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I. United States

1. DPRK Fuel Train Collision

Agence France-Presse ("3,000 DEAD OR INJURED IN NORTH KOREA TRAIN CRASH BLAST: REPORTS," 04/23/04) reported that some 3,000 people were killed or injured after two trains laden with fuel collided and exploded at a DPRK railway station, just hours after the DPRK's Kim Jong-Il passed through on his return from the PRC, reports said. The blast was so powerful it destroyed the railway station at Ryongchon near the PRC border at around 1:00 pm (0400 GMT). The DPRK declared a state of emergency around the site of the blast which resembled a war zone, the Yonhap news agency quoted PRC sources as saying, while the DPRK official media did not report the blast. At least 3,000 people were dead or injured, according to Seoul's YTN news channel. Yonhap, also quoting PRC sources, said the number of casualties could reach into the thousands. ROK media said the explosion occurred when two cargo trains carrying fuel collided at Ryongchon, 50 kilometers (30 miles) south of the DPRK border with China. One of the trains carried petrol (gasoline) and the other liquified petroleum gas, Yonhap news agency said, citing sources in the PRC. ROK officials confirmed that a blast had occurred. "It is true there was a large explosion in North Korea today," an official told AFP, requesting anonymity. "We are still trying to confirm other details." A defense

ministry official told Yonhap they had yet to confirm "the cause of the incident, the kind of explosion and how many died." The entire area "was turned into ruins comparable to the aftermath of a massive bombing," Yonhap said, quoting witnesses. DPRK authorities were investigating the cause of the accident, Yonhap said. If the death and injured toll is confirmed, it would be one of the worst train disasters ever, outweighing a 1981 accident in India which killed more than 800 people. The DPRK government, which often keeps its own citizens in the dark over events at home and abroad, immediately cut off international phone services to the devastated area. An unnamed government source told MBC television the incident appeared to be no more than an accident. "I doesn't look like this has anything to do with terrorism," he said.

2. PRC-DPRK 'Unofficial' Visit

Agence France-Presse ("CHINA SAYS IT OFFERED AID TO N.KOREA DURING KIM'S 'SUCCESSFUL' VISIT," 04/22/04) reported that the PRC confirmed it offered aid to North Korea during reclusive leader Kim Jong-il's just-ended "very important" and "successful" visit to his closest ally. Foreign ministry spokesman Kong Quan quoted PRC officials as highly praising the rare visit. "Both sides further strengthened (mutual) understanding and increased mutual trust, and deepened friendship," Kong said Thursday. "PRC and Korean leaders reached consensus on strengthening cooperation." The PRC side made four suggestions on strengthening the two countries' cooperation, including increasing high-level visits, deepening cooperation, strengthening consultation in international matters, and strengthening the two countries' economic and trade cooperation. "These suggestions received positive reception and agreement from the Korean side," Kong said. He added: "Both sides unanimously agreed to work together to push forward the six-party talks." During the three-day visit this week, the PRC had decided to offer free aid to its neighbor, Kong said. "On the one hand, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) has made achievements in its national construction process, but on the other hand, it has faced difficulties," Kong said a regular briefing. "So the PRC people, from the standpoint of strengthening the traditional friendship between the two countries' people, are giving some aid within our capability due to the economic difficulties faced by the DPRK people." Kong refused to disclose the amount of aid.

3. DPRK Nuclear Working Group Talks

Chosun Ilbo ("KIM, HU AGREE TO DATES FOR NUKE TALKS," Beijing, 04/22/04) reported that DPRK leader Kim Jong-il and PRC President Hu Jintao agreed to open working group meetings in mid-May and the third round of six-party talk in late June to settle the DPRK nuclear issue, a PRC diplomatic source said Thursday. During Kim's unofficial three-day visit to the PRC, Hu insisted on hosting the six-party talks earlier than originally planned, and Kim showed his determination to take active part in the conference, thus agreeing to set dates for the meetings, the source said. The six-party talk reportedly had to be put off to late June because Hu had to visit Eastern Europe in the second week of June and the Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) meeting, which is scheduled to be held in Qingdao from June 21 to 22. Both Hu and PRC Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing have to attend both events, so the six-party talks had to be scheduled after June 22, a PRC source said. The working group meetings are to be held in mid-May, after the PRC Labor Day holiday. Based on the agreement made by the PRC and the DPRK, the conference dates are to be finalized with the consent of the other four member states.

