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Preceding NAPSNet Report

I. NAPSNet

1. DPRK Nuclear Program

Chosun Ilbo ("N.KOREA, U.S. 'TO HAMMER OUT NUCLEAR DECLARATION'", 2008/04/03) reported that the US chief negotiator to six-party talks on the DPRK nuclear problem, Christopher Hill, will likely meet his DPRK counterpart Kim Kye-gwan in a Southeast Asian country later this week. The meeting is expected to produce a solution to disputes over the DPRK's full disclosure of its nuclear activities and programs, which has been delayed for more than three months. A ROK diplomatic source said that Hill will tour Indonesia and East Timor until April 8, and there is a chance that he will meet Kim in a Southeast Asian country during the trip. Some observers say Hill will likely meet Kim in Jakarta on Friday.

Korea Herald (Lee Joo-hee , "U.S. SAYS NO NEW DEADLINE ON N.K. LIST", 2008/04/03) reported that as back-channel consultations between Washington and Pyongyang continue, the US State Department said yesterday that there is no new deadline for the DPRK's official list of its nuclear programs. "I wouldn't circle a particular date on the calendar, but we think it's important that North Koreans come forward with the declaration," said State Department spokesman Sean McCormack. "We are already several months into overtime here. ... It's time to come forward with the declaration," McCormack said.

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2. Inter-Korean Relations

Agence France-Presse (Park Chan-Kyong, "NKOREA CUTS CONTACTS WITH SOUTH AS TENSIONS ESCALATE ", Seoul, 2008/04/03) reported that the DPRK announced it was suspending all dialogue with the ROK and closing the border to Seoul officials, its toughest action in a week of growing cross-border tensions. The DPRK said it went ahead with its threatened retaliatory action after Seoul refused to apologise for recent remarks by its military chief. The DPRK Thursday said Lee's government "is driving north-south relations to confrontation and catastrophe."

Yonhap ("N. KOREA CANCELS VISIT BY S. KOREAN CIVILIANS", Seoul, 2008/04/03) reported that the DPRK unilaterally canceled visits by ROK civilians who planned to plant trees in the DPRK for Arbor Day, sources here. Acheon Global Corp., Onnuri Community Church and Korean Sharing Movement said DPRK authorities indefinitely canceled the visit by members early this week. The trip was effectively called off because the group's DPRK counterparts said they did not welcome the visit by Governor Kim Moon-su. Kim is a member of the ruling Grand National Party that has taken a harder stance toward Pyongyang.

Yonhap ("N. KOREA THREATENS TO COUNTER 'BREACH' OF TERRITORIAL WATERS ", Seoul, 2008/04/03) reported that the DPRK issued warnings that it will take countermeasures to respond to "repeated incursions" of its territorial waters by ROK warships. The warning, issued by the Navy and carried by the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), claimed that "unforetold actions" will be taken if surface combatants continue to operate in DPRK waters. The KCNA said that just before noon, three ROK patrol boats entered DPRK waters off the coast of South Hwanghae Province and operated in the region, despite repeated warnings by DPRK authorities. The DPRK will carefully monitor actions taken by the ROK military, and if any military clash takes place, the responsibility for such an incident will rest entirely on Seoul, said the KCNA.

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3. DPRK Food Supply

Joongang Ilbo ("NORTH CUTS FOOD RATIONS TO PYONGYANG", 2008/04/03) reported that the DPRK's food shortages are so bad that even its elite citizens in Pyongyang will not get state food rations until September, a local relief group said yesterday. The Seoul-based organization Good Friends said the DPRK has decided to suspend state food rations in the capital city for six months. Grim predictions are spreading throughout the country that there will be massive deaths from famine in provincial areas starting around May, the group also said. It indicated the decision is unprecedented, quoting some senior Pyongyang officials as saying the food distribution was not even suspended for such a long period of time during the country's worst food crisis in the late 1990s.

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4. DPRK Arms Sales

NKH World ("N.KOREA EXPORTING ROCKET LAUNCHERS TO MYANMAR", 2008/04/03) reported that the DPRK has reportedly been exporting multiple-tube rocket launchers to Myanmar, in violation of UN sanctions. Diplomatic sources told NHK that the exports began last year after the 2 nations restored diplomatic ties, and have been carried out through a Singapore-based trading company. The UN Security Council adopted a sanctions resolution against the DPRK following its nuclear tests in October 2006. The resolution bans the country from exporting or importing nuclear material, ballistic missiles and other types of conventional weapons.

