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I. ROK Weekly Report

1. Introduction

("ROK WEEKLY REPORT: TRANS-KOREAN RAIL LINK", 2007-05-18) This week's report focuses on Thursday's test-run of a train across the DMZ from the ROK into the DPRK. While most commentators acknowledged that the test-run is a largely symbolic, one-time event, their attitude was universally one of excitement. Some commentators touted the test as a small step toward reunification, while others emphasized the economic benefits of railway interconnection.

2. Road to Reunification

BS ("HOPING THE KOREAN PENINSULA WOULD REUNITE", 2007-05-17) stated that the cross-border railway test-run means that every physical means of transportation between DPRK and ROK is now running. The report also says that this test-run shows hope for those separated families to meet again and the 70 million Koreans to come together. It, however, mentions that this was only a one-time event, and that in order for the train to run more regularly, transporting goods and resources, the nuclear issue must eventually be solved.

3. Need for DPRK to Upgrade Its Facilities

onga Ilbo ("CROSS-BORDER RAILWAY TEST-RUN IN 56 YEARS... WHAT DOES IT MEAN IN DPRK?", 2007-05-17) writes that according to a government authority, Kim Il-sung, the former president of the DPRK who passed away on July 8, 1994, was very interested in the railway project, and that if the event was held on July 25 to 27 of that year, as planned before, he was thinking of visiting Seoul using the railway. It also states that the international speed standard of a freight train is 60km per hour, but trains in DPRK can only run under 20km per hour, and that in order for the railway to properly operate, an updating project is necessary. Lee Jaejung, secretary of the Ministry of Unification, stated on the 14th that "There are many problems to be solved, including modernization of the railway, in order for it to operate properly," and showed possibility of social overhead capital (SOC) support for railway modernization in the DPRK.

4. Railway Sets Stage for Economic Cooperation

Financial News ("CROSS-BORDER RAILWAY TEST-RUN -- ITS BIG SYMBOLIC MEANING", 2007-05-16) writes that although this event was a one-time, symbolic event, the fact that we are one step closer to having the railway running properly should not be ignored. It writes that this test-run means that a basic frame of economic cooperation has been made, and considering freight trains transport 90% of goods in DPRK, the connection of the railway means much more than does providing the DPRK with rice and fertilizer.

Hankook Ilbo ("FIRST RAILWAY CONNECTION IN HALF A CENTURY", 2007-05-17) writes that although this event was a one-time test-run, it is very meaningful in a way that we have gone a step closer to proper run of the railway. It writes that this event could be the opportunity to increase economic cooperation and making peace in the Korean peninsula, and that it could increase interdependence and deter conflict between the two countries. It also notes that by saving the transportation fee needed to provide resources and sightseeing, both the DPRK and the ROK can gain enormous economic benefit. However, it emphasizes the importance of solving the nuclear issue and creating a peaceful environment in order for this event to be more than a one-time test-run.

5. DJ at a Loss for Words

TN ("FORMER PRESIDENT KIM DAEJOONG, 'CROSS-BORDER RAILWAY TEST-RUN, UNABLE TO EXPRESS IN WORDS'", 2007-05-17) writes that former president Kim Dae-jung explained that his feelings about the cross-border railway test-run is "unable to express in words", and that although it was a one-time event, and is symbolic, the physical meanings are enormous. The article states that he emphasized the importance of continuing this project until it reaches Pyongyang, the PRC, Russia, and in the long-run, even to Europe, and that if the railway could be connected to Europe, "a steel silk road" would newly be opened.

6. Large Costs Ahead

onhap News ("CROSS-BORDER RAILWAY TEST-RUN, ITS MEANING AND FUTURE TASKS", 2007-05-17) writes that although the test-run has a big symbolic meaning, there are also some cold evaluation of how the government needs to spend more than 1 billion Won in order to renovate railway in DPRK. However, Jaejung Lee, secretary of Ministry of Unification, stated that "there are certain problems to be solved and much time and effort must be put into it, but as there is a saying that 'if you start, you are already halfway there,' this test-run could be the first step to unification."

7. Can't Continue Buying Friendship

Hankook Ilbo ("CROSS-BORDER RAILWAY, ITS DREAMS AND REALITY", 2007-05-16) writes that it hopes that this test-run would not end as a one-time event. It also states that whereas the ROK views the event with hopeful eyes, the DPRK is only busy calculating. It writes that government's promise to provide rice and other resources using 240 billion Won has to be very much related to this test-run, that even though "buying the friendship" is the way it always works, it cannot be continued forever.

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