NAPSNet Daily Report 12 March, 2009

Recommended Citation

"NAPSNet Daily Report 12 March, 2009", NAPSNet Daily Report, March 12, 2009, https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-daily-report/napsnet-daily-report-12-march-2009/

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Preceding NAPSNet Report

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I. NAPSNet

1. DPRK Missile Program

Bloomberg (Michael Heath and Heejin Koo, "NORTH KOREA ROCKET WOULD BREAK UN RESOLUTION, YU SAYS", Seoul, 2009/03/11) reported that the ROK said any DPRK rocket launch would violate a United Nations resolution whether the communist state fires a ballistic missile or sends a satellite into space. "The two operate on very similar technology," ROK Foreign Minister Yu Myung Hwan said in an interview after speaking at a seminar in Seoul today. The resolution, adopted after the DPRK tested the nuclear device, demands the DPRK "not conduct any further nuclear test or launch of a ballistic missile."

Bloomberg (Michael Heath, "NORTH KOREA PLANS SPACE LAUNCH, U.S. INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL SAYS", Washington D.C., 2009/03/11) reported that the DPRK is planning a space launch, the director of U.S. National Intelligence told lawmakers, after American and ROK officials said the communist state is preparing to test-fire a ballistic missile. "The North Koreans announced that they were going to do a space launch and I believe that that's what they intend," Dennis Blair told the Senate Armed Services Committee in Washington yesterday. "I could be wrong, but that would be my estimate." The technology for a space launch "is indistinguishable from an intercontinental ballistic missile," Blair said, according to a government transcript. If the "three-stage space- launch vehicle works" it could technically reach the U.S. mainland, he added.

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2. DPRK on US-ROK Military Exercise

Reuters (Jack Kim, "NORTH KOREA ACCUSES U.S. OF PLOTTING ATTACK", Seoul, 2009/03/11) reported that the DPRK's Foreign Ministry on Wednesday accused the United States of preparing for a war against the communist state in Pyongyang's first verbal criticism of the Obama Administration. A ministry spokesman said military drills taking place between U.S. and ROK forces were "nuclear war exercises designed to mount a preemptive attack on the DPRK." The comments came as Russia and the PRC said that they were also concerned about rising tensions on the Korean peninsula . A

DPRK news article said that inter-Korean relations had reached their worst phase and the situation had grown so tense that "a war may break out any moment due to the reckless policy of confrontation" pursued by the ROK .

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3. Inter-Korean Relations

Chosun Ilbo ("N. KOREA REOPENS BORDER", 2009/03/11) reported that the DPRK Tuesday reopened the border only a day after it virtually detained 620 ROK citizens, but uncertainty lingers as the sole military communications line between the two Koreas remains cut off. "Nobody knows when North Korea will ban overland travel again under whatever pretext," an ROK official said. The official, Mr. Kim, added that, "We strongly protested to the North, which responded" by letting the ROK citizens return home, most from the Kaesong Industrial Complex, where they had been stranded.

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4. DPRK Government

Kyodo News ("N. KOREAN ELECTION REPLACES 43.5% OF DELEGATES IN PARLIAMENT", Beijing, 2009/03/11) reported that Sunday's election of the DPRK's Supreme People's Assembly, the country's parliament, has replaced just under half of its 687 members, a Tokyo-based organization monitoring DPRK media said Wednesday. Radiopress said its analysis showed a total of 299 of the delegates on the list of those elected were new to the assembly's seats, while 367, or 53.4 percent, were reelected.

Financial Times (Christian Oliver and Kang Buseong, "N KOREAN HARDLINES TO HANDLE POLICY ON SOUTH", Seoul, 2009/03/11) reported that Kim Jong-il, DPRK's leader, is bringing in a cadre of hardliners to deal with policy towards Seoul, results from Sunday's election showed. Kim Yong-hyun, a professor at Dongguk University, identified hardliners among the new faces in the Supreme People's Assembly, and noted that supposed moderates had disappeared. "North Korea's reshuffling of people who deal with the South illustrates how strained relations are," he said, adding that the removal of Kwon Ho-woong, a well-known figure in Inter-Korean diplomatic talks, was particularly telling.

