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Preceding NAPSNet Report

I. NAPSNet

1. US on DPRK Nuclear Program

Reuters ("HILL SEES EVENTUAL N.KOREAN NUCLEAR DECLARATION", Washington, 2008/03/18) reported that the top U.S. negotiator with the DPRK said Pyongyang is not yet ready to provide an accurate description of its nuclear programs but he expects them to do so eventually. "The basic problem ... is that the DPRK is not yet prepared to provide the complete and correct declaration," U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Chris Hill told reporters. The U.S. diplomat said he believed the next step in the effort to get the DPRK to abandon all its nuclear programs would be "even more difficult."

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2. US-DPRK Joint Recovery Operations

Yonhap ("U.S. HOPES FOR MORE N.K. HELP ON MIAS", Washington, 2008/03/18) reported that the DPRK may be more cooperative in helping account for thousands of American soldiers missing in action (MIAs) from the Korean War, Pentagon officials said Tuesday. Col. Julius Smith, chief of the Army's Casualty and Mortuary Affairs Operations Center in Virginia, said the DPRK government's cooperation has been in an "ebb-and-flow" manner according to its relations with the U.S. "But yes, it seems as though some things are in the future going to be positive for more cooperation with North Korea," he said in a roundtable with Department of Defense bloggers.

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3. DPRK Refugees

Yonhap ("U.S. LAWMAKERS APPEAL TO U.N. ON N. KOREAN REFUGEES", Washington, 2008/03/19) reported that U.S. legislators appealed to the chief of the United Nations to press the PRC to allow DPRK refugees under U.N. protection to leave the country, while accusing Beijing of using them as bargaining chips for the Summer Olympics. A total of eight senators and representatives from Congress signed the letter addressed to U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

on Tuesday, expressing concerns about at least 17 North Koreans currently under the custody of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Joongang Ilbo (Jung Ha-won, "SURGE IN NORTH DEFECTORS JAMS CENTERS", 2008/03/18) reported that the number of DPRK defectors going through Thailand has jumped more than 30-fold between 2004 and 2007, a government official said yesterday. Thai authorities have complained that their immigration detention centers are increasingly being packed by North Koreans. The ROK brought in about 2,500 DPRK defectors last year from various countries overseas, with about half coming from one Southeast Asian country he refused to name. Media in Seoul have reported that Thai authorities have demanded that the ROK take as many DPRK defectors as possible to ease crowding in the immigration detention centers.

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4. Inter-Korean Economic Relations

Korea Times (Kim Sue-young , "159 CEOS BEGIN TRIP TO NORTH KOREA", 2008/03/18) reported that a total of 159 chief executives of small- and medium-sized firms began a four-day trip to the DPRK to inspect industrial sites and weigh up investment opportunities in the communist state, the organizers said. It is the first group of ROK delegates to visit Pyongyang since conservative President Lee Myung-bak took office on Feb. 25. The trip was co-organized by Acheon Global Corp. and Seoul-based tour agency Pacific Holiday Tour with permission from the Lee government.

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5. DPRK Ambassador to the UN

Yonhap ("N.K. ENVOY TO U.N. LIKELY TO CHANGE: SOURCE", New York, 2008/03/18) reported that the DPRK's envoy to the United Nations is likely to be reshuffled sometime next month, and a former diplomat to the global organization is tapped to replace him, according to an inside source. Amb. Pak Gil-yon has been at the U.N. mission since 2001. There appears to be no other reason for the replacement than that the envoy has been at his post for a long period of time, the source said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

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6. ROK Dual Use Export Controls

KoreaNet ("GOV'T TO EDUCATE SMES ON STRATEGIC MATERIALS EXPORT SAFETY ", 2008/03/18) reported that the government said that it will educate small companies on the importance of adhering to the worldwide ban on the export of strategic materials that could be used to make weapons of mass destruction. The Ministry of Knowledge Economy said it plans to hold direct talks with managers of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) located in the provinces to outline global trends and measures taken by the United Nations to prevent sensitive material from being shipped to certain countries.