4. ROK-DPRK Relations

Bloomberg ("NORTH KOREA TELLS SOUTH KOREA TO STOP BACKING US ON WEAPONS,"

04/22/04) reported that the DPRK's government said it will exclude the ROK from talks on nuclear arms and inter-Korean cooperation unless it stops backing the US in its dispute with the DPRK on weapons development. The DPRK's Secretariat of the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland issued a circular condemning ROK Foreign Minister Ban Ki Moon's repetition of the US position that "complete, verifiable and irreversible dismantlement" of the DPRK's nuclear program must precede any aid pledge. "If the ROK authorities want to take part in the negotiation as a member of the six-way talks in future, and remain a partner in inter-Korean dialogue, they must join efforts with compatriots, instead of dancing to the tune of outside forces," the circular said, as cited by the Korea Central News Agency.

5. DPRK Japan Abduction Issue

Reuters ("N.KOREA WANTS RETURN OF JAPAN ABDUCTEES," Tokyo, 04/22/04) reported that the DPRK's top negotiator with Japan has called for five Japanese nationals abducted by its agents decades ago to return to the DPRK, calling it the only way to resolve the thorny issue of abductions that stands in the way of establishing diplomatic ties. In an interview with Kyodo news agency and other Japanese media conducted in Pyongyang and published on Thursday, Jong Thae-hwa, the chief negotiator on establishing ties with Japan, denied reports earlier this month that the DPRK was willing to send to Japan eight family members of the abductees. "There is no other way (besides having the five return) to resolve it," Jong was quoted by Kyodo as saying. "They must be returned, as was agreed between our governments."

6. Taiwan Constitution Reform

Agence France-Presse ("TAIWAN CONSTITUTION REFORM PLAN WILL NOT JEOPARDIZE CROSS-STRAIT TIES: FM," 04/22/04) report Taiwan has denied its move to adopt a new constitution is a step towards independence, after the US warned Taiwan not to jeopardize the status quo with the PRC. "I can assure you that the constitutional reform will be carried out under the existing framework," Foreign Minister Chen Tan-sun told reporters without elaborating. Taiwan would work to clear up the US' "misunderstanding" about the plan by President Chen Shui-bian to hold a referendum on a new constitution in 2006 for adoption two years later, the minister said. "There has been some misunderstanding, maybe because we have not made it clear enough or because China has deliberately exaggerated the issue. We will step up our communication (with Washington) for better understanding," the minister said. The new constitution would not lead to any changes in cross-Straits relations, said the minister.

7. Asia Terrorist Threat

Agence France-Presse ("GROUP TARGETS US ASIAN ALLIES FOR ATTACK," 04/22/04) reported that the ROK's embassy in Bangkok has received a letter threatening attacks against countries supporting the US-led war on terror, a Korean diplomat in the Thai capital said. The letter, received Wednesday from a group identifying itself as the "Yellow-Red Overseas Organization," threatened attacks on major facilities in Australia, Japan, Kuwait, Pakistan, the Philippines, Singapore, the ROK and Thailand, between April 20 and 30, he said. "This is a serious problem. They threatened embassies, air flights, and other interesting places" in the eight Asian nations, First Secretary Ryoo Jung-Young stated. "Our embassy has demanded an explanation about this from the (Thai) foreign ministry and interior ministry and also demanded more security for the embassy and the Korean community here," the diplomat added. The letter, typed in English and sent by regular post from within Thailand, was being examined by Thai authorities who launched an investigation, he said. The

embassy was operating normally.

8. ROK Iraq Troop Decision

Reuters ("SOUTH KOREA EXPECTS IRAQ TROOP DECISION NEXT WEEK," Seoul, 04/22/04) reported that the ROK's deployment of 3,000 troops in Iraq, already delayed over security concerns, will be finalised next week, the government said on Thursday. Seoul is considering either Arbil or Sulaymaniyah in northern Iraq for the deployment, which will have a parliamentary mandate to ensure security and help rebuild the region. A fact-finding team returned on Monday from surveying the two areas. "A very careful review is being done now among different ministries," the spokeswoman for the National Security Council, Lee Jihyun, said by telephone. Asked whether a decision would come next week, she said: "Yes, because, you know, the fact-finding team got back this week and their findings will have to be discussed." The government has said the plan to send the troops has not been affected by the recent upsurge in fighting in Iraq.

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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