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Preceding NAPSNet Report

I. NAPSNet

1. Six Party Talks

The Associated Press ("NKOREA: NUCLEAR ARMS TALKS TO CONTINUE", Seoul, 2008/03/18) reported that the DPRK said it has agreed to continue working with the United States to resolve a stalemate in international nuclear negotiations over the DPRK's promise to fully declare its weapons programs. The DPRK's official Korean Central News Agency said the two sides held "an in-depth discussion on the differences" during one-on-one meetings last week in Switzerland over a disarmament-for-aid agreement reached last year. The two countries agreed to "sit face-to-face with each other and continue the discussion" to find a solution to the impasse, which is holding up the nuclear deal, DPRK news agency said in a three-sentence dispatch, the first time it has mentioned the Geneva talks. The report gave no details of what was discussed or when the two sides would meet again.

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2. ROK on Aid to the DPRK

Yonhap ("OFFICIAL SAYS NK AID WILL CONTINUE WITH STRINGS ", Washington, 2008/03/18) reported that a senior ROK administration official said his government intends to continue humanitarian assistance to the DPRK, but with necessary conditions. "Are we going to do it (aid provision) in a way done by the former government? No," the official said. "I personally believe that we do need to give aid. But the important questions are, when, how, and under what conditions?" He said that aid is correlated to progress in the DPRK's denuclearization, to the practicability of each inter-Korean economic cooperation project, to securing the resources for such projects, and on public support. But there is the "plus alpha" factor or intrinsic benefit to humanitarian help, he said, just as the U.S. considered in the past.

Associated Press ("SOUTH KOREA BALKS AT JOINT NORTH-SOUTH ZONE", Seoul, 2008/03/19) ROK Unification Minister Kim Ha-joong said Wednesday that the ROK will hold off on expanding a joint industrial complex in the DPRK until the standoff over the nuclear program is settled. Kim said said Seoul would maintain the industrial zone but "it would be difficult to expand (the complex) unless North Korea's nuclear issue is resolved."

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3. Inter-Korean Relations

The Korea Times (Jung Sung-ki, "S-N FAMILY REUNIONS FACE HURDLES", 2008/03/17) reported that the first face-to-face reunion of displaced families from the two Koreas this year is expected to be cancelled due to the DPRK's lukewarm attitude toward it, an official of the ROK's Red Cross said Tuesday. The DPRK's attitude is construed as an expression of discontent over the Lee Myung-bak government's tougher policy on the regime, DPRK experts said. The timeline for construction of a permanent reunion center to accommodate some 1,000 people is also likely to be delayed, he said.

Yonhap ("SAMSUNG UNAWARE OF N. KOREAN BAN ON OLYMPIC TORCH RELAY", Seoul, 2008/03/17) reported that Samsung Group, a major sponsor of the torch relay for the coming Beijing Olympics, denied it has been informed by the PRC of the DPRK's decision to bar ROK and US nationals from carrying the torch on its soil. The denial comes after Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported the DPRK has notified Olympic officials in Beijing of the decision and that Samsung, which selected the torch runners, learned the news from PRC officials.

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4. DPRK African Diplomacy

Agence France-Presse ("NKOREA'S HEAD OF STATE BEGINS AFRICAN TOUR", Seoul, 2008/03/18) reported that the DPRK's de facto head of state Kim Yong-Nam left Tuesday on a goodwill visit to three African nations, official media said. Kim, whose official title is president of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly or parliament, left for Namibia, Angola and Uganda. The Korean Central News Agency said he was accompanied by the foreign, trade and health ministers, but gave no other details.

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5. DPRK-PRC Cultural Exchange

Xinhua ("CHINESE TV SERIES POPULAR IN DPRK ", Pyongyang, 2008/03/18) reported that a PRC TV series with the theme of anti-Japanese guerrilla war during the Second World War is being broadcast on Pyongyang's television screens, drawing great attention from viewers. "Di Hou Wu Gong Dui (guerrillas in the enemy's rear guard), produced by CCTV in 2005, is currently being broadcast on prime-time TV by the Korean Central Television Program (KCTP) of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). Xinhua correspondents in Pyongyang saw many people gathering before televisions in public places, watching the series attentively. "It's very interesting. I'm very eager to know how the story goes on," a woman said.

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6. ROK Missile Defense Program

Yonhap ("KOREA'S JCS GIVES IDEAS ON BMD: U.S. WEEKLY ", Washington, 2008/03/17) reported that the ROK's Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) provided the presidential transition team earlier this year with suggestions on how to participate in the US ballistic missile defense (BMD) system, its senior official was quoted as saying in an interview with a US military weekly. Lt. Gen. Lee Sung-chool, chief director of strategic planning for the JCS, was cautious about Seoul joining the BMD, given the financial constraints, technology level and public sentiments, Defense News reported. Lee said his government's priority is to build a low-tier missile shield to intercept incoming missiles from the DPRK. The weekly speculated that the suggestions could include the ROK providing missile launch sites, sharing the cost of deploying BMD in the ROK, and purchasing advanced U.S. missile defense systems interoperable with the U.S. BMD network.