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5. DPRK Human Rights

JoongAng Daily (Ser Myo-ja, "SURVEY: 76% OF NORTH DEFECTORS SAW EXECUTIONS", Seoul, 2009/03/12) reported that seventy-six percent of surveyed DPRK defectors say they have witnessed public executions in their homeland, the ROK's National Human Rights Commission said yesterday. The rights watchdog released the latest report on the human rights situation in the DPRK based on interviews of defectors who escaped the country during the past two years. However, defectors say the frequency of executions has gone down since 2000, according to the report. DPRK citizens' right to food was also violated, the report said. Fifty-eight percent of the defectors said they had witnessed death from hunger, while another 39 percent said they had heard about such deaths.

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6. ROK-US Trade Relations

Chosun Ilbo ("FTA WITH SEOUL UNACCEPTABLE, SAYS U.S. NOMINEE", Washington D.C., 2009/03/11) reported that U.S. trade representative-designate Ron Kirk on Monday said Washington's free trade agreement with Seoul was unfair in its current state and warned his government could ditch the deal. The FTA "as it is just simply isn't fair, and if we don't get that right we'll be prepared to step away from that," Ron Kirk said in his confirmation hearing at the U.S. Senate Finance Committee. But despite Kirk's strong hint at the need for renegotiation, the ROK government on Tuesday warned against stretching the meaning of his remarks, saying it has been advised of no official view from the U.S. government.

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7. ROK-Jordan Nuclear Cooperation

Reuters ("S. KOREA TAKES LEAD FOR JORDAN NUCLEAR PLANT DEAL - REPORT", 2009/03/11) reported that the ROK has taken the lead in talks to sell Jordan a nuclear power plant through a private deal without a formal bidding process, which would be its first such export deal, local media reported on Wednesday citing a top executive. "Jordan's No.1 nuclear power plant (project) is leaning towards a private deal with South Korea without a public bid," Kim Ssang-soo, the chief executive officer of state-run Korea Electric Power Corp (KEPCO), was quoted as saying during his trip to Amman. Jordan, which does not produce any crude oil of its own, plans to increase its use of nuclear power to about 30 percent of total power generation by 2040.

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8. ROK Stem Cell Research

Korea Times (Kim Tong-hyung, "KOREA TO JOIN STEM CELL RACE", Seoul,) reported that in response to new U.S. government policy lifting their country's restrictions on federal funding for new stem cell research, ROK regulators are feeling increasing pressure to do the same for researchers here. In the past, the ROK has been reluctant to support local scientists for research into cloned human stem cells. The National Bioethics Committee last month delayed its decision over whether to allow the Seoul-based Cha Medical Center to conduct research on embryonic stem cells created from cloned human embryos. But this month, the committee will likely say "yes," according to officials at the Ministry of Health and Welfare.

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9. ROK Olympic Bid

Associated Press ("BUSAN, SOUTH KOREA ANNOUNCES BID FOR 2020 OLYMPICS", Seoul, 2009/03/11) reported that the ROK city of Busan has announced its intention to bid for the 2020 Summer Olympics. Jeong Jin-hak, an official of Busan Metropolitan City, said the formal application is due in 2011. The host will be announced in 2013. But he said Busan will drop the plan if the ROK

city of Pyeongchang wins the right to host the 2018 Winter Olympics after two failed attempts. The winning bid for the 2018 Winter Games will be decided in 2011.

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10. Japan SDF Indian Ocean Mission

Agence France-Presse (Hiroshi Hiyama, "JAPAN WARSHIPTS TO GO ON SOMALIA ANTI-PIRACY MISSION", Tokyo, 2009/03/11) reported that Japan is expected to send two warships Saturday to pirate-infested waters off Somalia as the government tries to push through legislation to allow its forces more scope for armed response . Two destroyers will set sail for the world's most dangerous waters near the Gulf of Aden where US, European and PRC vessels have already been deployed to fend off pirates who attacked more than 100 ships last year. The bill proposes allowing forces to open fire on threatening pirate vessels that do not obey repeated orders to stop. It would also allow them for the first time to protect non-Japanese vessels, citizens and cargo from pirates.

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11. Japan Weapons Ban

Mainichi Daily News ("GOV'T GIVES GREEN LIGHT TO BILL BANNING PRODUCTION, POSSESSION OF CLUSTER BOMBS", Tokyo, 2009/03/11) reported that the Japanese government approved a bill to ban the production and possession of cluster bombs at a Cabinet meeting on Tuesday.The bill is aimed at implementing the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM), which Japan and other countries signed in December last year. The government is aiming to enact the bill and ratify the convention during the current Diet session. The latest development suggests that Japan wants to make a global impression with active involvement in arms reduction by heralding a move to implement the convention among industrialized nations.

