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Preceding NAPSNet Report

I. Napsnet

1. DPRK Nuclear Program

Agence France-Presse (William French, "US SEES NO BREAKTHROUGH IN NKOREA NUCLEAR TALKS", Geneva, 2008/03/14) reported that DPRK and US negotiators failed to reach any breakthrough in talks on Pyongyang's nuclear program and do not plan to resume negotiations Friday, the chief US negotiator said. "It was good consultations but we are not there yet," Christopher Hill told journalists late Thursday outside the US mission in Geneva after meeting his DPRK counterpart Kim Gye-gwan. "We are going to report to our capitals," he said.

Agence France-Presse ("US MULLS NEW STATEMENT TO BREAK NORTH KOREA DEADLOCK", Washington, 2008/03/12) reported that the United States is looking for a flexible way to unblock the Six Party talks without letting the DPRK off the hook of full disclosure. One option set to be discussed at talks in Geneva Thursday is a separate declaration, addressing US concerns that the DPRK has been secretly exporting nuclear technology to Syria, a diplomatic source said. That would enable fuller six-party talks to resume, the source said, putting renewed pressure on the DPRK to come clean on the full extent of its publicly disclosed nuclear program.

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2. ROK on Six Party Deadlock

Voice of America ("SEOUL URGES N. KOREA NUCLEAR NEGOTIATORS TO PRESERVE 'MOMENTUM'", 2008/03/12) reported that the ROK's newly appointed foreign minister says he is

concerned the six-nation talks may lose "momentum." However, officials in Seoul are optimistic a one-on-one meeting this week between North Korean and American negotiators may produce progress.

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3. USFK on DPRK Nuclear Proliferation

Korea Times ("'ZERO PROLIFERATION OF N. KOREAN MISSILE TECHNOLOGY'", 2008/03/14) reported that Gen. B. B. Bell, commander of the U.S. Forces Korea (USFK), said that the DPRK practically stopped exporting missile technology since 2005. The commander did however expressed concern over Pyongyang's advanced missile capabilities. Bell's comments were in stark contrast to those of U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney's the same day, which criticized Pyongyang for proliferating its ballistic missile technology to "rogue regimes" such as Iran and Syria.

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4. DPRK Human Rights

Yonhap ("N. KOREA DENOUNCES U.N. SPECIAL REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS", Geneva, 2008/03/14) reported that the DPRK on Thursday offered an angry denial of a U.N. envoy's report on the communist state's human rights situation. Vitit Muntarbhorn, a U.N. special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK, criticized the country for "appalling" prison conditions and "extensive use of torture and public executions" in his report to a meeting of the U.N. Human Rights Council here. Nowhere in the report exists truth," Kim Yong-ho, a senior official at the North's foreign ministry, said in his speech responding to Muntarborn's statement.

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5. ROK on New Inter-Korean Industrial Complex

Xinhua ("S KOREA TO SEEK NEW INTER-KOREAN INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX", Seoul, 2008/03/13) reported that the ROK government has organized a task force to seek the possibility of setting up a new inter-Korean joint industrial complex in the demilitarized zone bisecting the two Koreas. The creation of a large artificial island in an estuary of the Han River, which draws a western sea border between the Koreas, to use as a second joint industrial complex was one of President Lee Myung-bak's presidential election campaign pledges.

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6. DPRK Tourism

Korea Herald ("GOLF IN PYONGYANG", Seoul, 2008/03/14) reported that ROK citizens may soon be able to book a golf tour to Pyongyang, thanks to the efforts of Seoul-based PyeongHwa Group. Park Se-jin, manager of PyeongHwa Air Travel Agency Corp., the travel business arm of the group, said talks are now underway to allow golf package tours to the DPRK capital. "We are currently in the very early stages of the talks," Park said. "We wish the tours could begin as soon as June, but I don't

think it is possible at this stage of the discussions," he added.

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7. ROK Oil Spill

Agence France-Presse ("SOUTH KOREA OIL SPILL DEVASTATES MARINE LIFE: OFFICIAL REPORT", Seoul,) reported that the ROK's worst oil spill has devastated marine life, halving the number of sea plants and mollusks found off the western coast. Scores of marine farms and beaches were devastated and three people in Taean killed themselves in frustration over delays in compensation. The oil leak also threatened the underwater food chain, endangering fish and sea birds, the Environment Ministry report said. Hong Kong-registered supertanker Hebei Spirit spilled 10,900 tons of crude after it was rammed by a Samsung Heavy Industries barge in rough seas off Taean county on December 7.

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8. Lee Visit to US, Japan

Xinhua ("S.KOREAN PRESIDENT TO VISIT U.S., JAPAN IN MID-APRIL", Seoul, 2008/03/12) reported that ROK President Lee Myung-bak is scheduled to visit the United States and Japan in mid-April. Lee will visit the United States from April 15 to 19 for a summit with U.S. President George W. Bush at Camp David and visit Japan from April 20 to 21 for summit talks with Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda, the Presidential Office said. "At talks with Bush, Lee will propose value alliance and seek future-oriented strategic partnership with the U.S. (At talks with Fukuda, they) will discuss ways to promote bilateral relations, resume shuttle diplomacy and strengthen two-way cooperation in environment, energy and other global issues," said a spokesperson.

