

NAPSNet Daily Report 31 March, 2005

Recommended Citation

"NAPSNet Daily Report 31 March, 2005", NAPSNet Daily Report, March 31, 2005,
<https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-daily-report/napsnet-daily-report-31-march-2005/>

I. United States

1. DPRK on Nuclear Talks

The Associated Press ("N. KOREA DEMANDS EQUAL TREATMENT IN TALKS", 2005-03-31) reported that the DPRK said Thursday the US should dismantle all potential nuclear threats in the region before it would discuss giving up its own nuclear program and demanded to be treated equally in disarmament talks. "Now that we have become a nuclear power, the six-party talks should be disarmament talks where participants can solve the issue on an equal basis," a DPRK Foreign Ministry spokesman said. The unidentified spokesman added that the nuclear crisis could no longer be resolved through discussions on a potential reward in return for freezing the nuclear program.

Reuters ("REPORT: NORTH KOREA WANTS COMPREHENSIVE ARMS TALKS", 2005-03-31) reported that the DPRK wants six-party talks on its nuclear programs to be upgraded into comprehensive disarmament talks now that it has become a nuclear state, KCNA quoted a Foreign Ministry spokesman as saying Thursday. "The US claims that if the DPRK dismantles its nuclear weapons first, it will be given collective assurances for security and get a benefit. This is, however, nothing but a gangster-like logic...", the spokesman said. "Escalating US nuclear threat on the Korean peninsula and its surroundings, which gave us no choice but to possess nuclear weapons, must be cleared and a relationship of trust between us and related countries must be established," the spokesman said.

2. US on DPRK Nuclear Talks

Agence France Presse ("US REITERATES OTHER OPTIONS POSSIBLE IF NORTH KOREAN NUCLEAR TALKS FAIL", 2005-03-31) reported that the US will consider other options if the DPRK

refuses to return to six-party talks on curbing its nuclear weapons drive, a senior official reiterated. But Christopher Hill, the new assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, stressed the US would do all it could to get the talks back on track. "If it doesn't work, obviously we will have to see what other ways (there are)," said Hill. "One option that is not available to us is to walk away from it," he told reporters.

3. DPRK on US-DPRK Relations

The Associated Press ("NORTH KOREA DISMISSES U.S. CLAIMS IT WON'T INVADE", 2005-03-31) reported that DPRK dismissed the US' repeated claims that it has no intention to invade the DPRK as a mere diversionary tactic to pave the way for an attack. The US says it has no intention of invading and has urged the DPRK to return to the negotiating table. However, such US claims are "expressions of ambitions to rule (the DPRK) through use of both carrots and sticks," the DPRK's official Rodong Sinmun daily said in a commentary. "But neither carrots nor sticks will work."

4. Inter-Korean Accord

Joongang Ilbo ("GNP PROPOSES ACCORD WITH NORTH", 2005-03-31) reported that the Grand National Party has drawn up a proposal for a "peace accord" between DPRK and ROK. A reform committee of the conservative party recommended upgrading the Armistice Agreement to a "peace accord." Over the years, the DPRK has insisted it would only sign a peace agreement with the US. Though the details of the peace accord were not released, the committee said it recognizes the DPRK as a legitimate entity.

5. DPRK-Japanese Relations

Yonhap news ("KOIZUMI SENDS SPECIAL ENVOYS TO NORTH KOREA", 2005-03-31) reported that Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi sent special envoys to the DPRK this week to help improve soured relations with the DPRK. The three-member delegation left for Pyongyang Wednesday night, the source who is familiar with Japanese diplomatic affairs told Yonhap News Agency on condition of anonymity, adding that they carried Koizumi's personal letter for DPRK leader Kim Jong-il. The source did not give details on the content of the letter but said it may have included "Japanese willingness to smooth bilateral ties" worsened by a row involving the remains of two Japanese nationals kidnapped by the DPRK decades ago.