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7. ROK Military

Korea Herald (Jin Dae-woong , "LEE BACKS PLAN FOR BLUE-WATER NAVY", 2008/03/18) reported that President Lee Myung-bak yesterday pledged to build up the nation's naval forces to protect the ROK's global commercial interests and expand its contributions to world peace. "The 21st century is the era of the ocean. We have to build a state-of-the-art force that can protect our maritime sovereignty," Lee said in a congratulatory statement during the 62th annual graduation ceremony at the Korea Naval Academy. "With a vision for an advanced deep-sea navy, our navy should become a force that can ensure the security of maritime transportation lines, and contribute to peace in the world."

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8. US-ROK Security Alliance

Chosun Ilbo ("BELL DENIES USFK RELOCATION REMARK", 2008/03/18) reported that the commander of the U.S. Forces Korea, Gen. Burwell Bell, denied a statement attributed to him that the relocation of the Yongsan base will cost the ROK around US$10 billion. "It was either a misstatement or a misquotation in the transcript," he said. Calling the reports a "misunderstanding", Bell said the two countries had agreed that the ROK will pay W5.59 trillion (US$1=W1,029) for the relocation of the Yongsan base while the U.S. will pay W4.4 trillion for moving its Second Infantry Division to Pyeongtaek.

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9. US-ROK Trade Relations

Joongang Ilbo (Limb Jae-un , "LEE CALLS ON FARMERS TO SUPPORT FTA", 2008/03/17) reported that President Lee Myung-bak said yesterday that farmers should drop their opposition to the ROK-US FTA and begin constructive dialogue instead. "The government has earmarked 100 trillion won [$100.5 billion] for rural communities, but the communities are burdened with debt and remain places without hope, with young people leaving," Lee said during the Ministry of Food, Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry's briefing at Jeonbuk Bioindustry Development Institute in Jeonju, North Jeolla. "Farmers are against the FTA with the United States, but [free trade] is an irreversible trend and they should start a discussion about it."

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10. US-Japan Relations

Kyodo ("JAPAN TO SEEK AUTHORITY TO ARREST U.S. SOLDIERS ON JOINT PATROLS ", Tokyo, 2008/03/18) reported that Japan plans to ask the United States to make clear that the Japanese side will have the authority to arrest U.S. soldiers during joint patrols by Japanese police and U.S. forces to be conducted as part of efforts to prevent a recurrence of crimes in Okinawa, the Foreign Ministry said Tuesday. Foreign Minister Masahiko Komura unveiled the plan in a meeting with representatives from the Okinawa prefectural chapter of the governing Liberal Democratic Party, ministry officials said.

Xinhua ("JAPAN STARTS ENVIRONMENT ASSESSMENT ON U.S. MARINES' RELOCATION SITE", 2008/03/18) reported that Japan's Defense Ministry launched comprehensive environmental assessment on a U.S. Marine Corps' relocation site, said reports from the southern Japanese port city of Naha, capital of Okinawa Island. The assessment work, which includes the evaluation of weather conditions, the impact on the ecological environment and noise levels from the aircraft, is conducted by the Okinawa Defense Bureau of the ministry at the U.S. Marines' Camp Schwab in Nago, Okinawa Prefecture, a planned relocation site for the Marine's Futemma Air Station in Ginowan.

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11. Japan Energy Supply

The Times (Leo Lewis , "CAPACITY CRISIS AT JAPAN STEEL WORKS THREATENS GLOBAL NUCLEAR POWER PLANT PRODUCTION", 2008/03/17) reported that a 100-year-old steel mill that once forged guns for the Japanese Imperial Navy has hit a production bottleneck that threatens to derail more than £150 billion of global nuclear power-plant construction. The capacity shortage at Japan Steel Works (JSW) has created a worldwide stampede among electricity producers to place orders with the Tokyo-based engineer for nuclear reactor cores - a specialised component in which the company has an effective global monopoly. Nuclear energy experts fear that in its haste to expand production, the nuclear industry may have overlooked this part of the equation, potentially jeopardising the future of the 237 reactors expected by The World Nuclear Association to be built between now and 2030.

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12. Cross Strait Relations

The Associated Press ("CHINA'S PREMIER WARNS ON TAIWAN'S UN BID ", Beijing, 2008/03/18) reported that the PRC's premier tried to woo rival Taiwan with poetry and business deals Tuesday but urged Taiwanese voters to reject a referendum on whether the island should join the United Nations, warning that tensions would rise if the bid succeeds. Premier Wen Jiabao said approval of the referendum that will accompany Taiwan's presidential election this Saturday could aggravate the already tense ties between the PRC and Taiwan. "We are opposed to the so-called referendum schemes for Taiwan's membership in the United Nations," Wen told a news conference in Beijing.

"That would deal a serious blow to cross-strait relations, that would harm the fundamental interests of the people on both sides, cause tensions in the Taiwan Strait and threaten peace in the Taiwan Strait and the Asia-Pacific region at large."