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9. ROK-PRC Relations

Xinhua ("ROK FOREIGN MINISTER TO VISIT CHINA", Beijing, 2008/03/13) reported that the ROK Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Yu Myung-hwan is to pay an official visit to the PRC from March 20 to 22 at the invitation of Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi.

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10. Japan-PRC Relations

Reuters ("CHINA, JAPAN TO EXCHANGE FOOD SAFETY EXPERTS", Beijing, 2008/03/13) reported that the PRC and Japan will exchange teams of food safety experts and investigators in a bid to clear up a disagreement over Chinese-made dumplings that left 10 people sick in Japan. No one has died from the poisoned food but the case has stirred intense media coverage in Japan and threatened to strain ties between the two countries ahead of a visit by PRC President Hu Jintao to Japan in coming months.

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11. Japan Economy

Bloomberg ("JAPAN'S PROFITS ARE BEING SQUEEZED BY SURGING YEN, OTA SAYS", 2008/03/13) reported that a rising yen and record energy prices are starting to weigh on corporate earnings, Economic and Fiscal Policy Minister Hiroko Ota said after Japan's currency rose to a 12-year high and crude oil exceeded $110 a barrel. "The dollar's weakness, the yen's strength and rising crude oil prices are beginning to have an impact on corporate earnings," Ota said in parliament in Tokyo today. "The probability of Japan going into a recession is very high,'' said Yoshimasa Maruyama, a senior economist at BNP Paribas in Tokyo. "If oil and the yen stay at this level, that will squeeze corporate profits."

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12. Comfort Women Issue

Asahi Shimbun (Aya Kamila, "PHILIIPPINES TO SEEK 'COMFORT WOMEN' APOLOGY", Manila, 2008/03/14) reported that the Philippine parliament is expected to pass a resolution within days calling for a formal apology and compensation from Japan for forcing Filipino women to provide sex to Japanese soldiers during World War II. The resolution, the first of its kind by the Philippines, was approved unanimously by the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives on Tuesday.

Yomiuri ("JOINT STATEMENT PLANNED DURING HU'S VISIT", Tokyo, 2008/03/13) reported that the Japanese and PRC governments plan to release a political statement on achievements made during talks between Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda and PRC President Hu Jintao during Hu's visit to Japan, expected to take place in May, government sources said. The envisioned joint statement will spell out the two governments' determination to develop mutually beneficial strategic relations and declare that the two countries have entered a new stage that would facilitate international cooperation in East Asia, in addition to improving bilateral relations.

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13. Taiwan Politics

Washington Post (Jane Rickards, "TAIWAN REFERENDUM FACES BOYCOTT", Taipei, 2008/03/13) reported that Nationalist Party, called on its supporters Wednesday to boycott a government-sponsored referendum asking whether the island should apply for UN membership under the name Taiwan. On Wednesday, Nationalist Party Chairman Wu Po-hsiung warned that the referendum "would create immeasurable damage to the situation in the Taiwan Strait. It has aroused strong opposition in the international community, which views it as a serious provocation involving changing the nation's name and status quo. This would make Taiwan even more isolated and marginalized internationally, impacting the security and interests of our 23 million compatriots."

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14. PRC Pollution

Reuters ("CHINA'S EMISSIONS SEEN RISING FASTER THAN THOUGHT", Hong Kong, 2008/03/13) reported that the PRC is producing far more carbon dioxide than previous estimates and this will frustrate global aims to stabilize atmospheric greenhouse gases, a group of U.S. economists said. Researchers at the University of California, Berkeley, and UC San Diego said the PRC's CO2 emissions will grow at least 11 percent annually between 2004 and 2010. The PRC is the world's second-largest emitter of CO2 and some studies suggest it might already have overtaken the United States last year. The report could add to calls for China to sign up to binding cuts, something it has refused to do.

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15. Protest for Tibet

Asia Times ("CHINA INTENSIFIES TIBET MONASTERIES SIEGE", Beijing, 2008/03/13) reported that demonstraters were arrested in India as they tried to march in solidarity with monks under siege in Tibet. Beijing laid siege to at least three monasteries in Tibet today, leaving monks trapped with dwindling food supplies, as the biggest anti-Chinese demonstrations in nearly two decades intensified.

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16. PRC on US Human Rights

Canwest ("CHINA ACCUSES U.S. OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS", Shanghai, 2008/03/13) reported that the PRC released a lengthy report alleging a raft of human rights abuses in and by the United States. The paper meticulously documents a rise in violent crime in the US and increases in prisoner abuse, racial discrimination and child poverty, plus a myriad other human rights violations allegedly committed by Americans in the execution of both the Iraq war and the war on terrorism.