6. Russia-DPRK Relations

Pravda.Ru ("RUSSIA TO GAIN PROFIT FROM COOPERATION WITH NORTH KOREA, DESPITE USA'S CONCERNS", 2005-03-31) reported that the central objective of the six-sided talks between Russia, the PRC, Japan and ROK (plus the USA and the DPRK) is the prevention of war. The four states have very good chances to gain profit from the economic cooperation with Pyongyang, if they

try to understand the viewpoint of the DPRK diplomats. DPRK workers have already managed to find their demand in Russia's Far East owing to their low payment requirements and high-quality work. As long as the DPRK economy is becoming more transparent to the world, the states, which decide to help the nation during the moment of hardship, will be able to use the DPRK's gratitude in return. Russia may find itself among such winners too.

7. Gallucci on DPRK Nuclear Issue

JoongAng Ilbo ("FORMER U.S. DIPLOMAT SAYS NORTH TALKS NOT A LOSS YET", 2005-03-31) reported that in a recent interview with the JoongAng Ilbo, Robert Gallucci, former chief US negotiator with the DPRK during the first nuclear crisis, made clear that he does not agree with Washington's current hardline approach of no compensation for the DPRK to stop its weapons programs. "All of us who have raised children understand the idea of not rewarding bad behavior," Mr. Gallucci said. "My problem is that international politics is not childrearing. An apparently simple ethical guideline to good behavior seems to be inadequate principles for dealing with dangerous states in international affairs. I am less worried about rewarding bad behavior than solving the problem."

8. US on DPRK Nuclear Export

New York Times ("USING CLUES FROM LIBYA TO STUDY A NUCLEAR MYSTERY", 2005-03-31) reported that in the 15 months since Libya turned over nearly two tons of illicit uranium, the radioactive material has become a pivotal piece of evidence for investigators unraveling the nuclear black market. The Bush administration now say the uranium most likely came from the DPRK and helps to build a case that the DPRK has exported dangerous nuclear material. But the evidence is also circumstantial. In interviews this week, administration officials and foreign diplomats disclosed that Libyan officials had also surrendered financial ledgers to the US that provide a guide to the front companies involved in the nuclear network. One large payment, US officials contend, was directed to the DPRK, presumably for the uranium hexafluoride that arrived in Tripoli in 2001. But US and foreign officials who have seen the financial documents or been briefed on them say they do not prove a direct payment from Libya to the DPRK government.

9. US Intelligence Report

Reuters ("REPORT: U.S. INTELLIGENCE 'DEAD WRONG' ON IRAQ", 2005-03-31) reported that US intelligence on Iraq was "dead wrong," dealing a blow to UD credibility that will take years to undo, and spymasters still know disturbingly little about nuclear programs in countries like Iran and the DPRK, a presidential commission reported on Thursday. And at a time when the US is accusing Iran of nuclear ambitions and pressuring the DPRK on its nuclear programs, the report said: "Across the board, the intelligence community knows disturbingly little about the nuclear programs of many of the world's most dangerous actors."

10. US Poll on Nuclear Weapons

The Associated Press ("POLL: NO NATION SHOULD HAVE NUKE WEAPONS", 2005-03-31) reported that most Americans think nuclear weapons are so dangerous that no country should have them, and a majority believe it's likely that terrorists or a nation will use them within five years. 52 percent of Americans think a nuclear attack by one country against another is somewhat or very likely by 2010, according to an AP-Ipsos poll. Fifty-three percent think a nuclear attack by terrorists is at least somewhat likely. Two-thirds of Americans say no nation should have nuclear weapons, including the US, and most of the others say no more countries should get them.

11. ROK on DPRK Bird Flu Outbreak

Yonhap news ("SOUTH KOREA INVITES NORTH TO DISCUSS CONTAINING BIRD FLU", 2005-0-31) reported that discussions between the two Koreas and related international organizations will likely begin this week on ways to contain the spread of bird flu in the DPRK, Unification Ministry officials said Thursday. "The North has yet to respond to a telephone message from South Korea, but we're in contact with the UN Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Health Organization (to arrange talks)," said Kim Cheon-sik, director of inter-Korean exchange and cooperation bureau at the ministry.