Agence France-Presse (Benjamin Yeh, "FORTIFIED TAIWAN ISLAND SEEKS GATEWAY TO CHINA", Kinmen, 2008/03/18) reported that Taiwan's fortified island of Kinmen has lain for decades on the frontline against the PRC, but now the landmines are being dug up as Taipei seeks to turn the page in relations with Beijing. With fears of a conflict receding and the government keen to promote trade, Kinmen has found a new status as a bridgehead for limited direct links between Taiwan and the PRC. Ferry boats provide 24 sailings a day to and from the PRC, mostly carrying Taiwanese businessmen between here and the cities of Xiamen and Quanzhou in the PRC's southeastern Fujian province.

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13. Tibet Unrest

The New York Times (David Lague, "CHINA PREMIER BLAMES DALAI LAMA FOR 'APPALLING' VIOLENCE IN TIBET", Beijing, 2008/03/18) reported that Prime Minister Wen Jiabao of the PRC on Tuesday blamed supporters of the Dalai Lama, the exiled Tibetan spiritual leader, for planning and inciting what he described as an "appalling" violence and destruction in Tibet last week. Mr. Wen said at a news conference that the attacks included killings, arson and the ransacking of public and private property and had seriously disrupted the Tibetan regional capital of Lhasa,but that PRC authorities were capable of restoring order. Mr. Wen said the PRC had evidence that supporters of the Dalai Lama were behind the violence, in contrast to their public calls for peaceful negotiation to solve differences with Beijing.

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14. US-PRC Trade Relations

The Financial Times (Richard McGregor , "WEAK DOLLAR TROUBLES BEIJING ", Beijing, 2008/03/18) reported that the PRC is "deeply worried" about the state of the US and global economies and about the impact from the continuing weakness of the dollar against other currencies, Wen Jiabao, the country's premier, said. Mr Wen, speaking at his annual news conference at the close of the National People's Congress, said he was confident the PRC would maintain "fast and steady" growth this year. But it could not avoid the impact of a downturn elsewhere. Mr Wen said it was "particularly noteworthy" that the renminbi, the PRC's currency, had been appreciating more rapidly in recent months, but he expressed concern about persistent US dollar weakness. "What concerns me now is the continuous depreciation of the US dollar and when the dollar will hit bottom," he said.

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15. US-PRC Energy Cooperation

Xinhua ("CLEAN ENERGY, A GREAT OPPORTUNITY FOR U.S.-CHINA COOPERATION ", Beijing, 2008/03/18) reported that Maria Cantwell, Democrat Senator for the Washington State, on Tuesday

said the clean energy technology will provide new and great opportunity for the United States and PRC to cooperate. Cantwell made the remarks at a press conference on Tuesday at the U.S. embassy to China, noting that such cooperation between the United States and PRC, the current world's largest emitters of carbon dioxide, is of great significance and will point to a clear path for the rest of the world in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

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II. Republic of Korea

16. DPRK Nuclear Program

Seoul Newspaper (Hong Hyun-ik, "[opinion] US-ROK TALK IN GENEVA AND PRAGMATIC DIPLOMACY", 2008/03/19) carried an article by the head researcher at Sejong Institute, who wrote that the US being flexible and making the DPRK leaders' decision easier to break the deadlock is highly evaluated. However, it is disappointing to see US occupied with letting the dust settle while the DPRK under Security Council's sanction after carrying our nuclear experiment is rather remarkably patient. The future of the fence-sitting policy toward the DPRK and policy of linking the DPRK nuclear issue and inter-Korean relations that the ROK government proposes has become unclear. Reconsideration about the negotiating ability of the ROK with the DPRK is urgent. Therefore, it would be wise for the government to positively induce denuclearization of the DPRK through promoting mutually beneficial ROK-DPRK economic cooperation for national security and economic profit.

Herald Economy (Park Seung-Yoon, "'CONFESSION DIPLOMACY' OF DPRK AS THE BEGINNING POINT FOR COMMON PROSPERITY", 2008/03/19) wrote that the reason that people are concerned about the DPRK nuclear issue is that it is the DPRK, and not the ROK nor US, that has the key to a solution. The ROK government and the global society say the carrots for the DPRK are prepared. However, the precondition is the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and the beginning point is the DPRK admitting the fact that it has been involved in UEP and nuclear proliferation activities. Whether Kim Jong-il will be able to step forward to "confession diplomacy" is the key. In this aspect, confession diplomacy is a necessity rather than a strategic "choice."

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17. ROK Policy Toward DPRK

(Hwang In-su, "A POLICY TOWARD DPRK THAT OPENLY DEMANDS CHANGE", 2008/03/19) a member of policy research committee at the National Unification Advisory Council wrote that although the DPRK, which is used to the policies of the previous administration, might balk and trigger a deadlock, in the long term, this is not to be feared so much. The DPRK must be made to realize that without the constitutional change for the welfare of DPRK people and human rights in the DPRK in the future, economic cooperation with global society will be impossible and there will be limitation in progress in DPRK-US relations and improvement in inter-Korean relations. The ROK government should wisely make use of the US-ROK alliance and ROK-Japan relations in solving the DPRK nuclear issue and having a leading role in unification.

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