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I. United States

1. DPRK Massive Train Accident Confirmation

Kyodo News (Ralph Jennings, "N. KOREA CONFIRMS TRAIN BLAST, SEEKS INT'L HELP," Beijing, 04/23/04) reported that a United Nations official in Pyongyang told Kyodo News by telephone Friday that the DPRK has confirmed the massive train accident Thursday in Ryongchon 50 kilometers north of the capital and has asked for international help in dealing with the disaster. Brendan McDonald, head of the U.N. office for coordination of humanitarian affairs in Pyongyang, said he was at meeting with the DPRK government at 4 p.m. Friday in which the government confirmed the accident occurred at 12:10 p.m. Thursday. The DPRK side said, however, that the accident was between two train wagons that were being shunted on a siding, not a collision of two trains as had been previously believed. Red Cross officials in Beijing said earlier the blast came from commercial mining explosives and the report from Pyongyang does not seem to dispute that. McDonald said he was told a cable of some kind accidentally touched the wagons being shunted, triggering the massive explosion. The blast killed at least 50 people, injured more than 1,000 more and destroyed

around 1,800 dwellings, McDonald quoted the government officials as telling him. He also said the North Koreans informed all diplomatic missions in Pyongyang, including the PRC's, about the accident and asked them for help in dealing with it.

The Associated Press ("NORTH KOREA TELLS AID WORKERS TRAIN BLAST KILLED 150 PEOPLE," Beijing, 04/23/04) reported that the DPRK government told aid workers at least 150 people were killed when two trains loaded with explosives blew up, an aid official told Irish radio Friday. The DPRK said the explosion occurred when trains carrying dynamite touched power lines, Anne O'Mahony, regional director of the Irish aid agency Concern, told RTE by telephone from Pyongyang, the North's capital. "It says 150 people died, including some school children," Ms. O'Mahony said. The blast occurred at a railway station in Ryongchon, a bustling town about 90 miles (150 kilometers) north of Pyongyang. Ryongchon has a reported population of 130,000 and is known for its chemical and metalwork plants.

Korea Times (Yoo Dong-ho, "RYONGCHON STATION NEAR LIGHT INDUSTRY COMPLEXES," 04/23/04) reported that the DPRK's Ryongchon railway station, where a massive explosion took place, is about just 20 kilometers from the PRC border and north of Pyongyang. The station is located at one of the North Korea's main railway lines connecting Pyongyang and Shinuju, the northern city bordering China. The accident will likely wreak havoc on the reclusive country's logistics and passenger carrying system. The station covers about 26 percent of the town's total logistics, mainly for corns, grains coals, construction materials and fisheries. A wide range of light industry complexes are concentrated near the station - small-and medium-sized textile plants, coal mine companies, shipbuilding yards and machinery firms. Refrigerator ships and cargo ships are manufactured at the shipping yards named "Ryongam." According to a source in the PRC border town of Dandong, not only was Ryongcheon Station destroyed in the blast, but so were the nearby school and a large number of civilian dwellings; casualties are presumed to be very high, Yonhap News reported. The source said a PRC who saw the scene of the accident and returned to Dandong said the area around Ryoncheon Station "had been transformed into ruins, like it was bombed... It was still difficult to grasp exactly how many casualties there were." The casualty total is presumed to be high, however, since this area -- with a school and a high concentration of houses and apartments -- was totally destroyed.

2. DPRK Six-party Talks

Kyodo News ("N KOREA OFFICIAL: HAVE NO URANIUM ENRICHMENT PROGRAM," Singapore, 04/23/04) reported that a DPRK official said Friday that he believes the third round of six-party talks on the country's nuclear development program will take place as planned by the end of June, Kyodo News reported. Jong Thae Yang, director of the DPRK Foreign Ministry's division in charge of US affairs, made the remark in an interview with Kyodo News and other Japanese media organizations in the DPRK capital. The official also denied that Pyongyang possesses any uranium enrichment program, saying the US has distorted the truth in claiming the DPRK admitted to secretly running such a program. "No uranium enrichment program exists in our country in the first place," the official said. The DPRK has repeatedly denied US allegations that it has a program to enrich uranium for nuclear weapons.