12. UN on DPRK Bird Flu Outbreak

Chosun Ilbo ("INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY GIVES MULTIFACTED AID TO N.K. FOLLOWING BIRD FLU", 2005-03-31) reported that the UN Food and Agriculture Organization said Hans Wagner, a senior FAO official flew into Pyongyang on Tuesday, two days after the DPRK confirmed its first outbreak of bird flu. Mr. Wagner will soon be joined by two other experts from the PRC and Australia to look at the strategies being set up by the government and also deliver supplies. The FAO says the DPRK was being "open and transparent" and are willing to cooperate with the FAO, realizing that this is a serious situation.

13. DPRK Bird Flu Outbreak

Los Angeles Times ("BIRD FLU HITS N. KOREA IN SORE SPOT", 2005-03-31) reported that the first reported outbreak of avian flu in the DPRK could have a devastating effect on the DPRK. ROK officials believe that the fact the DPRK felt compelled to make the announcement suggests that the situation is far worse than described. If an epidemic takes hold -- or has taken hold -- in the DPRK, the implications could be grave, in part because of the country's faltering healthcare system. The DPRK's people also suffer from a chronic lack of protein, and the nation's sparse economy generates few legal exports.

Kyodo News ("N. KOREA CULLED 219,000 BIRDS AT 3 FARMS DUE TO BIRD FLU", 2005-03-31) reported that the DPRK has culled 219,000 birds at three chicken farms following what is believed to

be its first outbreak of bird flu, an official at the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization said Thursday. DPRK authorities also told an FAO expert visiting Pyongyang that areas near the chicken farms have been vaccinated, and surveillance measures for the disease have been expanded to the entire country, the official told Kyodo News. DPRK authorities also told FAO that no human infections have been found, according to the official.

14. Inter-Korean Agricultural Cooperation

Yonhap news ("S. KOREAN PROVINCE OFFERS TO BUILD FARM IN N. KOREA", 2005-03-31) reported that a ROK provincial government has offered the DPRK to establish a farm in the DPRK in an effort to help build up its backwater agricultural base, an official said Thursday. The Gyeonggi provincial administration made the proposal at a meeting with DPRK officials in the DPRK's border city of Kaesong Wednesday, said the official at the administration's policy planning and coordination office.

15. UN Food Aid to the DPRK

Itar-Tass ("UN WORLD FOOD PROGRAM MAY CUT HUMANITARIAN AID TO N KOREA", 2005-0-31) reported that the World Food Programme of the United Nations may reduce the volume of humanitarian aid supplied to the DPRK, WFP regional director Tony Banbury said in Beijing on Thursday, according to local reports. According to the WFP official, the organization has already stopped supplying vitamin vegetable oil for 900,000 aged people and this week it will suspend its distribution among kindergartens and nurseries, pregnant women and nursing mothers, due to the lack of funds.

16. DMZ Fire

Yonhap news ("FOREST FIRE IN NORTH KOREA SPREADS TO DMZ", None) reported that the ROK's frontline army units are on high alert after a fire that broke out on the eastern side of the peninsula just north of the inter-Korean border began rapidly moving southward, military officials said Thursday. They said the blaze was first spotted on the side of a mountain inside the DPRK Tuesday and that it has already crossed the military demarcation line of the heavily armed demilitarized zone (DMZ).

17. DPRK on VE-Day Celebration

Itar-Tass ("KIM JONG IL NOT TO ATTEND VE-DAY FESTIVITIES IN MOSCOW", 2005-03-31) reported that a renowned DPRK politician will represent the country at VE-Day anniversary celebrations in Moscow on May 9 instead of DPRK leader Kim Jong Il, a source from the Russian organizing committee Victory told Itar-Tass on Thursday. "A renowned politician, but not Kim Jong Il, will arrive for the Moscow festivities marking the 60th anniversary of the VE-Day," the source

said.

18. Inter-Korean Economic Cooperation

Asia Pulse/Yonhap ("SSANGBANGWOOL TO OFFER N.KOREAN-MADE UNDERWEAR IN S.KOREA", 2005-03-31) reported that Ssangbangwool Co., the ROK's largest underwear maker, said Thursday it will sell its products made in the DPRK at discount outlets here from Friday. In November last year, Ssangbangwool signed a deal with the factory in the DPRK's Rajin-Sonbong special economic zone to produce undergarments on an original equipment manufacturing basis.

