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Contents in this Issue:

- I. NAPSNet
 - [1. DPRK Nuclear Program](#)
 - [2. US Sanctions on DPRK](#)
 - [3. DPRK Diplomacy](#)
 - [4. Inter-Korean Relations](#)
 - [5. ROK on DPRK Human Rights](#)
 - [6. DPRK-Japan Relations](#)
 - [7. DPRK Food Supply](#)
 - [8. DPRK Economy](#)
 - [9. US-ROK Relations](#)
 - [10. ROK Bird Flu Outbreak](#)
 - [11. Sino-Japanese Relations](#)
 - [12. Cross Strait Relations](#)
 - [13. Tibet Unrest](#)
- II. ROK Report
 - [14. DPRK Nuclear Problem](#)
 - [15. ROK Policy Toward DPRK](#)

I. NAPSNet

1. DPRK Nuclear Program

Reuters (Teruaki Ueno , "U.S. AND NORTH KOREA ENVOYS THINK KEY ROW CLEARED: SOURCES ", Tokyo, 2008/04/16) reported that negotiators from the United States and the DPRK believe they have settled a thorny dispute over Washington's allegations that Pyongyang had a program to enrich uranium for weapons and proliferated nuclear technology to Syria, diplomatic sources in Tokyo said. "The negotiators concerned think that the issue over uranium and Syria has been settled," a Japanese government source said. The first diplomatic source said it remained unclear whether top officials of the two governments would accept the compromise deal. The Japanese government source said a huge gap remained over details of the DPRK's declaration of its plutonium-based nuclear arms program, stalling six-party talks on ending the DPRK's nuclear ambitions.

[\(return to top\)](#)

2. US Sanctions on DPRK

Yonhap (Lee Chi-dong, "U.S. TO BEGIN REWARDING PYONGYANG UPON DECLARATION: ENVOY", Seoul, 2008/04/17) reported that the United States is expected to begin removing the DPRK from its list of terrorism-sponsoring nations "almost simultaneously" with Pyongyang's declaration of its nuclear activity, ROK's new nuclear envoy Kim Sook said Thursday. "It will be a matter of hours or days," Kim stated. "If the talks are resumed, related nations will discuss detailed ways of verifying the declaration," he said.

[\(return to top\)](#)

3. DPRK Diplomacy

Associated Press ("REPORT: NORTH KOREA LEADER MAY VISIT ALLIES", Seoul, 2008/04/17) reported that DPRK leader Kim Jong-il is likely to visit Vietnam and the PRC next week on an unprecedented trip by plane, Yonhap said Thursday, citing unidentified diplomatic sources in the PRC. In October, Kim accepted an invitation to visit Hanoi from Vietnam's Communist Party Chief Nong Duc Manh. Air Koryo has recently purchased a Russian TU-204 aircraft and was conducting test flights for Kim's trip, Yonhap said.

[\(return to top\)](#)

4. Inter-Korean Relations

Bloomberg (Heejin Koo, "NORTH KOREAN RHETORIC ISN'T MILITARY THREAT, SOUTH KOREA SAYS ", 2008/04/16) reported that the DPRK's recent criticism of the U.S. and the ROK doesn't amount to a military threat, ROK President Lee Myung Bak said in the U.S. today at the start of a five-day visit. "I don't think North Korea's comments pose a military threat, but rather that they are making threats with militaristic comments," Lee said. "I strongly support the resolution of the nuclear issue through six-nation talks." ``If North Korea gives up its nuclear weapons it will no longer be threatened but be guaranteed of its security," Lee said. ``I strongly believe North Korea will be able to operate a self-sufficient economy if it abandons its nuclear weapons and opens up to the outside world."

[\(return to top\)](#)

5. ROK on DPRK Human Rights

Yonhap (Sam Kim, "PROBE OF N.K. HUMAN RIGHTS IN LINE WITH NEW GOV'T: OFFICIAL ", Seoul, 2008/04/16) reported that a senior ROK human rights watchdog official said his organization has decided to step up its investigation into alleged human rights abuses in the DPRK in the wake of the establishment of the new conservative government in Seoul. The comment by Yoo Nam-young, a standing member of the 11-strong National Human Rights Commission, comes after the state-run watchdog recently announced for the first time that it plans to interview hundreds of DPRK defectors to investigate human rights issues. But Yoo, a former attorney, emphasized that his organization plans to make stringent efforts to keep the investigation as free as possible from political influence when it kicks into gear in May.

