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CONTENTS

I. United States

1. Iraq Japanese Hostage Recovery
2. ROK Parliamentary Election
3. US on DPRK Nuclear Program
4. ROK-US Relations
5. DPRK Japan Abduction Reunion
6. Hong Kong Democratic Reform
7. DPRK British Brewery

I. United States

1. Iraq Japanese Hostage Recovery

Agence France-Presse ("FREED JAPANESE HOSTAGES RECOVER IN DUBAI FROM THEIR IRAQ ORDEAL," 04/17/04) reported that three Japanese held hostage in Iraq for a week were resting in Dubai Friday night from their ordeal after arriving in the Gulf emirate to an emotional welcome from Japanese reporters who got only a glimpse of them Noriaki Imai, 18, Nahoko Takato, 34, and Soichiro Koriyama, 32, were undergoing medical check-ups at the American Hospital here and reported to be "relatively fine" by the Japanese official who headed a Amman-based task force in charge of seeking their release. Senior Vice Foreign Minister Ichiro Aisawa, who will fly back to Japan with the three, told reporters he would be replaced by parliamentary secretary for foreign affairs Kazunori Tanaka as head of the crisis cell, which is trying to establish the whereabouts of two other Japanese citizens missing in Iraq. Aisawa gave little away about the circumstances of the April 8 abduction of the three or of their release, but he said the Japanese charge d'affaires in Baghdad received a call from an unidentified Iraqi on Thursday afternoon telling him embassy officials should go and pick up the trio at a mosque.

Agence France-Presse ("RELEASED JAPANESE HOSTAGES WANT TO STAY IN IRAQ," 04/16/04)

reported that two of the three Japanese hostages released in Iraq have said they want to stay in the troubled nation, prompting disbelief and exasperation among relatives and politicians. Moments after she was released by a militant group, volunteer worker Nahoko Takato, 34, said on the Arab satellite television station Al-Jazeera that she wanted to continue her volunteer work in Iraq. Another released hostage, photojournalist Soichiro Koriyama, 32, told his family he wished to stay to document the war-torn nation, relatives told reporters. "I will continue (my work in Iraq)," Takato said in an interview conducted shortly after she was released. Takato went to Iraq as an unaffiliated volunteer, distributing medicines to Iraqi people and helping street children. "(The kidnappers) did things to me that I did not like. But I cannot hate the Iraqi people," she said, wiping away tears. In the same Al-Jazeera footage, released in Japan on Friday, Koriyama was seen smiling, snapping photos of Takato and the other released hostage Noriaki Imai, 18, and telling them: "My job is to shoot (pictures)." It was not immediately clear if the two former hostages were refusing to return to Japan. The government said the hostages were due to fly to Dubai Friday to meet Senior Vice Foreign Minister Ichiro Aisawa before heading home.

2. ROK Parliamentary Election

Reuters (Martin Nesirky, "SOUTH KOREA ENTERS NEW POLITICAL ERA AFTER ELECTION," 04/16/04) reported that the ROK began a new political era on Friday after a liberal party won a major election victory that ended conservative control of parliament and gave a vote of support to the impeached president. The Uri Party captured a majority in Thursday's election on a groundswell of support for President Roh Moo-hyun, tripling its seats at the expense of the parties that sent him into a political limbo last month for violating a minor election law. "Our people wrote a new history of elections," acting President Goh Kun said in a televised address. "With this election, I hope a new era of politics of co-existence and cooperation will be born." Goh, who is interim leader until the Constitutional Court rules on the impeachment vote, said the government and all political parties should concentrate on reviving the economy. Thursday's election marked the first time a left-leaning or liberal party had won control of a hitherto conservative chamber and meant the pro-Roh Uri Party could push through reformist legislation long stalled by opponents. "Uri" means "our" in Korean, and the party's full name means "Our Open Party."

3. US on DPRK Nuclear Program

Los Angeles Times (Doyle McManus, "CHENEY MAKES CLEAR US IS NOT WILLING TO BEND ON NORTH KOREA; HE REPEATS WARNINGS TO JAPAN, CHINA AND SOUTH KOREA ON THREAT POSED BY PYONGYANG AND ITS NUCLEAR PROGRAM," 04/16/04) reported that US Vice President Dick Cheney stepped up pressure on Asian nations to embrace the US stance on the DPRK this week, renewing Bush administration warnings that the reclusive regime could provide nuclear weapons to terrorist organizations such as Al Qaeda and touch off a regional arms race. After meeting with the ROK's acting president and foreign minister this morning, Cheney said the US and the government in Seoul "stand together in insisting on a Korean peninsula that is free of nuclear weapons." But Cheney diplomatically avoided noting that the ROK government had been moving toward a policy of conciliation with the DPRK, and did not mention Thursday's parliamentary election that gave a slight majority to the Uri Party -- which is in favor of greater cooperation with the DPRK. "Time is not necessarily on our side," he told students at Shanghai's Fudan University on Thursday. "We worry that, given what they've done in the past, and given what we estimate to be their current capability, that North Korea could well, for example, provide [nuclear weapons] ... to, say, a terrorist organization. We know that there are terrorist organizations out there like Al Qaeda that have sought to acquire these kinds of weapons in the past." And in a comment designed to get the PRC's attention, Cheney warned that if the DPRK deployed nuclear-armed missiles, "other

nations in the region" might go nuclear as well-- a reference to Japan.