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12. Japan Economy

Asahi Shimbun ("OVER 1,300 BANKRUPTCIES IN FEBRUARY", Tokyo, 2009/03/11) reported that in February, 1,318 Japanese companies with liabilities of more than 10 million yen each declared bankruptcy, according to Tokyo Shoko Research Ltd. The figure for February topped the 1,300-mark for the first time in six years. The figure was 10.4 percent higher than the same month a year ago, and marked the ninth consecutive month of year-on-year increases in bankruptcies. Debts for February totaled 1.229 trillion yen, the third-highest seen for the same month since World War II. The February figure brought bankruptcies so far in fiscal 2008, which ends March 31, to 14,609, the research firm said Monday.

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13. PRC-Algeria Relations

Financial Times (Eileen Byrne, "ALGERIA TURNS TO CHINESE KNOWHOW", Algiers, 2009/03/11)

reported that as the PRC seeks to expand its presence in Africa, it is looking north to Algeria, with which it has historic ties of friendship. The PRC is also increasing its outreach through the construction of engineering projects, including water supply works, airport terminals, university facilities and upgrades to the power infrastructure, with a strong emphasis on housing. The Algeria government has been in a hurry to use the proceeds from oil and gas exports to modernise the country's infrastructure, aiming to spend about $200bn (€157bn, £144bn) on such projects by the end of 2009, and has turned to PRC knowhow to get things done fast.

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14. Sino-US Relations

Associated Press (Foster Klug, "TOP US, CHINA DIPLOMATS WORK TO SMOOTH RELATIONS", Washington D.C., 2009/03/11) reported that the top U.S. and PRC diplomats have work to do to keep a confrontation between American and PRC naval vessels from damaging a relationship that President Barack Obama deems crucial to confronting the world's toughest crises. Even if diplomatic efforts by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and PRC Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi are successful in toning down the dispute — the two were scheduled to meet Wednesday in Washington — they may ease anger only temporarily over a larger military disagreement. Jonathan Pollack, professor of Asian studies at the U.S. Naval War College, suggested that without stronger military-to-military links, the potential for "something ugly" happening "should not be minimized."

New York Times (Thom Shanker and Mark Mazzetti, "CHINA AND U.S. CLASH ON NAVAL FRACAS", Washington D.C., 2009/03/11) reported that the confrontation between a United States naval vessel and five PRC ships is the "most serious" military dispute between the countries since a midair collision in 2001 forced an American surveillance plane to land on Hainan island, the director of national intelligence, Dennis C. Blair, said Tuesday before the Senate Armed Services Committee. In Beijing, Ma Zhaoxu, a Foreign Ministry spokesman, said "The U.S. claims are gravely in contravention of the facts and confuse black and white, and they are totally unacceptable to China." He did not specify what laws that PRC contended the American ship had broken. Mr. Blair said at the Senate hearing that the PRC "seem to be more militarily aggressive" in general.

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15. US on PRC Tibet Issue

Bloomberg (Viola Gienger, "U.S. CALLS ON CHINA TO RECONSIDER ITS TIBET POLICIES", Washington D.C., 2009/03/11) reported that the U.S. urged the PRC to reconsider its policies in Tibet, saying they have created tensions and had a "harmful impact" on religion and culture in the region. In a statement marking the 50th anniversary of a Tibetan uprising yesterday, the State Department said it is "deeply concerned by the human rights situation in Tibetan areas." Talks between the government in Beijing and representatives of the Dalai Lama could help achieve "true and lasting stability" in the region, acting spokesman Robert Wood said in the statement. The U.S respects the PRC's territorial integrity and considers Tibet to be a part of the PRC, he said.

Reuters (Nick Macfie, "CHINA DENOUNCES U.S. CRITICISM OF ITS RULE IN TIBET", Beijing, 2009/03/11) reported that the PRC denounced the United States on Wednesday for criticizing its rule of Tibet and calling for dialogue with the Dalai Lama , who 50 years ago fled the Himalayan

plateau after a failed uprising against Beijing's rule. The PRC brands the Dalai Lama a separatist, a charge the Buddhist monk denies. "We express our strong displeasure and adamant opposition to this, and we have made stern representations to the U.S. side," PRC Foreign Ministry spokesman Ma Zhaoxu said on the ministry website __ .