3. US Missile Defense

Reuters (Jim Wolf, "US SHIELD AGAINST NORTH KOREA MISSILES SAID UNPROVEN," Washington, 04/24/04) reported that the US ability to shoot down a DPRK ballistic missile will be "largely unproven" when a multibillion-dollar shield becomes operational in coming months,

congressional investigators said on Friday. "As a result of testing shortfalls and the limited time available to test the (Ballistic Missile Defense System) being fielded, system effectiveness will be largely unproven when the initial capability goes on alert at the end of September 2004," the General Accounting Office said. The Pentagon's Missile Defense Agency says the initial deployment will provide protection of all 50 US states against a limited strike from Northeast Asia. "However, testing in 2003 did little to demonstrate the predicted effectiveness of the system's capability to defeat ballistic missiles as an integrated system," said the GAO, Congress's nonpartisan audit and investigative arm. None of the components has been flight tested yet in the configurations in which they ultimately will be deployed, the study said. The system has "not been tested under unscripted, operationally realistic conditions," it added. Richard Lehner, a spokesman for the Pentagon's Missile Defense Agency, noted the US currently had no defense at all against ballistic missiles, which could carry nuclear, chemical or biological warheads. "We think that by the end of the year we'll have a capability against a limited threat," he said. How many incoming missiles could supposedly be shot down was classified and always will be to avoid guiding an enemy, Lehner said.

4. ROK-US Relations

Chosun Ilbo (Ju Yong-jung, "NEXT US AMBASSADOR STRESSES ALLIANCE," Washington DC, 4/23/04) reported that Christopher Hill, who has been tentatively selected as the next US Ambassador to the ROK, said Friday that the ROK's decision to send troops to Iraq was not an easy one and noted that the ROK would contribute the third largest number of troops to the Middle Eastern nation, behind the US and Great Britain. During a Senate confirmation hearing, Hill said, "The Korea-US alliance must always re-adjust itself in accordance with the changes of the times, and that's not an easy thing." He said, however, that the Korea-US alliance was the cornerstone to stability in Northeast Asia and would continue to be so.

5. US Congress Hong Kong Democracy Resolution

Agence France-Presse ("US CONGRESS RECEIVES RESOLUTION HIGHLIGHTING HONG KONG'S AUTONOMY," 04/23/04) reported that a resolution has been introduced in the US Congress seeking a declaration that the people of Hong Kong should be free to decide the pace of democratic reform on the former British-ruled territory. "A clear message emerges from everyone with whom I have spoken on this issue: Hong Kong is ready for full democracy," said Senator Sam Brownback, who introduced the resolution this week. "The people have demonstrated the ability to create a vibrant society and they deserve universal suffrage and the ability to participate fully in the functions of government," he said. Brownback's resolution says the US Congress should declare "that the people of Hong Kong should be free to determine the pace and scope of constitutional developments" and that anything less violates the vision of democracy as agreed upon by Britain and China. Brownback, the Senator from Kansas, is chairman of the East Asia sub-panel of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee which held a hearing last month on democracy in Hong Kong in which Martin Lee, a top democracy advocate from the island, testified.

6. PRC Military Spending Agence France-Presse ("CHINA MORE THAN DOUBLING BUDGETED MILITARY SPENDING THIS YEAR," 04/23/04) reported that the PRC is more than doubling its budgeted defense spending this year as part of an aggressive military modernization strategy, including deterring any moves by Taiwan to declare independence, the Pentagon said. The PRC's official defense budget in 2004 is more than 25 billion dollars. But when off-budget funding for foreign weapons system imports is included, total defense-related expenditures this year should soar to between 50 and 70 billion dollars, said Richard Lawless, the deputy undersecretary of defence.

This would rank the PRC third in defense spending after the US and Russia, he told a Senate hearing where the PRC's military reforms were discussed Thursday. Lawless, who handles security affairs in the Asia-Pacific, said that China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) had stepped up its modernization plan in recent years to prepare against any separation moves by Taiwan. "In recent years, the PLA accelerated reform and modernization so as to have a variety of credible military options to deter moves by Taiwan toward permanent separation or, if required, to compel by force the integration of Taiwan under mainland authority," he said. It also wanted capability to "deter, delay or disrupt third-party intervention in a cross-Strait military crisis," Lawless said.