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5. DPRK Economy

Yomiuri Shimbun (Kazuyoshi Nakaya , "CASH-STRAPPED N. KOREA TO OPEN HOTEL IN BERLIN",

Berlin, 2008/04/03) reported that the DPRK is planning to open a hotel in Berlin by converting a building that previously formed part of its embassy, The Yomiuri Shimbun has learned. The hostel has the potential to be popular with tourists. However, its opening, which was originally slated for early March, is behind schedule, a delay thought by some to be due to concerns in Pyongyang about people learning secrets by accessing the building that once served as a key information-gathering complex during the Cold War.

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6. US on ROK Missile Defence

The Associated Press (William C. Mann, "GENERAL: SOUTH KOREA DEFENSES LACKING ", Washington, 2008/04/03) reported that the DPRK has 13,000 artillery systems and 800 missiles, and the ROK lacks anti-missile defenses adequate to counter them, senators were told. U.S. Army Lt. Gen. Walter L. Sharp, nominated to take over the U.S. and U.N. military commands on the peninsula, said upgrades in the PAC-3 Patriot missile defense system have improved protection for critical U.S. facilities in the ROK. The ROK "does not currently possess a ballistic missile defense capability" that can join seamlessly with U.S. defensive missiles, Sharp wrote. It is urgent that the ROK develop such a system, Sharp wrote and added: "South Korean military and civilian facilities are currently highly vulnerable to North Korean missile attacks."

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7. US-ROK Security Alliance

Korea Herald (Jin Dae-woong , "KOREA, U.S. TO HOLD DEFENSE TALKS", 2008/04/03) reported that the ROK and the United States will hold working-level military talks next week to discuss pending issues including elevating Seoul's standing in the US arms-exporting program, the ROK Defense Ministry said. In the Security Policy Initiative talks, the 17th of their kind, delegates will exchange views on Seoul's demands regarding this matter, the ministry said. The meeting will be held on April 8 in Seoul. The two sides will also discuss Seoul's plan to expand its peacekeeping force overseas, the ministry said.

Korea Times ("US COMMITMENT WILL NOT CHANGE AFTER OPCON TRANSFER: BELL", 2008/04/03) reported that the US will continue to be fully committed to the joint defense of the ROK even after the transfer of wartime operational control of ROK troops back to Seoul in 2012, the commander of U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) said. Gen. Burwell B. Bell also dismissed recent calls to delay the scheduled transfer of the wartime operational control, often called OPCON, saying the United States is "extremely" happy with the direction the alliance is headed.

Yonhap ("SENATORS CRITICIZE OPCON TRANSFER DATE AS TOO LATE", Washington, 2008/04/03) reported that Senior U.S. senators criticized as too late the agreed date for the U.S. to transfer wartime command to the ROK side and pressed that it be pushed up. The ROK and the U.S. have decided that the transfer would take place in April 2012, much later than 2009 the U.S. side initially desired. "I find that unacceptable," Sen. John Warner (R-Virginia), the ranking member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said at a nomination hearing for the next commander of U.S. Forces Korea (USFK). Sen. Carl Levin (D-Michigan), the committee chairman, said it is "essential" for the nominee, Lt. Gen. Walter Sharp, to try to push the date forward.

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8. US-Japan Security Alliance

Kyodo ("FUKUDA DENIES NEED TO REVISE ACCORD ON U.S. FORCES OVER CRIMES ", Tokyo, 2008/04/03) reported that Japan and the United States denied the need to review the Japan-US Status of Forces Agreement in the wake of the arrest of a US Navy seaman on a murder charge, with Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda stressing that Japan will continue to seek improved implementation of the agreement. Fukuda made the remarks after the Democratic Party of Japan and two smaller opposition parties handed a petition to the government calling for revision of the agreement, known as SOFA, including making it mandatory for the United States to hand over US military personnel suspected of crimes on the demand of Japanese authorities.

Kyodo ("U.S. BASE-HOSTING DEAL PASSES LOWER HOUSE, TO TAKE EFFECT BY MAY ", Tokyo, 2008/04/03) reported that Japan's lower house passed a bilateral agreement with the US obliging Japan to annually pay some 140 billion yen to help operate U.S. military bases for three years until fiscal 2010. The endorsement by the House of Representatives paves the way for the already delayed implementation of the agreement by early May. The bilateral accord cleared the lower chamber backed mainly by the ruling coalition of the Liberal Democratic Party and New Komeito party.