19. DPRK World Cup Soccer Riot

The Independent ("FIFA TO INVESTIGATE AFTER VIOLENCE MARS N KOREA DEFEAT ", 2005-0-31) reported that the FIFA is awaiting referee Mohammed Kousa's report before launching an investigation after he and two assistants were forced to seek refuge from angry DPRK fans following the World Cup qualifier against Iran. Iran beat the DPRK 2-0 in Pyongyang yesterday in a match that ended in violent scenes to take the outright lead in their World Cup qualifying group. The match officials were unable to leave the pitch for 20 minutes after the game as furious DPRK fans hurled bottles, rocks and chairs in frustration.

Kyodo News ("JAPAN ASKS FOR SAFETY GUARANTEE FOR FOOTBALL MATCH WITH N KOREA", 2005-03-31) reported that Japan said Thursday that it wants Japanese soccer players and fans to have their safety guaranteed when Japan play a World Cup qualifier against DPRK on 8 June in Pyongyang. "As many (Japanese soccer) supporters may travel (to Pyongyang), we would like to see firm safety steps taken for them as well as the players," Chief Cabinet Secretary Hiroyuki Hosoda told a press conference.

20. ROK on NSL Prosecutions

Korea Herald ("PROSECUTION CLEARS NOVELIST, SCHOLAR OF PRO-N.K. CHARGES", 2005-0-31) reported that the prosecution yesterday cleared two liberal intellectuals of charges of helping the DPRK in their writings on the Korean War. The Seoul District Prosecutor's Office said it has decided not to press charges against novelist Cho Chong-rae and political scientist Choi Jang-jip, who were accused of violating the security law in 1994 and 1998, respectively. The decision came amid controversy over the draconian National Security Law, which has been criticized for being abused for political oppression purposes and which the ruling Uri Party is pushing to abolish.

21. ROK on Sino-Japanese Relations

Korea Times ("`BALANCING ROLE' FOCUSES ON POSSIBLE CHINA-JAPAN CONFLICT", 2005-0-31) reported that President Roh Moo-hyun's vision of the ROK playing a "balancing role" in

Northeast Asia has come out of concern of a possible conflict between the PRC and Japan, according to government sources. They said Roh believes the situation in Northeast Asia has become unstable due to an escalating power struggle between these two nations. "We are seeking to play a pro-active and positive role in the creation of a permanent peace structure in Northeast Asia based on cooperative relations with China and Japan," a senior official at the National Security Council (NSC) said.

22. ROK-Japanese Relations

Choson Ilbo ("THE END OF KOREAN-JAPANESE FRIENDSHIP?", 2005-03-31) reported that the "diplomatic war" with Japan is heating up, with the island country giving the ROK a taste of its own medicine. Japanese Foreign Minister Nobutaka Machimura's comment on Wednesday criticizing President Roh Moo-hyun was a mirror image of Unification Minister Chung Dong-young's comment on March 17 that Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi was "mistaken" and "rude". Diplomatic principles seem to have been thrown out the window, and closed discussions between national leaders are now fair game.

23. PRC on Cross Strait Relations

Reuters ("CHINA CALLS FOR DIALOGUE WITH TAIWAN", 2005-03-31) reported that a top PRC leader called for a resumption of dialogue with Taiwan Thursday, one day after Beijing offered Taipei trade sweeteners to temper a law sanctioning war if the island formally declared independence. "Signs have emerged that the tense situation in the Taiwan Strait has eased somewhat," Jia Qinglin, who is ranked fourth in the PRC's Communist Party hierarchy, told Chiang Pin-kung, the visiting vice-chairman of the Nationalist Party, or Kuomintang (KMT). "(We) should seek to start talking based on the 1992 consensus," a government statement quoted Jia as saying. The consensus refers to Beijing and Taipei agreeing to their own interpretation of the "one China" principle.

