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Preceding NAPSNet Report

I. Napsnet

1. ROK on DPRK Nuclear Program

Associated Press (Kwang-tae Kim, "SKOREA EXPECTS NUCLEAR BREAKTHROUGH", Seoul, 2008/03/12) reported that the ROK expressed optimism Wednesday at the possibility of a breakthrough in international efforts to get the DPRK to declare its nuclear programs. "I expect a quick resolution of the declaration issue" and the resumption of the six-way talks, Foreign Minister Yu Myung-hwan told reporters. Yu said he was optimistic because "close consultations" were under way among chief nuclear negotiators from the six countries involved in the disarmament talks.

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2. US-ROK Relations

Associated Press (Jae-soon Chang, "SKOREAN LEADER TO HOLD SUMMIT WITH BUSH", Seoul, 2008/03/12) reported that ROK President Lee Myung-bak will visit the United States next month for his first face-to-face talks with US President George W. Bush. Lee will hold talks April 18-19 with Bush at Camp David, a statement from the Blue House said. The Camp David invitation "reflects the U.S. welcome and President Bush's personal trust" in Lee, said spokesman Lee Dong-kwan. "The summit is expected to serve as an opportunity to upgrade the South Korea-US alliance."

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3. ROK Military

Associated Press ("SKOREA'S LEE CALLS FOR BOLSTERING ARMY", Seoul, 2008/03/12) reported that the ROK president called Wednesday for beefing up the country's military and strengthening ties with the United States to deter any aggression from the DPRK. "Strengthening defense capability and becoming a strong army means we should win a war in the event it breaks out," Lee Myung-bak told top military leaders Wednesday. "Our greater role is to prevent a war," he added.

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4. Japan on Kyoto Protocol

Reuters ("JAPAN SEEKS TO DESIGN POST-KYOTO EMISSIONS-TRADING PROGRAM ", Tokyo, 2008/03/11) reported that Japan, one of the world's biggest emitters of greenhouse gases, wants to design an emissions trading program as soon as possible to help it fight climate change after the Kyoto Protocol expires in 2012. In a boost for its green credentials, Japan has started talks on introducing its own version of a cap-and-trade system with mandatory emission limits, a system already in place in Europe. Environment minister, Ichiro Kamoshita, said Japan would consider extra regulatory steps like an environment tax if there were a danger that the country would miss its Kyoto Protocol target of cutting emissions by 6 percent from 1990 levels over the period from 2008 to 2012.

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5. Japan Space Program

Reuters ("SPACE SHUTTLE ENDEAVOUR LAUNCHES WITH JAPANESE LAB", Cape Canaveral, 2008/03/11) reported that the U.S. space shuttle Endeavour blasted off from its Florida home port on Tuesday to deliver the first part of a huge Japanese laboratory to the International Space Station. In addition to a storage module for Japan's double-decker bus-sized Kibo space laboratory, the main part of which will be hoisted to space in late May, Endeavour is carrying a Canadian-built two-armed robotic system, called Dextre.

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6. Japan Whaling Issue

Associated Press ("TAKE ACTION AGAINST WHALING PROTESTERS: JAPAN", 2008/03/11) reported that Japan wants the Australian Government to take action against Paul Watson, Captain of the anti-whaling ship Steve Irwin. The captain, Paul Watson, says he was shot by the whalers during an altercation last week. Hideki Moronuki of Japan's Fisheries Agency denies any shots were fired and says the Australian Government should take action against the protesters.

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7. UNICEF on Japan Child Pornography Laws

Associated Press ("UNICEF CALLS ON JAPAN TO CRACK DOWN ON CHILD PORNOGRAPHY", Tokyo, 2008/03/11) reported that UNICEF called on Japan to ban possession of child pornography and crack down on animated films, comic books and computer games that show children being sexually exploited. The United Nations Children's Fund said Japan's 1999 child pornography law suffers from serious loopholes that hobble law enforcement and threaten children around the world.

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8. Russia-India Military Deal

Xinhua ("RUSSIA TO UPGRADE INDIAN MIG FIGHTERS", Moscow, 2008/03/11) reported that Russia's aircraft manufacturer MiGhas signed a contract with India to upgrade around 70 MiG-29 fighters. According to RIA Novosti, the contract for upgrading the MiG fighters belonging to the Indian Air Force was signed in Delhi on March 7, RIA quoted a spokesperson for the aircraft corporation as saying. The contract is worth around 1 billion U.S. dollars.

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9. Russia on WTO

Xinhua ("OFFICIAL: RUSSIA COULD JOIN WTO IN 2009", Moscow, 2008/03/11) reported that Russia is expected to complete negotiations on its accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) this summer and become a full member in 2009. RIA news agency reported Russia has been seeking membership of the WTO since 1993,has so far concluded bilateral talks with more than 60 WTO members. However, it still needs to complete talks with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Georgia.