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9. Japan SDF Peace-Keeping Operations

Japan Times ("U.N. LOOKS FOR JAPAN TO SEND MINE-REMOVAL TROOPS TO SUDAN", 2008/04/03) reported that the U.N. has sounded out Japan about dispatching Self-Defense Forces personnel to take part in U.N. peacekeepers' mine-removal efforts in southern Sudan, government sources said. The Foreign Ministry has already been considering Japanese participation in the U.N. Mission in Sudan. The world body's request is expected to help expedite debate on a deployment. The sources said the U.N. has approached Japan on several occasions since the beginning of the year, requesting troops for Sudan mine-removal efforts.

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10. US-Japan Nuclear Cooperation

Agence France-Presse ("TOSHIBA IN TALKS ON LUCRATIVE US NUCLEAR PLANT DEALS", Tokyo, 2008/04/03) reported that Japan's Toshiba Corp. said it is in talks with US firms on securing nuclear power plant contracts, as a report said it was set to clinch the 13.7-billion-dollar deals. "It is true that our subsidiary Westinghouse is holding negotiations with the aim to get final contracts but no decision has been made at the moment," Toshiba said in a statement. The orders are from utilities Scana Corp. and Southern Co. to build two plants in South Carolina and two in Georgia, the daily said.

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11. Tibet Unrest

The Associated Press (Christopher Bodeen, "TIBET ORDERS POST-RIOT PROPAGANDA DRIVE ", Beijing, 2008/04/03) reported that more than 1,000 people have been arrested or surrendered after deadly rioting last month in the Tibetan capital, and trials will be held before May, the city's deputy Communist Party secretary said. The statement is an apparent sign of the government's determination to close the book on the violence well ahead of the Beijing Olympic Games in August. Wang Xiangming's remarks in the official Tibet Commerce newspaper also offer the most complete picture yet of the scope of the crackdown on the largest anti-government protests in Tibetan areas across western PRC in almost two decades.

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12. Xinjiang Unrest

The New York Times (Howard W. French, "CHINA CONFIRMS PROTESTS BY UIGHUR MUSLIMS", Shanghai, 2008/04/03) reported that PRC officials said Wednesday that they were grappling with ethnic unrest on a second front, in the northwestern region of Xinjiang, where Uighur Muslims protested Chinese rule last month even as Tibetans rioted in the southwest. One Uighur demonstration, which appears to have been quickly suppressed, took place in the town of Hotan on March 23, at the same time the PRC was deploying thousands of security officers across much of its southwest to put down Tibetan unrest. Officials said the protest was staged by Islamic separatist groups seeking to foment a broader uprising in Xinjiang.

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13. US-PRC Trade Relations

The Financial Times (Richard McGregor, "SUBPRIME CRISIS MAY ‘PAUSE’ CHINA REFORMS", Beijing, 2008/04/03) reported that Hank Paulson, the US Treasury secretary, acknowledged that the fall-out from the subprime crisis in the US had “no doubt” given the PRC “pause” about the benefits of financial liberalisation. Mr Paulson was speaking in Beijing, where he is meeting PRC leaders, including Hu Jintao, the president, to prepare for the next round of the top-level dialogue between the two countries. “There is no doubt that what’s happening in US markets clearly has to give pause to the Chinese,” he said. “They may be too polite to say it directly.”

Xinhua ("CHINA URGES U.S. TO LIFT EXPORT RESTRICTIONS, REDUCE TRADE BARRIERS", Beijing, 2008/04/03) reported that the PRC urged the US to lift export restrictions that affect the PRC and reduce trade and investment barriers to promote bilateral trade relations. "Cooperation in the economic and trade fields is an important basis for Sino-American relations", said PRC Premier Wen Jiabao, according to a press release from the PRC Foreign Ministry, during a meeting with visiting US Treasury Secretary Henry M. Paulson. Wen said that bilateral cooperation in the areas of trade, investment and finance had developed to a very high level. He said that the PRC had taken active measures to address its trade imbalance with the US, which had already had "some positive effects".