4. ROK-US Relations

Agence France-Presse ("US EXPECTS TO WORK CLOSELY WITH SEOUL ON NUCLEAR ISSUE AFTER SKOREAN ELECTIONS," 04/16/04) reported that the US said it expected to work closely with Seoul to tackle the DPRK nuclear crisis following a reformist party's landmark victory in South Korea's parliamentary elections. The Uri Party backing impeached President Roh Moo-Hyun became the first reformist bloc to control the National Assembly in more than four decades after Thursday's elections. There is no change expected in current policies but Roh supports reconciliation with nuclear-armed DPRK while his conservative opponents say he should take a harder line against Pyongyang. He was impeached last month by an alliance including conservative politicians, who had dominated South Korea for years but lost Thursday's elections, in an apparent voter backlash against the impeachment. US State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said Friday that the US looked forward to working closely with the ROK government and the new parliament on the DPRK nuclear crisis and other issues. Asked whether the US was concerned that the new majority party in parliament was more sympathetic towards North Korea than the previous one, Boucher said: "It's a matter for the government to decide and for the parliamentary majority to decide. We have all along had a very strong friend and ally in South Korea. We expect that to continue. We look forward to working with them to strengthen that relationship across the board in the many, many ways that we cooperate with our allies in South Korea, whether it's policy toward North Korea where we coordinate with Japan and South Korea very closely or the fight against terrorism and the deployments to Iraq."

5. DPRK Japan Abduction Reunion

Kyodo News: ("KIN OF EX-ABDUCTEES MAY COME TO JAPAN BY SUMMER: N. KOREA EXPERT," Tokyo, 04/16/04) reported that the relatives of five former Japanese abductees may come to Japan, possibly by this summer, a leading Japanese defense analyst on DPRK military affairs said Friday at the Foreign Press Center in Tokyo. Hideshi Takesada, professor at the Defense Agency's National Institute for Defense Studies (NIDS), made the remarks which he qualified as his personal view based on the timetable for a working-group meeting on the six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear programs. According to Takesada, the DPRK is keen to work toward establishing diplomatic ties, and is aware that a resolution of the abduction issue is key. "Given the strong public sentiment on the abduction issue, North Korea is hoping to resolve the issue and sway Japanese public opinion in favor of North Korea and to create diplomatic ties with Japan linked to economic assistance, something which Pyongyang very much wants immediately," he said.

6. Hong Kong Democratic Reform

Agence France-Presse ("DEMOCRACY LAWMAKERS TO CONFRONT HONG KONG CHIEF OVER REFORM STATEMENT," 04/16/04) reported that pro-democracy lawmakers say they will use a rare meeting with Hong Kong's leader to demand an explanation for his submission to C that the territory is not ready for universal suffrage. Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa will meet 21 pro-democracy legislators a day after telling China in a report that the former British colony should have universal suffrage, but not yet. Tung's report recommends changes to Hong Kong's political system but sets out nine conditions that must be taken account when considering such changes. Former Democratic Party chairman Martin Lee, one of the group to meet Tung, said the chief executive had essentially opened the door for the PRC to refuse to allow Hong Kong to elect its leaders in a full election. "We

are going to ask him who gave him this power to lay down the nine rules. He has now paved a way for Beijing to say 'no' to universal suffrage," Lee stated.

7. DPRK British Brewery

The Associated Press ("N KOREA USES FORMER BRITISH BREWERY TO MAKE BETTER BEER," Seoul, 04/16/04) reported that in impoverished North Korea, many go without basic necessities. But for the privileged population of Pyongyang, good beer is always on tap, thanks to the regime's decision to buy a brewery from England and transport it home, vat-by-vat. Taedonggang Beer, named after the Taedong river flowing through the communist country's capital, now rivals popular brews from Japan and Europe, which are priced outside the reach of usual consumers. "Our people like Taedonggang Beer a lot," Ri Hae Nam, assistant chief engineer at Taedonggang Brewery, stated. "All the managers and workers of this brewery are trying to improve quality to international standards, upholding the instructions of General Kim Jong Il to achieve the highest quality." Many bars in the capital now provide beer on tap, sometimes from their own microbreweries, but more often from the Taedonggang Brewery, located just east of the city. The DPRK bought the entire brewery from the British Ushers company in 2000 and imported it complete.

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