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Preceding NAPSNet Report

I. NAPSNet

1. Inter-Korean Ministerial Talks

Chosun Ilbo ("TWO KOREAS REACH AGREEMENT ON POWS, ABDUCTEES ", 2006-04-24) reported that the ROK and the DPRK have agreed to cooperate in settling the issue of prisoners of war and abductees still held in the DPRK. In a statement concluding the 18th ministerial talks between the two countries in Pyongyang on Monday, ROK Unification Minister Lee Jong-seok and his DPRK counterpart Kwon Ho-ung said, “The South and the North agreed to cooperate to conclusively settle the issue of people whose whereabouts during the war or after the war remain unknown.” In other results, the two sides decided to hold the next ministerial meeting in Busan from July 11 through 14, the first in the southern port city.

(return to top) Associated Press ("NORTH, SOUTH KOREA DISCUSS EXCHANGING PRISONERS", 2006-04-23) reported that the ROK on Sunday proposed sending captured DPRK spies home in exchange for the release of ROK citizens believed held in the DPRK. The ROK proposed releasing the former DPRK spies "when South Korean abductees and POWs ... are returned," said a high-ranking ROK delegate, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of ongoing Cabinet-level talks between the countries. (return to top) Reuters ("S.KOREA FAILS TO GET NORTH BACK TO NUCLEAR TALKS ", 2006-04-24) reported that the DPRK agreed on Monday to work toward implementing a deal under which Pyongyang would scrap its nuclear weapons programs, but could not be induced to come back to multilateral disarmament talks. "The South and the North agreed to continue to make efforts for the denuclearization of the peninsula and cooperate for a peaceful settlement of the nuclear issue by having the September 19 joint agreement implemented at an early date," a joint statement said. (return to top)

2. Former ROK President to Visit DPRK

Yonhap ("FORMER PRESIDENT KIM TO REVISIT N. KOREA IN JUNE", 2006-04-24) reported that Monday's inter-Korean agreement on former President Kim Dae-jung visiting Pyongyang this year paves the way for Kim and DPRK leader Kim Jong-il to discuss easing cross-border tension and the dispute over the DPRK’s nuclear weapons program.

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3. Kaesong Industrial Complex

Korea Times ("INCLUDING MIXED-KOREAN PRODUCTS IN FTA POSSIBLE: US BUSINESS LEADER ", 2006-04-24) reported that a US business representative hinted Thursday there could be a way around the issue of including products made at the Kaesong Industrial Complex in a free trade agreement (FTA) with the US. Myron Brilliant, speaking at an International Trade Commission (ITC) public hearing on the ROK-US free trade agreement, said the two countries need to discuss issues related to Kaesong. Brilliant cited the US FTA with Singapore, which allows some items manufactured in Singaporean industrial zones on Indonesian islands to be exported to the US if they are shipped from Singaporean ports.

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4. DPRK Counterfeiting

Chosun Ilbo ("S.KOREA MULLED PROVIDING NORTH WITH BANKNOTE PAPER, INK ", 2006-0--24) reported that the Korea Minting and Security Printing Corporation considered providing special paper and ink to the DPRK as part of an economic cooperation project this year amid allegations that the DPRK produced so-called supernotes or fake US$100 bills, it emerged Monday. A Unification Ministry document dated Feb. 14, 2006 on inter-Korean economic cooperation involving major state-run corporations says one of the mint's projects was to "review offering special paper and ink for printing banknotes to North Korea."

(return to top) Yonhap ("U.S. SHOULD PROBE CHINA'S LINK TO N.K. COUNTERFEITING: SCHOLAR", 2006-04-24) reported that the PRC is most likely complicit in the DPRK's counterfeiting operation, and the US should seriously investigate the link, a scholar at a conservative Washington think tank claimed Monday. John Tkacik, a senior research fellow at the Heritage Foundation, said in a research paper dated April 20 that the ease with which the DPRK moved financial accounts to PRC banks after punitive US actions -- and the PRC connection of a man indicted for circulating DPRK-made bogus bills -- indicate the PRC's involvement. (return to top)

5. DPRK Espionage Charges

Kyodo News ("ARREST WARRANT ISSUED FOR EX-N. KOREAN SPY OVER KIDNAPPING ", 2006-04-24) reported that Japanese police on Monday obtained arrest warrants for former DPRK spy Sin Guang Su and a former principal of a DPR Korean school in Japan for allegedly kidnapping a Japanese national, Tadaaki Hara, in 1980, police sources said.

