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Contents in this Issue:

- I. Napsnet
  - 1. Six-Party Talks
  - 2. US-ROK Military Exercises
  - 3. DPRK on US-ROK Exercises
  - 4. Inter-Korean Relations
  - 5. Inter-Korean Sports Exchanges
  - 6. PRC-DPRK Relations
  - 7. DPRK Food Supply
  - 8. DPRK Energy
  - 9. Alleged DPRK Cigarette Counterfeiting
  - 10. ROK Unification Ministry
  - 11. ROK Fisheries Protection
  - 12. ROK-Japan Relations
  - 13. US-Japan Relations
  - 14. Japanese Whaling

- 15. Sino-US Relations
- 16. PRC-Russian Relations

- II. ROK Report
  - 17. ROK-US Relations
  - 18. DPRK Human Rights

Preceding NAPSNet Report

I. Napsnet

1. Six-Party Talks

Associated Press (Audra Ang, "US NUCLEAR ENVOY LEAVES CHINA", Beijing, 2008/03/02) reported that US Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill left Beijing on Sunday. Hill met his PRC counterpart Wu Dawei on Saturday as part of efforts to jump-start the disarmament process. A U.S. State Department official said earlier that Hill might also meet with his DPRK counterpart Kim Kye-gwan in Beijing, but the U.S. Embassy here said Sunday that no such meeting took place. U.S. Embassy spokeswoman Susan Stevenson said Hill had been in touch with North Korean officials through contacts in New York, but gave no details. Hill said the DPRK was considering Chinese proposals on ways to break the deadlock. "They're looking at the ideas and haven't decided what they want to do," the agency quoted Hill as saying Saturday. "We thought they might be ready to discuss it with us, and clearly they were not."

Korea Herald ("U.S. HOPES FOR N.K. DECLARATION 'WITHIN WEEKS'", Seoul, 2008/03/03) reported that US Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hil; was quoted as saying on Sunday that the United States is working to complete the process of the DPRK's nuclear programs declaration within weeks, in order to break the deadlock in the six-party talks. Hill reportedly told reporters that the involved parties are working to produce a solution in the near future and that the DPRK is reviewing ideas. He was also quoted as saying that the negotiators are likely to gather at some point, without offering any more details.

(return to top)

2. US-ROK Military Exercises

Associated Press (Kwang-tae Kim, "SOUTH KOREA, US BEGIN MILITARY DRILLS", Seoul, 2008/03/02) reported that about 27,000 American troops, the USS Nimitz aircraft carrier, and an undisclosed number of ROK soldiers began participating in joint military exercises on Sunday, dubbed Key Resolve and Foal Eagle. The exercises, scheduled to run until Friday, involve a computer-simulated war game with field drills, and "provide an excellent opportunity to improve ...

combat readiness," U.S. Army General B.B. Bell, commander of U.S. Forces Korea, said in a statement last month.

(return to top)

3. DPRK on US-ROK Exercises

Associated Press (Kim Kwang-tae, "NORTH KOREA BLASTS US-SKOREA WAR DRILLS", Seoul, 2008/03/03) reported that the DPRK threatened Monday to bolster its nuclear deterrent in response to U.S.-ROK war games. A comment from the Foreign Ministry said that the DPRK will "take necessary countermeasures including those to further bolster up all its deterrent forces." The ministry said the military maneuvers demonstrate that Washington "is invariably sticking to its hostile policy to stifle the DPRK by force." "Such nuclear threat and blackmail do not work on the DPRK but will only put a brake on the process of the denuclearization of the peninsula," it added.

(return to top)

4. Inter-Korean Relations

Korea Times (Kang Hyun-kyung, "'INTER-KOREAN RELATIONS AS IMPORTANT AS INT'L TIES", Seoul, 2008/03/03) reported that Rep. Chung Hyung-keun of the governing Grand National Party (GNP) Monday advised President Lee Myung-bak to pay more attention to inter-Korean relations. "Pyongyang desperately wants economic assistance from Seoul to make its economy work, so it doesn't use aggravating words against its counterparts here, although they might feel uncomfortable with the new government's policy," Chung said.

(return to top)

5. Inter-Korean Sports Exchanges

Joongang Ilbo ("N. KOREA SEEKS TO PLAY S. KOREA IN SHENYANG: REPORT", Seoul, 2008/02/29) reported that the DPRK prefers to hold its World Cup qualifier against the ROK next month in the PRC rather than in Pyongyang, an ROK broadcaster was quoted as saying by Yonhap News Agency. The SBS television network said the North hopes to hold the March 24 qualifier for the 2010 World Cup finals in Shenyang. The ROK's Korea Football Association KFA has requested FIFA arbitration without additional negotiations, KFA Public Relations Director Yoo Young-cheol said. "FIFA shares the view with us that the match should be held as stipulated in its regulations. I expect FIFA will make a decision in favor of us," Yoo said.