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16. PRC Tibet Issue

Associated Press (Audra Ang, "CHINA PILLORIES US OVER TIBET, EXTENDS TRAVEL BAN", Ya'an, PRC, 2009/03/11) reported that the PRC pilloried the Dalai Lama on Wednesday and criticized the United States for suggesting Beijing talk to the exiled Tibetan leader, as authorities further tightened security to prevent unrest during a volatile anniversary period. A ban on foreigners traveling to Tibetan areas was widened to include the remote Jiuzhaigou valley this month. And paramilitary police forces, a constant presence in Tibet and surrounding provinces since last year's protests, have poured into the area in larger numbers, ringing it with checkpoints.

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17. PRC Maritime Surveillance

Xinhua News ("CHINA'S LARGEST FISHERY PATROL SHIP STARTS MISSION", Guangzhou, 2009/03/11) reported that the PRC's largest fishery patrol ship has started its way to the Xisha Islands to enhance the fishery protection and maritime surveillance efforts in the South China Sea. The ship, China Yuzheng 311, sailed at midday Tuesday from Guangzhou. Yang Jian, a Ministry of Agriculture engineer, said given the country's heavy task of maritime rights and interests protection, the vessel would reinforce the fishery administration in the South China Sea.

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18. PRC Economy

Associated Press (Joe McDonald, "CHINA'S EXPORTS PLUNGE AGAIN, BUT CAR SALES RISE", Beijing, 2009/03/11) reported that the decline in the PRC's exports accelerated in February, but Asia's bleak picture was tempered by other news Wednesday of a jump in PRC auto sales and a smaller-than-expected drop in Japanese machinery orders. PRC trade figures highlighted again the region's dependence on Western consumers. Exports in February plunged 25.7 percent from a year earlier, worse than January's 17.5 percent decline, according to customs data. The PRC's trade surplus narrowed to $4.8 billion in February as exports fell to $64.8 billion and imports dropped to $60 billion. Its politically sensitive trade gaps with the United States and Europe also shrank.

Bloomberg ("CHINA'S INVESTMENT SURGES 26.5% AS EXPORTS PLUNGE", 2009/03/11) reported that the PRC's investment spending surged as the nation poured money into roads, railways and power grids to counter a plunge in exports, which a separate report showed fell by a record in February. Urban fixed-asset investment climbed a more-than-estimated 26.5 percent in January and February combined to 1.03 trillion yuan ($150 billion) from a year earlier, the statistics bureau said today in Beijing. Premier Wen Jiabao’s 4 trillion yuan package of tax cuts and infrastructure spending may help him to achieve a target of 8 percent economic growth this year even as world

trade collapses. Signs of a PRC recovery, including a surge in lending and gains in power consumption, have powered a 17 percent gain in the Shanghai Composite Index in 2009.

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19. PRC Unemployment

Shanghai Daily (Li Xiran, "NATION IN 'GRAVE' EMPLOYMENT SITUATION", Shanghai, 2009/03/11) reported that the PRC faces a "grave" employment situation, but government measures to boost payrolls are taking "initial effect," Yin Weimin, minister of Human Resources and Social Security, said yesterday. The country has experienced a big drop in employment overall, a large number of migrant workers have lost their jobs, and labor-intensive industries are a major victim of the global financial downturn, he told a news conference on the sidelines of the national legislature's annual session. Yin also said that 11 million migrant workers were still unemployed after the Spring Festival, while the registered unemployment ratio in urban areas has reached 4.2 percent, the highest in the past three years.

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II. PRC Report

20. PRC Environment

Daily Economic News (Zhu Xiaowen, "ECO ACTION STAGE UNVEILED IN BEIJING", 2009/03/11) reported that Eco Action Stage is an advanced interactive environmental protection facility, firstly introduced from Japan by Panasonic Center Beijing. By manual operation on the Warming Earth Simulator, people can see the temperature changes of the earth before and after 150 years. People can also leave a message on a piece of leaf of “environmental protection tree," to record their own environmental protection way or wish. Now people can go to Panasonic Center Beijing located in Beijing Xinguang Shopping Mall to experience it.

Xinhua Net ("ENVIRONMENTAL NGO CALLS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUPERVISION ON 4000 BILLION RMB INVESTMENT", 2009/03/10) reported that Friends of Nature appealed to the representatives of the two sessions yesterday that the environmental supervision of the 4000 billion RMB investment should be enhanced. Firstly, high energy consuming industry without vitality shouldn’t be protected. Secondly, environmental impact evaluation of the invested projects should be strictly carried out and the result should be open to the public in a timely manner. Thirdly, public feedback should be considered seriously. Fourthly, the accountability of environmental supervision sectors should be strengthened.

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