7. PRC-Japan Chemical Arms Disposal Facility

Agence France-Presse ("JAPAN, CHINA AGREE TO BUILD CHEMICAL ARMS DISPOSAL FACILITY," 04/23/04) reported that Japan and the PRC will start building a facility in northern PRC to destroy thousands of chemical bombs left behind by Japanese soldiers at the end of World War II within a year, Japanese officials said. The decision was taken at working level talks on Thursday in Tokyo and puts the two nations on track to meeting a 2007 deadline to dispose of the weapons, which have been the cause of deadly accidents, the official said. "We must dispose of the weapons soon so we decided to start construction," said foreign ministry official Masahiro Nakaya. Japan has set aside 17.1 billion yen (157 million dollars) for the full cost of the construction of the site and will also foot the bill for incineration costs of bombs it recognizes are chemical weapons its soldiers left behind. Work on the design stage will start immediately with a view to construction beginning by spring next year, said Akihiko Aoyama, an official at the Cabinet Office. The plant will be built in the Haerbaling region of Dunhua city in China's northern Jilin province

8. PRC Hospitals for DPRK Train Victims

Agence France-Presse ("PRC HOSPITALS ON ALERT, BUT DPRK VICTIMS NEVER ARRIVE," 04/23/04) reported that PRC hospitals in the border city of Dandong were placed on alert to receive victims from a huge explosion in North Korea, but the patients never arrived, doctors said. "We got a call from the Dandong health department last night telling us an accident had happened and to be prepared to assist them," Zhang Fengjing, director of the hospital affairs department at the No 1 hospital, told AFP. "But we haven't received any of the patients. None of the hospitals in Dandong have received any patients." Nurses in the hospital said they had stayed up throughout the night waiting for the wounded to arrive. "Several nurses and doctors were on duty. We stayed up all night waiting for them but they never came," said Sun Chengying, the nursing supervisor.

9. PRC SARS Outbreak?

Agence France-Presse ("ONE SUSPECTED SARS PATIENT DIES AS VIRUS RETURNS TO HAUNT CHINA," 04/24/04) reported that the PRC announced four confirmed or suspected SARS cases, one of whom had died, as the disease that killed nearly 800 worldwide last year returned to haunt the country. Health officials nationwide stepped up their alert level as the health ministry rushed to identify the source of the unexpected reemergence of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in a bid to control its spread. "Experts have reached the tentative conclusion that this outbreak can be traced back to infection by laboratory workers," the ministry said in a statement. The statement provided a rough outline of how the disease might have spread, indicating that a laboratory inside the Center for Disease Control in Beijing may have played a key part. "The fact that these infections can be traced to a laboratory, while disturbing, is also to some degree reassuring," the World Health Organization (WHO) said in a statement. "The initial source of the SARS virus does not appear to be

animal or community-related," it said. One of the confirmed cases, a 26-year-old medical student identified by her surname Song, conducted research at the laboratory for two weeks last month, the ministry said. She later returned to her home province, Anhui in eastern China, where she was hospitalized with fever and tended to by her 53-year-old mother, surnamed Wei. Wei, who suffered from heart problems, died early this week but post-mortems had not yet definitively established her as a SARS case, the ministry said. She was cremated Friday.

10. Japan Anti-PRC Activist

Reuters ("JAPAN RIGHT-WINGER RAMS BUS INTO PRC CONSULATE," Tokyo, 04/23/04) reported that a member of a Japanese right-wing group rammed a bus into the PRC consulate in western Japan on Friday, protesting over the PRC's claims to an island chain at the heart of a territorial row between Beijing and Tokyo. Television footage showed that a white bus with the Japanese flag painted on its side -- a type of vehicle typically used by right-wingers to stage demonstrations -- had crashed into the gates of the consulate in the city of Osaka. Police said a fire had broken out near the driver's seat but was put out shortly. There was no damage to the consulate building and nobody inside was hurt, they said. Police arrested a 34-year-old rightist group member, who said his actions were to protest at the PRC's position in the long-running dispute over the Senkaku Islands, a police official said.

The NAPSNet Daily Report aims to serve as a forum for dialogue and exchange among peace and security specialists. Conventions for readers and a list of acronyms and abbreviations are available to all recipients. For descriptions of the world wide web sites used to gather information for this report, or for more information on web sites with related information, see the collection of other NAPSNet resources.
We invite you to reply to today's report, and we welcome commentary or papers for distribution to the network.

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