(return to top)

6. PRC-DPRK Relations

Chosun Ilbo ("KIM JONG-IL VISITS CHINESE EMBASSY", Seoul, 2008/03/03) reported that DPRK leader Kim Jong-il attended a dinner at the PRC Embassy in Pyongyang on Saturday with an entourage of senior DPRK leaders. Kim said, "China and Korea are like a close family. I'm very glad to come to the Chinese Embassy. I feel as if I were visiting a relatives' house." He said 2008 is a

historic year for both countries. “I am sure of your success in the upcoming Beijing Olympics, which is an honor not only for the Chinese people but also for the peoples in Asia and the world."

(return to top)

7. DPRK Food Supply

Associated Press (Hyung-jin Kim, "NORTH KOREA WINTER THREATENS FOOD SUPPLY", Seoul, 2008/03/03) reported that an abnormally dry and mild winter has hampered the growth of some crops in the DPRK, state media reported Monday. "This abnormal climate phenomenon has seriously affected the growth of autumn wheat and barley," the Korean Central News Agency reported. The World Food Program recently predicted the DPRK will be short of about 1.4 million tons of food this year.

(return to top)

8. DPRK Energy

IFES NK Brief ("DPRK HOLDS FIRST EXTENDED CABINET MEETING OF THE YEAR", Seoul, 2008/03/03) reported that the DPRK's first extended cabinet meeting of the year opened in the beginning of February, with Premier Kim Young-il presiding. At the meeting, Vice Premier Kwak Bum-ki stressed that accomplishing this year's economic goals was "essential for opening the doors to a breakthrough for building an economically strong nation." In particular, he called for the production of the "lifeline of socialist construction," and specifically, electricity, coal, metal, and railways, which he referred to as the "four lines for the advance of the people's economy." Accordingly, the goal of carrying out overwhelming repairs to power generation facilities, and at the same time constructing new power plants in order to increase electrical production capabilities by several hundred thousand kilowatts, was proposed.

(return to top)

9. Alleged DPRK Cigarette Counterfeiting

Korea Times ("N. KOREA SELLING FAKE CIGARETTES", Seoul, 2008/03/02) reported that a report by the U.S. State Department said Friday that the DPRK may have switched from narcotics trafficking to selling counterfeit cigarettes to earn valuable foreign currency. The annual report on international narcotics transactions said large quantities of counterfeit brand-name cigarettes that were likely made in DPRK are in circulation. It said such proliferation can only be attributable to DPRK authorities not clamping down on criminal activities within their own borders or Pyongyang playing a role in production. The report said that if the latter is the case, it could represent a policy shift away from the narcotics trade, which has drawn intense criticism from abroad, to a less "risky" way to make money.

(return to top)

10. ROK Unification Ministry

Donga Ilbo ("PRES. LEE NAMES NEW UNIFICATION, ENVIRONMENTAL MINISTERS", Seoul, 2008/03/03) reported that ROK President Lee Myung-bak nominated Sunday Ambassador to the PRC Kim Ha-jung unification minister. Kim has served as diplomatic minister to the PRC, director of the Foreign Ministry's Asia-Pacific bureau, and senior presidential secretary for foreign affairs and security.

(return to top)

11. ROK Fisheries Protection

Korea Times (Jung Sung-ki, "S. KOREA RATIFIES INTERNATIONAL MARITIME PACT", Seoul, 2008/03/03) reported that the ROK has become the 68th country to ratify the United Nations pact on the protection and management of fish in the high seas, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade said Monday. The pact includes guiding principles on managing and protecting fishes and maritime resources, and international efforts such as registration in other nations' marine associations and searches of ships from other countries.

(return to top)

12. ROK-Japan Relations

Chosun Ilbo ("LEE URGES FUTURE-ORIENTED TIES WITH JAPAN", Seoul, 2008/03/03) reported that ROK President Lee Myung-bak, in an address marking the anniversary of the March 1 Independence Movement on Saturday, said the ROK and Japan "should build up future-oriented relations in a pragmatic way. We can never turn our face away from the truth of history. But neither can we afford to remain bound by the past indefinitely and delay our march toward the future." Lee called for a more "open-minded patriotism, whereby we can exchange and live together with the people around the world, instead of narrow-minded nationalism."

(return to top)

13. US-Japan Relations

Associated Press (Chisaki Watanabe, "US MILITARY PROBES MARINE RAPE SUSPECT", Tokyo, 2008/03/01) reported that US officials are investigating a Marine accused of raping a teenage girl in Okinawa after Japanese prosecutors dropped charges against him, officials said Saturday. Staff Sgt. Tyrone Luther Hadnott was released Friday night after the girl withdrew her criminal complaint against him, according to Ryo Fukahori, a ministry official in charge of Japan-U.S. security. The district prosecutor's office in the prefectural capital of Naha then dropped charges against Hadnott. "The girl told us that she wished to be left alone," Chief District Prosecutor Yaichiro Yamashiki was quoted by Kyodo as telling reporters. "Considering her feelings, we decided that it was not appropriate to pursue our indictment."

