has been annulled, has maintained its principle of “focusing on the sportsmanship regardless of ideology and politics” despite the one-way insistence of the DPRK. The DPRK must adhere to global regulations and respect the ROK. That is the way to earn treatment on global stage.

Donga Ilbo ("DPRK 'DIRTY PLAY' VIOLATING FIFA REGULATIONS", 2008/03/10) wrote that because the DPRK refused to hoist the ROK flag and to sing the ROK national anthem, the preliminary match between ROK and DPRK for 2010 World Cup is going to be held in Shanghai instead of Pyeongyang on March 26th. Whether the DPRK hoisting the DPRK flag and playing the DPRK national anthem should be allowed in the match held at Seoul on June 22 as if nothing has happened is to be reconsidered. The ROK must adhere to the attitude of not minding holding the match in another country instead in Seoul if the DPRK does not apologize and promise that such incidence would not occur again.

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Nautilus Institute
608 San Miguel Ave., Berkeley, CA 94707-1535 | Phone: (510) 423-0372 | Email: nautilus@nautilus.org