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7. US-ROK Security Alliance

Korea Herald (Jin Dae-woong, "CONSERVATIVES DEMAND DELAY IN CONTROL TRANSFER", 2008/03/18) reported that an alliance of veterans and conservative civic groups yesterday called on the new government to renegotiate the timing of Seoul's takeover of wartime operational control of its armed forces from Washington. The group, consisting of 227 military veterans and rightist organizations, yesterday delivered the message to Defense Minister Lee Sang-hee, ministry officials said. "The South Korea-U.S. Combined Forces Command should remain intact for a considerable time until North Korea is denuclearized and our military is modernized with information technology," the group said in a statement.

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8. Yasukuni Shrine Issue

Kyodo ("KIN OF BATTLE OF OKINAWA VICTIMS SUE YASUKUNI OVER ENSHRINEMENT", Naha, 2008/03/18) reported that the five families of 10 civilians and soldiers who died in the Battle of Okinawa and at other places during World War II filed a lawsuit against Yasukuni Shrine seeking to delist their relatives from those worshipped at the shrine. In the lawsuit, which also names the state, the families are also seeking a total of 500,000 yen in compensation for the psychological anguish they have suffered as a result of the enshrinement of their relatives despite their wishes, according to the complaint filed with the Naha District Court.

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9. Sino-Japanese Relations

Kyodo ("JAPAN, CHINA TO HOLD FINANCE DIALOGUE SUNDAY ", Tokyo, 2008/03/18) reported that Japanese Finance Minister Fukushiro Nukaga and his PRC counterpart Xie Xuren will hold talks on Sunday in Tokyo under a bilateral dialogue framework on finance, the Finance Ministry said Wednesday. In the one-day meeting, the two ministers are expected to confer on their domestic economies as well as the global and regional economies, and on fiscal and customs policies.

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10. Tibet Unrest

The Associated Press (Anita Chang, "CHINA TIGHTENS GRIP IN TIBETAN AREAS", Beijing, 2008/03/18) reported that police clamped down in far-flung towns and villages Wednesday seeking to restore control in the Tibetan areas of western PRC as sporadic demonstrations against PRC rule in Tibet flared up. A top Beijing Olympics official vowed the unrest would not disrupt plans for the torch relay preceding this summer's Olympics in Beijing. One leg of the relay is to pass through Tibet, taking the flame to the peak of Mount Everest sometime in May. The official Xinhua News Agency said late Wednesday that 170 people had surrendered for their role in last week's riots in Tibet's capital, Lhasa. The violence injured 325 people, and the PRC says 16 people were killed, denying claims by Tibetan exile groups that 80 died.

Washington Post (Maureen Fan, "IN THE PROVINCES, LIFE FOR TIBETANS IS A TROUBLED MIX", Xining, 2008/03/18) reported that the day-to-day lives of ordinary Tibetans here, in one of the largest provinces in the PRC with one of the smallest economies, show that resentments rooted in ethnicity and culture are not far from the surface in towns and cities outside the Tibet Autonomous Region. While residents enjoy more opportunities here than they might in Tibet proper, many remain dissatisfied. Tibetan university graduates who enter government never seem to rise above deputy positions. Officials invest more money in areas where many Han Chinese live, rather than in the autonomous areas where most Tibetans (outside Tibet) live.

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11. Cross Strait Relations

Reuters (Ralph Jennings , "TAIWAN TO ELECT PRESIDENT AS ECONOMY AND CHINA TIES IN FOCUS ", Taipei, 2008/03/18) reported that Taiwan goes to the polls on Saturday to elect a new president, its third in the island's brief democratic history, perhaps heralding a new era of improved trade ties with political archrival the PRC regardless of who wins. Hsieh and Ma support an increase in direct flights between the PRC and Taiwan. Such flights, non-existent for most of the post-1949 period, are now limited to charters on several major holidays and must all pass through Hong Kong airspace.