(return to top)

14. Japanese Whaling

Associated Press (Joseph Coleman, "JAPAN: ACTIVISTS INJURE WHALERS", Tokyo, 2008/03/03) reported that anti-whaling activists aboard aboard a boat operated by the Sea Shepherd hurled containers of rotten butter at a Japanese whaling ship Nisshin Maru in Antarctic waters Monday, lightly injuring several crewmembers, Japan's government said. "We strongly condemn this," Chief Cabinet Secretary Nobutaka Machimura said. Japan planned to issue a formal protest to the Netherlands, which licenses the activist boat, the Steve Irwin, said Itsunori Onodera, senior vice minister for foreign affairs.

(return to top)

15. Sino-US Relations

BBC News ("US AND CHINA AGREE HOTLINE PLAN", Beijing, 2008/02/29) reported that the PRC and the United States have formally agreed to the setting up of a military hotline. The deal was signed at a meeting of senior US and PRC defence officials in Shanghai. Establishing a hotline has been long planned and was last discussed during a visit to THE PRC in November by the US defence secretary, Robert Gates. "The agreement will allow us to move forward on installing the actual equipment in the next few weeks," said a statement from the US defence department.

(return to top)

16. PRC-Russian Relations

International Herald Tribune (David Lague, "RUSSIA AND CHINA RETHINK ARMS DEALS", Beijing , 2008/03/03) reported that a fear in Moscow of renewed rivalry with the PRC and a desire in Beijing to become more self-reliant have led both sides to re-evaluate their arms trade. After orders peaked at more than $2 billion a year early in this decade, PRC arms deals with Russia shrank to almost nothing in 2006, and no major new contracts are in the pipeline, according to Russian, Chinese and U.S. defense experts. "The Russians can maintain their lead for a certain period, but eventually we will catch up," said Shen Dingli, an international affairs analyst at Fudan University in Shanghai. "China will be a formidable technological competitor to anybody."

China Daily ("MEDVEDEV SET TO BOOST CHINA TIES", Beijing, 2008/03/03) reported that the Sino-Russian strategic cooperative partnership will be further strengthened if Dimitry Medvedev is elected president, PRC analysts believe. "Establishing Russian-China strategic partnership is a pillar policy of the Putin administration and Medvedev is expected to follow Putin's policy on China," says Xu Tao, a professor of China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations. "Moscow, confronted by increasing pressure from the West, needs understanding and support from China," he added. "This is a key reason why Medvedev will cherish the partnership with Beijing."

(return to top)

II. ROK Report

17. ROK-US Relations

Munhwa Ilbo ("DPRK RESPONDING TO US-ROK JOINT MILITARY EXERCISE BY THREATENING", 2008/03/03) wrote that the DPRK is intensifying its criticism of the US-ROK joint military exercise. No further explanation is needed than that the allusion the DPRK made to the nuclear threat. Considering the fact that DPRK, right after it had provoked the world with the October 9, 2006 nuclear test, has specifically mentioned nuclear restraint in the 2007 New Year's editorial, and is currently outspokenly threatening the world with nuclear weapons, this situation worries many people. We think that DPRK repeatedly criticizing US-ROK joint military exercise only proves the necessity of US-ROK alliance reinforcement.

(return to top)

18. DPRK Human Rights

Kukmin Ilbo ("WE SHOULD NO LONGER BE SILENT ABOUT DPRK HUMAN RIGHTS", 2008/03/03) wrote that the seventh assembly of the UN Commission of Human Rights is taking place in Geneva, Switzerland from today. At this conference, the ROK government should finally display a strong will to improve human rights in the DPRK. As a matter of fact, the lukewarm attitude toward DPRK human rights invites criticisms from others. President Lee Myung-bak, who emphasizes the diplomatic attitude toward DRPK in which ROK says what is necessary, has shown great interest in DPRK human rights. This is the time for President Lee to prove that his ideas are not words only.

Hankook Ilbo ("HOPING FOR 'FRANK CONVERSATION' THAT IMPROVES DPRK HUMAN RIGHTS", 2008/03/03) wrote that the question of how the new administration will show a changed attitude toward DPRK human rights at the UN Commission of Human Rights Conference taking place in Geneva from today is drawing attention. Pure DPRK aid organizations such as “Good Friends” point out that although the human rights conditions have improved, there are still problems of food distribution, discrimination, and polarization. If the new administration shows effort to change such reality through frank conversation, the global society will support it fullheartedly.

(return to top)

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