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17. Russia on US Human Rights

Bloomberg ("RUSSIA ACCUSES U.S. OF DOUBLE STANDARDS ON RIGHTS", 2008/03/13) reported that Russia said the U.S. State Department's "latest opus'' on human rights reflects the double standards of a country that uses the issue as a foreign policy tool while failing to examine its own actions. The Foreign Ministry said in a statement it rejects criticism of Russia's human rights record from a country that "has in effect legalized torture, uses capital punishment on minors and denies responsibility for war crimes and human rights violations in Iraq and Afghanistan."

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18. Russia on Projects Under Kyoto

Reuters ("RUSSIA SAYS WILL BE STRICT APPROVING KYOTO PROJECTS", Moscow, 2008/03/13) reported that foreign firms seeking to make money in Russia under the Kyoto Protocol will not have an easy time getting approval from the Russian state. Deputy Economy Minister Vsevolod Gavrilov, the official in charge of Kyoto implementation in Russia said there were now 60 of these projects under development in Russia, funded by tens of millions of dollars from foreign investors who have waited nearly two years for the green light from the state.

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19. US-Russia Talks on Missile Defense

Xinhua ("U.S. TRIES AGAIN TO WIN RUSSIA'S CONSENT TO MISSILE SHIELD", Beijing, 2008/03/13) reported that U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Defense Secretary Robert Gates will try to seek cooperation with Russia during their visit to the country on March 17-18. The visit was arranged a few days after Washington concluded separate talks with Poland and the Czech Republic over the controversial missile shield, and reportedly made some progress in pushing through its missile defense system plans in Europe. The United States plans to base radar units in the Czech Republic and 10 missile interceptors in Poland as part of its attempts to extend the missile defense system to Europe. Russia strongly opposes the plan, saying it poses a threat to its security. The United States says the system is aimed at states and groups in the Middle East that are seeking weapons of mass destruction, not against Russia.

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20. Russia-PRC Relations

Reuters ("RUSSIA'S PUTIN VOWS CLOSE CHINA TIES UNDER MEDVEDEV", Moscow, 2008/03/13) reported thatRussian president Vladimir Putin promised the PRC that Moscow would maintain its strong ties with Beijing under his successor, Dmitry Medvedev. Russia is eager to boost exports of oil, gas and nuclear products to the PRC, the world's second biggest consumer of oil and power, though the PRC’s growing world clout is watched with some anxiety by Moscow's elite. PRC, set to overtake Germany as the world's third biggest economy, is Russia's number two trading partner after the European Union with $35 billion in 2007 bilateral trade.

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II. ROK Report

21. DPRK Nuclear Program

Kookmin Ilbo ("NUCLEAR COMPROMISE BETWEEN DPRK-US MUST NOT BE AMBIGUOUS", 2008/03/13) wrote that the head representatives of the six-party talks from the DPRK and US were to have talks between the two on the issue of DPRK nuclear report. Although China has proposed a compromised plan for report, as the plan is not a resolution but a remedy, it is not appropriate. Considering that reporting is directly related to verification, having an ambiguous remedy cannot guarantee the complete abandonment of nuclear in DPRK. DPRK must also clean all its suspicion.

They must prove for themselves of the topic instead of asserting that UEP does not exist or not saying anything about the nuclear proliferation.

Hankyoreh ("TENSE NUCLEAR COMPROMISE BETWEEN DPRK AND US, ROK UNOCCUPIED", 2008/03/13) wrote that the DPRK, in any way possible, must clearly explain the UEP and rumor of cooperation in developing a nuclear program with other countries. In response, the US should clearly suggest removing the DPRK as a terrorist-support nation and the termination date of Trading with the Enemy act. In contrast to the DPRK-US relation in crisis, ROK government is nothing but occupied. The new administration must not give up on playing a leading role in deciding cases related to the Korean Peninsula because it is so much obsessed with differentiating itself from the old regime.

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22. DPRK Internal Situation

Good Friends ("SUSPENSION ON FOOD DISTRIBUTION FROM MARCH IN SOME AREAS IN PYONYANG", 2008/03/14) reported that some areas of Pyongyang City have decided to suspend their food distribution from March. In Pyonyang, there are rumors that if low-food situation spreads nationwide until May when plants start growing, different diseases will rage and people will die of hunger. It is difficult to find food even in Pyeongsung market.

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23. ROK-US Relation

Korea Institute for Future Strategies (Lee Kang-Roh, "PREDICTION FOR ROK-US RELATIONS AND INAUGURATION OF LEE MYUNG-BAK ADMINISTRATION", 2008/03/13) carried an article by a professor of the school of law and police administration of JeonJu University, who wrote that the overall ROK-US relations including security and economy is predicted to be amiable thanks to the inauguration of the Lee Myung-bak administration. However, if the Democratic Party wins in the November Presidential election, conflict of a certain degree is expected in economic issues, including US-ROK FTA ratification. Also, a domestic criticism on “autonomy” issues will rise if Lee Myung-bak administration fails to retain the national benefit of ROK while maintaining one-way amity toward the US.

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