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12. Sino-Russian Relations

Interfax ("CHINA AND RUSSIA "ALWAYS FRIENDS AND NEVER FOES" - YANG JIECHI", 2008/03/17) reported that "We expect that [Russian] President-elect Medvedev will visit China soon. It is expected that a meeting between the two leaders will take place at a summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and an unofficial summit of Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation," the Chinese minister said. The SCO summit is expected to take place in summer 2008 in Dushanbe. Yang congratulated Medvedev on his election to office and expressed "gratitude to Russian President Vladimir Putin for his outstanding contribution to the development of Sino-Russian relations."

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13. Sino-US Relations

Agence France-Presse ("CHINA'S CONTROVERSIAL AID POLICY TO COME UNDER SCRUTINY", Washington, 2008/03/19) reported that the United States is to hold high-level talks with the PRC to address concerns over Beijing's deft strategy of boosting ties with developing nations through a no-strings-attached aid program, an official said. Washington hopes to launch this "new high-level dialogue" soon, US deputy assistant secretary of state Thomas Christensen said at a hearing of the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, a Congress-mandated panel. "We are concerned that by giving aid without conditions and without coordination with the international community, China's programs could run counter to the efforts by these other actors to use targeted and sustainable aid to promote transparency and good governance," Christensen said.

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14. PRC Bird Flu

Reuters (Maggie Fox, "GENE STUDY SUGGESTS CHINA SOURCE OF H5N1 VIRUS", Washington, 2008/03/18) reported that Southern PRC may have been the source for much of the spread of the H5N1 avian flu virus, researchers suggested. A genetic analysis of the virus shows that strains that showed up in Vietnam, Thailand and Malaysia in 2002 and 2003 closely resemble a strain from poultry markets in the PRC's Yunnan Province, the flu experts found. "These results suggest a direct transmission link for H5N1 viruses between Yunnan and Vietnam and also between Hunan and Indonesia during 2002 and 2003," wrote the researchers, who included Guan Yi of the University of Hong Kong and Robert Webster of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee.

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II. ROK Report

15. DPRK Internal Situation

Good friends ("HUSBANDS SIGHING OVER MARCH 3RD INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY", 2008/03/20) reported that DPRK husbands' sighing of grief in this International Women's Day was deeper than ever. Husbands say there is not even a hint of hope: they are not allowed to get involved in trade, rice price is endlessly increasing, and no matter how long they wait, there is no measure from the government. They asked when they will be able to be good husbands when there is nothing but the sound of people crying because of the non-tax payment growing as they speak. March 3rd International Women's Day for some husbands was the day of lamentation.

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16. ROK Policy Toward DPRK

Saegae Ilbo (Song Dae-Seong, "FIRST GET RID OF LARGE PEGS ON POLICIES TOWARD DPRK", 2008/03/20) carried an article by the head researcher at Sejong Institute, who wrote that the DPRK's response to Lee Myung-bak administration's policies toward DPRK calls for adhesion to preexistent policies toward ROK while following the steps of different evil deeds and coercion. The Lee Myung-bak administration must neither be agitated by the DPRK and pro-DPRK groups of the left in the ROK nor feel anxious about improvement in inter-Korean relations. The government should confirm the sincere change in non-nuclear, opening, and human rights improvement already mentioned in the early stage of policies toward DPRK while untangling the nodes one by one from zero-base situation. The one that is anxious is the DPRK, not the ROK.

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17. DPRK Nuclear Program

Yonhap News ("MEANING AND PROSPECT OF GOVERNMENT'S CONTINUED MESSAGES TO DPRK", 2008/03/20) wrote that the messages the ROK government is recently sending to the DPRK go "why don't you look how we changed and change yourselves." Because it is a mere suggestion made on a theoretical level having a sensitive situation of general election ahead, specialists fear possible flexibilities regarding detailed plans. For the reason, the prediction that the DPRK will not hastily react to the messages is dominant. In that sense, specialists suggest the government to prepare to delicately solve inter-Korean relations according to the DPRK nuclear issue scenarios for the future direction of DPRK nuclear issues after mid-April.

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