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6. US Congressional Hearing on DPRK Abductions

Mainichi Daily News ("MEGUMI YOKOTA'S MOM LEAVES FOR US TO PRESSURE NORTH KOREA OVER ABDUCTIONS", 2006-04-24) reported that the mother of Megumi Yokota left on Monday for the US to speak at a public Congress hearing about DPRK's abduction of her daughter. Sakie Yokota spoke to reporters at Narita airport before leaving. "I feel nervous," Yokota, 70, said. "I want to convey my wish for my daughter to return and stress the importance of human rights." They are set to talk about the abduction issue at the hearing on April 27 local time and take part in a meeting organized by non-governmental organizations.

(return to top) Joongang Ilbo ("RALLY KICKS OFF A WEEK'S CAMPAIGN IN U.S. FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN NORTH", 2006-04-23) reported that rights groups from the ROK, the US and Japan rallied in Washington over the weekend in a bid to increase international awareness of kidnappings by the DPRK and urge government action to bring back RO Koreans held there. On Tuesday, a Senate committee will hear witnesses concerning DPRK illicit trade ? counterfeiting, drugs, cigarettes and the like ? and a House of Representatives committee will hear witnesses on abductions two days later. (return to top) Yonhap ("U.S. WILL CONTINUE TO HELP RESOLVE N.K. ABDUCTIONS: ERELI ", 2006-04-24) reported that the US will do all it can to help those seeking the return of people kidnapped by the DPRK, the State Department said Monday as Congress prepares to hold its first hearing on the matter this week. "The United States has, I think, publicly and in every way possible sought to support those who are seeking a return of abductees," department spokesman Adam Ereli said at a daily briefing. (return to top)

7. DPRK Secret Finances Allegations

Yonhap ("N. KOREA ASKS SWITZERLAND TO PROBE RUMORS OF SECRET ACCOUNT", 2006-0--21) reported that the DPRK said Friday it has asked the Swiss government to investigate the authenticity of a US claim that Pyongyang secretly keeps US$4 billion in Swiss bank accounts, and then release a report on its findings. The DPRK embassy in Switzerland sent a statement to Yonhap News Agency, branding the US allegation a "conventional scheme to damage the image of our republic."

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8. DPRK Military

Associated Press ("NKOREA HAVING TROUBLE MAINTAINING MILITARY EQUIPMENT, SKOREAN DEFENSE MINISTER SAYS ", 2006-04-24) reported that the DPRK appears to be struggling to maintaining its vast military, the ROK's top military official said Monday. "It looks like the North Korean military's equipment maintenance posture is facing great difficulty," Defense Minister Yoon Kwang-ung said at a seminar in comments confirmed by the host institute. Yoon said such an assessment was based on his discussions with PRC Defense Minister Cao Gangchuan, who visited Seoul last week after a trip to Pyongyang.

(return to top) Yonhap ("N.K. WOULD NEED MONTHS TO RESTOCK FUEL IN CASE OF COMBAT: STUDY", 2006-04-24) reported that it would take at least four months for the DPRK to be able to restock its military fuels in case of full-time combat, according to a recent study on the country's energy capabilities. According to an analysis by Peter Hayes, professor at Nautilus Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, the DPRK would need to double its imports and production to sustain combat. (return to top)

9. DPRK Tourism

Chosun Ilbo ("NORTH KOREA TOURS LURE AMERICAN TOURISTS ", 2006-04-24) reported that more US tourists can add the DPRK to their list of possible travel destinations this year. The country is accepting US citizens during select dates from August to October in time for the Arirang mass calisthenics performance. Tours to the DPRK cost about US$500 per day.

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10. DPRK Population

Korea Times ("NORTH KOREA'S POPULATION STANDS AT 23.11 MILLION", 2006-04-23) reported that the CIA of the US has predicted that the DPRK population could grow by 0.84 percent to 23.11 million in July 2006 from last year. The report said the DPRK's birthrate was estimated to have fallen slightly with 15.54 births per 1,000 population in July, compared with 16.09 births last year, the report said. It said infant mortality rate in the DPRK was estimated to fall to 23.29 deaths per 1,000 births, representing the fourth consecutive annual decline. Life expectancy was estimated to stand at 71.56 years.

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11. PRC One-Child Policy

Taipei Times ("ONE-CHILD POLICY TO STAY DESPITED TILTED SEX-RATIO", 2006-04-24) reported that PRC's male-dominated gender imbalance will not prompt the government to change its stringent family planning policy, state press reported yesterday. "The major reason for the PRC's rising sex ratio is the entrenched concept of `boys are better than girls,'" said Zhang Weiqing, director of the National Population and Family Planning Commission. "Does the imbalance have something to do with family planning? Yes, but there is no direct connection," Xinhua news agency quoted him as saying.