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10. US on Russia Human Rights

Reuters ("U.S. EASES CRITICISM OF CHINA AND TARGETS RUSSIA", Washington, 2008/03/11) reported that the United States took aim at Russia in its annual report on human rights, accusing the government of corruption and electoral abuses, but seemed to ease criticism of the PRC ahead of the Olympic Games.

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11. US on PRC Military

Reuters ("TOP U.S. MILITARY OFFICER CONCERNED ABOUT CHINA ", Washington, 2008/03/11) reported that the top U.S. military officer in the Pacific voiced new concern on Tuesday about the PRC's rapidly growing military and said the United States has only a limited understanding of PRC military intentions. Navy Adm. Timothy Keating, commander of the U.S. Pacific Command, is the latest U.S. defense official to express misgivings about the growth of the PRC military. Beijing is planning a 17.6 percent increase in defense expenditures this year to 418 billion yuan ($59 billion), on top of a 17.8 percent increase last year. U.S. military spending is about $500 billion, not including war costs. "Sustaining stability across the Taiwan Strait is a top priority. Vital to preserving this current stability is a credible Taiwan self-defense capability," Keating said in written testimony released at a committee hearing.

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12. PRC on Protest in Tibet

Agence France-Presse ("CHINA SAYS BUDDHIST MONKS ARRESTED AFTER TIBET PROTEST", Beijing, 2008/03/11) reported that the PRC said it quashed a protest by Buddhist monks in the Tibetan capital Lhasa, amid reports that dozens were arrested for marking the anniversary of an uprising against Chinese rule. A Radio Free Asia report said up to 300 monks tried to march from Drepung monastery on the outskirts of Lhasa to the culturally symbolic Potala Palace in the city centre on Monday. "Yesterday afternoon some monks in Lhasa, abetted by a small handful of people, did some illegal things that challenged social stability," foreign ministry spokesman Qin Gang told reporters.

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13. PRC Inflation

Voice of America ("INFLATION HITS 12-YEAR HIGH IN CHINA", Hong Kong, 2008/03/11) reported that the PRC's inflation rate has hit its highest level in 12 years, following a continued rise in food costs. The PRC's leaders and political experts fear that inflation could spark unrest if it is not brought under control.

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14. Avian Flu

Reuters ("BIRD FLU SHOWS SIGNS OF MUTATION: CHINA EXPERT", Hong Kong, 2008/03/11) reported that a Chinese expert on respiratory diseases says the H5N1 bird flu virus has shown signs of mutation and urged vigilance at a time when seasonal human influenza is at a peak. Three Chinese have died this year of H5N1 bird flu and they were infected probably through contact with sick poultry. The World Health Organisation said there was no evidence of transmission between humans in all three cases. In Hong Kong, the government shut a primary school early ahead of the Easter holidays after one of its students, a 7-year-old boy, died at noon on Tuesday. The boy was admitted to hospital last week with flu-like symptoms and authorities are still trying to determine the cause of his illness.

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II. ROK Report

15. ROK Policy Toward DPRK

Kyunghyang Shinmun ("[EDITORIAL] LEE MUST SOLIDIFY HIS STANCE TOWARDS NORTH KOREA", Seoul, 2008/03/12) wrote that Tuesday's briefing at Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade by President Lee Myung-bak was rather abstract. It was as if Lee administration is taking on the role of a bystander or adopting the same strategy of "benign neglect" which Bush's first-term administration took towards the DPRK. Since sustaining the driving force is vital to foreign relations,

Lee must create plans to revive that same driving force formed by the previous Kim and Roh administrations. Instead of conceptual words, the Lee administration should come up with more concrete plans to promote peace in the Korean peninsula.

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16. DPRK Human Rights

Maeil Shinmun ("[EDITORIAL] DPRK HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES SHOULD BE CONTINUOUSLY DISCUSSED", Seoul, 2008/03/12) reported that the U.S. State Department's 2007 report that "DPRK is one of the 10 most systematic violators of human rights" shows that the DPRK violates human rights to a serious level. The past ROK administration has been avoiding DPRK's human rights issues in the international society. However, the new administration is approaching this matter from a different position that "human rights should be dealt with according to the standard of people's universal happiness." Human rights issues should be continuously discussed and taken into consideration along with economic cooperation and security matters. In other words, although it might risk the North-South relationship, it should be dealt in the right way.

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17. US-ROK Alliance

Hankook Ilbo ("[EDITORIAL] LEE STRESSES 'NATIONAL INTERESTS WITHIN ALLIANCE'", Seoul, 2008/03/12) wrote that Tuesday in the briefings at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Present Lee Myung-bak adopted the practical diplomatic line that there is no alliance without national interests. He especially stressed innovative, practical diplomacy that would help the ROK's national interests to meet those of the U.S. In the near future, the ROK and the U.S. must find the tangent of their national interests. This also applies to the North-South relationship. Lee requested a more positive attitude such as "shuttle diplomacy" toward the DPRK rather than avoiding it. President Lee needs to come up with a creative idea and approach in order to achieve "innovative, practical diplomacy."

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