[\(return to top\)](#)

6. DPRK-Japan Relations

The Yomiuri Shimbun ("LAWMAKERS SUBMIT PETITION OVER JAPANESE WIVES IN N. KOREA", 2008/04/16) reported that a group of suprapartisan Diet members submitted a petition Tuesday to Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda, calling on the government to tackle the issue of repatriation of Japanese wives of former pro-Pyongyang Korean residents of Japan in its talks with the DPRK, sources said. About 1,800 Japanese women who married pro-Pyongyang Korean residents of Japan went to the DPRK as part of a repatriation program for Koreans between 1959 and 1984. By presenting the issue to the DPRK, lawmakers intend to break the current impasse in talks aimed at normalizing diplomatic ties between the two countries and urge Pyongyang to address the problem, according to the sources.

[\(return to top\)](#)

7. DPRK Food Supply

Agence France-Presse (Simon Martin , "UN WARNS OF LOOMING NKOREA FOOD CRISIS ", Seoul, 2008/04/16) reported that time is running out to avert a humanitarian tragedy in the DPRK due to acute and worsening food shortages, a United Nations agency warned Wednesday. "The food

security situation... is clearly bad and getting worse," said Tony Banbury, the World Food Programme's (WFP) Asia director. "It is increasingly likely that external assistance will be urgently required to avert a serious tragedy," he said in a statement. The WFP estimates that right now more than 6.5 million people, out of a population of 23 million, do not have enough to eat, warning that the figure would rise unless urgent action is taken.

[\(return to top\)](#)

8. DPRK Economy

IFES NK Brief ("DPRK BUDGET EXPENDITURES GROW 2.5% THIS YEAR", 2008/04/16) reported that on May 9, the sixth round of the DPRK's 11th Supreme People's Assembly opened, at which this year's budget expenditures were announced to be 2.5% greater than last year. It was also reported at the assembly that the Cabinet would pursue a new 5-year plan to develop the nation's science and technology sector by 2012. According to this statement, this year's budget is estimated to be 451.5 trillion won (3.2 billion USD). An estimated 15.8%, or 71.3 billion won (510 million USD), is slated for national defense. The DPRK has also decided to increase budget allocations for energy, coal, and metal industries as well as the railway sector by 49.8% as compared to 2007, and will focus investments on staple industries.

[\(return to top\)](#)

9. US-ROK Relations

Korea Herald (Kim Ji-hyun, "'ALLIANCE OF VALUES, TRUST, PEACE-BUILDING'", New York, 2008/04/16) reported that President Lee Myung-bak proposed that the ROK and the US build a wider alliance firmly anchored to shared values, mutual trust, and joint efforts to promote peace on the globe. The president also urged the legislatures of both counties to ratify the bilateral free trade agreement which he said would greatly benefit the two economies. He referred to increased mutual interests in various areas to build an alliance of trust, including defense, diplomacy, economy, social issues and culture. "Based on the increased bilateral trust, the alliance will work more closely than ever to ease tension on the Korean peninsula and promote peace in Northeast Asia," the president said.

[\(return to top\)](#)

10. ROK Bird Flu Outbreak

Yonhap ("S. KOREA EXTENDS BIRD FLU RISK LEVEL TO SECOND HIGHEST NATIONWIDE ", Seoul, 2008/04/16) reported that the ROK has extended its avian influenza risk level to the second highest nationwide amid rising concerns bird flu could spread across the country following a series of outbreaks this month, quarantine officials said. The Ministry for Food, Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries held a livestock quarantine meeting earlier in the day and decided to extend the risk level to "orange" nationwide. This is the second highest risk level in the ROK's four-tier alert system -- blue, yellow, orange and red -- and it has been applied previously only to the Jeolla provinces where most cases of avian influenza have been reported. The ministry also said that it will begin conducting year-round blood serum testing at all poultry farms with the help of local universities, to detect any signs of infection early on and then take swift remedial action.