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14. Cross Strait Relations

The Financial Times (Kathrin Hille, "HOPES RISE FOR TAIWAN-CHINA DIALOGUE", Taipei, 2008/04/03) reported that only two weeks after Ma Ying-jeou won Taiwan's presidential election in a landslide, the first signs are emerging that Taiwan and the PRC are edging towards resuming a dialogue that has been suspended for a decade. Mr Ma this week lauded a remark by Hu Jintao, the PRC's president, that the PRC and Taiwan should restore talks on the basis of an agreement to disagree on sovereignty issues which allowed the two to launch consultations in 1992. "You cannot deny that there is progress here," Mr Ma said.

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15. PRC Security

Agence France-Presse ("CHINA DENIES PRE-OLYMPIC CRACKDOWN ON DISSIDENTS ", Beijing, 2008/04/03) reported that the PRC denied it was cracking down on dissidents ahead of the Beijing Olympics, after high-profile rights activist Hu Jia was jailed for subversion. "We can't accept the accusation. China is a country with the rule of law. Everyone is equal before the law. We can't stop implementation of the law because of the Olympics," foreign ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu said. Hu, 34, received a three-and-a-half year prison sentence earlier Thursday for "subversion of power," based on articles he published online.

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16. PRC Energy Supply

China Daily (Xin Dingding , "GOVERNMENT PLANS TO FIND OIL, MINERAL RESERVES", 2008/04/03) reported that the search is on for domestic reserves of key resources, such as iron ore and crude oil, to reduce dependence on imports, according to a government plan released Wednesday. By 2010, the PRC aims to find 10 new oil fields, each with a reserve of at least 100 million tons, and eight to 10 new gas fields, each with a reserve of more than 100 billion cu m of natural gas, the national geological surveying and prospecting plan said. By the same year, the country is also seeking to find about 200 large mines, with coal, iron and copper being the resources most urgently needed, the plan drafted by the Ministry of Land and Resources, said.

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17. Shanghai Cooperation Organization

Washington Times (David R. Sands, "TEHRAN PUSHES TO JOIN CENTRAL ASIAN ALLIANCE", 2008/04/03) reported that seeking to break out of its diplomatic isolation, Iran has applied for full membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, an alliance dominated by the PRC and Russia and seen as challenging U.S. security interests in Central Asia. With Iran at loggerheads with the United States and leading European powers over its suspected nuclear programs and its support for militant Islamic groups in the Middle East, SCO members had been seen as reluctant to provoke the West by taking up Tehran's application.

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II. ROK Report

18. DPRK Internal Situation

Goodfirends ("[editorial] APPREHENSION FOR THE SECOND MARCH OF AFFLICTION", 2008/04/04) The food allotment in DPRK has reached a point of crisis. There are many areas expecting people to die from starvation. In the midst of the food crisis, inter-Korean relations are regressing. The current situation reminds us of of the Arduous March 10 years ago. Even though it was not during wartime, the precious lives of more than three million people were sacrificed. If something is not done right now, the casualties will be out of control. In collaboration, ROK and DPRK must come up with a measure to prevent DPRK victims' sacrifice.

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19. Inter-Korean Relations

Munhwa Ilbo ("DPRK'S MILITARY THREATNEING IS A MERE HARM TO TISLEF", 2008/04/04) President Lee Myung-bak has re-proposed that the DPRK that should suspend its aggressive attitude for "a truthful conversation, an upgraded inter-Korean cooperation." We who have notified the fact that the DPRK nuclear problem is the most essential pending question to Korea Peninsular believe that by emphasizing "DPRK nuclear abandonment first" and "pragmatic mutualism", the Lee administration has finally led the DPRK policies to their proper route. We also believe that DPRK must first ratify its "approach method to inter-Korean relations" as recommended by President Lee. DPRK must understand that the later the determination for change is made, the more serious the isolation will be.

Herlad Economics ("PEOPLE NOT EVEN UNPERTURBED BY DPRK MILITARY THREAT", 2008/04/04) There has been much change made in inter-Korean relations. People of the ROK seems hardly agitated by the continued provocation of the DPRK. ROK people are not losing stability from DPRK threats no matter the the circumstance. The Government also seems to be maintaining its flexibility. However, the question of whether ROK is ready to make countermeasure for DPRK's threatening beyond the moderate level is also an important issue. Countermeasures of introducing systematic missile defense system is also urgent. "Flexible response, or no response at all" are good, but they are possible only after such countermeasures are established. Insensibility of ROK people toward DPRK threats must not turn into disaster.

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