24. PRC on Japanese UNSC Bid

The New York Times ("22 MILLION CHINESE SEEK TO BLOCK JAPAN'S BID TO JOIN U.N. COUNCIL", 2005-03-31) reported that a grass-roots PRC campaign to keep Japan out of the United Nations Security Council has gathered some 22 million signatures, increasing the chances that the PRC will block Japan's bid to join the group, organizers and analysts said today. The petition effort, conducted through popular PRC Web sites, enjoys tacit support from the government, which has allowed state-controlled news media to cover the campaign prominently. If the PRC prevents Japan's elevation, it would mark the most direct confrontation between Asia's two leading powers since they re-established diplomatic ties in 1972.

25. PRC Population Redistribution

Agence France Presse ("MORE THAN 300 MILLION CHINESE TO MOVE FROM COUNTRYSIDE TO CITIES BY 2020", 2005-03-31) reported that more than 300 million Chinese will move from the countryside to the cities by 2020, changing the face of the world's most populous nation forever. The trend is culminating right now as millions leave their rural homes every year to seek employment and new lives in big urban areas, the Xinhua news agency reported. "Economic growth and the drive towards industrialization are causing cities to expand," said Li Si Ming, an expert on urban development in the PRC at the Hong Kong Baptist University.

26. PRC on Illegal Logging

The Associated Press ("CHINA INVESTIGATING APP CHARGES", 2005-03-31) reported that the PRC's State Forestry Administration is investigating charges that Singapore-based Asia Pulp & Paper Co., the world's largest pulp producer, is conducting illegal logging in southwestern PRC forests, an official said Thursday, warning that violators would be punished. "The local forestry administration is now investigating this case," said Wang Zhuxiong, a senior official with the administration. "If the company is found guilty, it will be punished according to law."

II. Japan

27. Japan-ROK Territorial Dispute

The Japan Times ("TOKYO: SEOUL GETTING 'EMOTIONAL' ON ISLES", 2005-03-25) reported that members of a Liberal Democratic Party panel on diplomacy called on the Japanese government to take the Takeshima (Tokdo) case to the International Court of Justice to settle the territorial claim. A senior Foreign Ministry official, however, said he doubted whether the issue could be brought before the ICJ because the consent of both countries is necessary. The ROK has refused in the past to take the issue to the ICJ.

28. Japan on Cross Strait Relations

The Japan Times ("DEFENSE REPORT WARNS OF CHINA TARGETING TAIWAN", 2005-03-29) reported that a Japan's Defense Agency think tank raised concerns in a report Monday about the military balance between the PRC and Taiwan, noting that the PRC is conducting frequent offensive exercises for attacking Taiwan and deterring US intervention. The PRC is accelerating its weapons modernization, military alignment and training because it is "now searching for an effective policy to deal with the strengthening Taiwanese identity and moves for independence in Taiwan," the National Institute for Defense Studies said in its 2005 East Asian Strategic Review.

29. US Bases in Japan

The Asahi Shimbun ("PLAN PUTS SDF IN CONTROL OF FUTENMA", 2005-03-29) reported that

with plans at a deadlock for relocating the US Marine Corps Air Station Futenma, the Japan's government is weighing whether to put the facility under control of the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) rather than hand back the land to owners in Ginowan, Okinawa Prefecture. Under the new plan, the US military could use Futenma as a strategic base in case of military emergencies. Another idea that has been floated is to relocate the helicopter unit now stationed at Futenma to Kadena, or Marine Corps facilities at Camp Schwab or Camp Hansen, which are also in Okinawa Prefecture.

30. Resignation of KEPCO President

Kyodo News ("KEPCO CHIEF TO EXIT OVER STEAM DEATHS", 2005-03-31) reported that Yosaku Fuji, president of Kansai Electric Power Co. (KEPCO), said he will step down in June to take responsibility for last year's fatal steam accident at one of its nuclear power plants. Fuji, 67, will also step down as chairman of the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan by June but will stay on the board of KEPCO. The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry's investigative commission is looking into the Aug. 9, 2004, rupture of a reactor-cooling system pipe at KEPCO's Mihama nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture. In the accident, high temperature steam erupted from the pipe, killing five inspection workers and injuring six others.

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