[\(return to top\)](#)

11. Sino-Japanese Relations

Xinhua ("CHINA, JAPAN VOW TO FURTHER STRATEGIC, RECIPROCAL RELATIONS", Beijing, 2008/04/16) reported that President Hu Jintao said that the PRC would work with Japan to expand strategic relations. Hu made the remarks in a meeting with a delegation from the two Japanese ruling parties headed by Ibuki Bunmei, Secretary-General of the Liberal Democratic Party, and Kitagawa Kazuo, Secretary-General of the Komei Party. Hu said Sino-Japanese relations were developing and exchanges and cooperation had expanded. The Japanese guests said that the Japanese ruling parties and the nation's people would promote strategic and reciprocal relations with the PRC.

[\(return to top\)](#)

12. Cross Strait Relations

Washington Post (Edward Cody, "TAIWANESE ECONOMIC PLAN GETS BOOST FROM CHINA", Beijing, 2008/04/16) reported that contributing to an increasingly upbeat climate, the PRC expressed confidence that an imminent change of leadership in Taiwan will swiftly lead to direct airline connections, increased tourism and more cross-strait investment. The prediction, from the government's Taiwan Affairs Office, intensified anticipation of a broad lowering of tensions across the Taiwan Strait after President-elect Ma Ying-jeou takes over as leader of the self-ruled island from President Chen Shui-bian on May 20.

[\(return to top\)](#)

13. Tibet Unrest

Kyodo ("CHINA'S HU CALLS TIBET RIOTS PLOT TO PRESSURE CHINA: LAWMAKERS", Beijing, 2008/04/16) reported that PRC President Hu Jintao told a group of Japanese lawmakers on Wednesday he believes that last month's violent riots in Tibet and the ensuing protests against the Beijing Olympics in the international arena were a plot to pressure the PRC, participants said. Kazuo Kitagawa, secretary general of Japan's New Komeito party, quoted Hu as calling the actions "a deliberate scheme" to create problems by linking the Tibet issue with the PRC's hosting of the Olympic Games in August. "They are trying to pressure China by connecting (the Tibet issue) with the Olympics," Hu was further quoted as saying in the meeting at Beijing's Great Hall of the People.

Reuters ("CHINA FINDS DYNAMITE AND GUNS IN 11 MONASTERIES: XINHUA ", Beijing, 2008/04/16) reported that police have found guns, dynamite, bullets and satellite receivers hidden in 11 Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in the PRC's northeastern Gansu province, state media reported. The weapons caches were found over the past two days in monasteries of the Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, where riots between March 14 and 19 injured 94 people, Xinhua news agency said.

[\(return to top\)](#)

II. ROK Report

14. DPRK Nuclear Problem

Chosun Ilbo ("DPRK NUCLEAR REPORT TO BE DEALT STRICTLY, AND PRECISELY", 2008/04/17) wrote that no matter the circumstance, the fundamental principle of perfectly verifying past DPRK nuclear activities must not be changed. If the DPRK has sincerely made the decision to abandon its nuclear program, receive compensation, and search for the way of survival, there is no need to delay and be passive in the verification process. The attitude with which the DPRK cooperates in the verification can also show the true intention of the DPRK. Presidents Lee Myung-bak and George W. Bush must make a meticulous agreement on the summit talk on April 18.

[\(return to top\)](#)

15. ROK Policy Toward DPRK

Yonhap News ("PRESIDENT LEE'S COMMENTS ON DPRK, STILL WEIGHS ON ADHERENCE TO THE PRINCIPLES", 2008/04/17) wrote that with the ROK-US summit talk on the 19th ahead, President Lee Myung-bak has continuously made comments that seemed to suggest a loosening of inter-Korean relations. However, many specialists who paid close attention to president Lee's recent comments predict that the President's will to renovate inter-Korean relationship routine and the principles of inter-Korean conversation that reflect his will are not going to change. The majority of specialists also said that as the principles are so resolute and clear, not only the ROK people but also the DPRK people will pay more attention to the "the adherence to the principles" rather than the "loosened comments."

[\(return to top\)](#)

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