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12. PRC-Vatican Relations

China Post ("CHINA, VATICAN EDGE TOWARD FORMAL ACCORD", 2006-04-24) reported that after more than half a century of hostility, the PRC and the Roman Catholic Church have inched within reach of normal relations, a historic shift aimed at improving the lives of 10 million Chinese who regularly practice the faith, according to leaders and analysts on both sides of the divide.

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13. PRC in Africa

BBC News ("CHINESE LEADER BEGINS AFRICA TOUR", 2006-04-24) reported that the trip has started in Morocco where the PRC President will sign a number of trade deals with King Mohammed VI. President Hu will also visit Kenya and make a return trip to Nigeria, which he visited in 2004 - a tour that also included Gabon and Algeria. The visit indicates the importance the PRC is attaching to securing energy and trade deals in the region, says the BBC's David Bamford.

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14. PRC-India Relations

Xinhua ("CHINA, INDIA CAN ACHIEVE WIN-WIN THROUGH CO-OP", 2006-04-24) reported that described as "dragon" and "elephant" in Asia, the PRC and India, the two largest developing nations of the world, can achieve win-win by cooperation rather than competition, said experts attending the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2006 running on April 21-23.

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15. PRC-Saudi Arabia Relations

Los Angeles Times ("CHINA'S HU IS WELCOMED IN SAUDI ARABIA", 2006-04-24) reported that PRC President Hu Jintao made a rare address to the Saudi kingdom's Consultative Council on Sunday amid a three-day visit that has been emblematic of the oil-rich nation's overtures to Asia's growing and energy-hungry economies.

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16. Soloman Islands

Xinhua ("CHINESE EVACUEES FROM SOLOMAN ISLANDS LEAVE FOR CHINA", 2006-04-24) reported that reported that three hundred and ten Chinese evacuated from the strife-torn Solomon Islands left for the PRC Monday afternoon from Papua New Guinea's capital Port Moresby onboard a chartered Boeing-777. So far the PRC government has completed the evacuation of Chinese from the Solomon Islands capital of Honiara, which witnessed two days of riots sparked by the controversial election of new Prime Minister Synder Rini last week.

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17. Japan-ROK Territorial Dispute

Donga Ilbo ("JAPAN, KOREA DEFUSE DOKDO SURVEY ROW", 2006-04-24) reported that the ROK and Japan have agreed to discontinue the discord caused by Japan's hydrographic survey plan for the ROK's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) around Dokdo in foreign affairs vice-minister level talks on April 22. This will prevent an impending conflict between the two countries on the East Sea.

(return to top) Yomiuri Shimbun ("SIGHS OF RELIEF GREET TAKESHIMA DEAL", 2006-04-24) reported that Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Shinzo Abe said Saturday that the agreement reached between Japan and the ROK on the dispute over the Takeshima islets came as "a result of efforts by both Japan and the ROK to peacefully settle the problem through clear-headed responses respecting international law." (return to top) reported that the formulaic visit to the US by the PRC's president, Hu Jintao, made the headlines last week, but more significant for Asian geopolitics was the near-clash between Japanese and ROK vessels in the Sea of Japan (the East Sea, in ROK and PRC parlance). (return to top)

18. USFJ Realignment

New York Times ("U.S. AND JAPAN REACH DEAL ON MARINE MOVE", 2006-04-24) reported that the US and Japan have struck a bargain over a plan to realign US forces in Japan, with Japan agreeing to pay $6 billion of the $10 billion cost, the Japanese defense minister said Sunday night.

(return to top) Japan Times ("IWAKUNI ELECTS MAYOR OPPOSED TO BASE PLAN", 2006-04-24) reported that former Iwakuni Mayor Katsusuke Ihara was elected Sunday to run the new city formed March 20 through a merger with seven adjacent municipalities. The focus of the election was on a central government plan to relocate US carrier-based aircraft to a base in the city. (return to top)

19. Japan on Iran Nuclear Issue

Kyodo News ("JAPAN, EU URGE IRAN TO HALT URANIUM ENRICHMENT, DISCUSS E. ASIA", 2006-04-24) reported that Japan and the EU on Monday urged Iran to halt its uranium enrichment activities and vowed to closely cooperate in finding a diplomatic solution to the Iranian nuclear standoff. ''Japan and the EU agreed on closely cooperating in resolving the Iranian issue diplomatically,'' Koizumi said at a joint press conference after the meeting, referring to Iran's uranium enrichment as ''extremely regrettable.''

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20. Taiwan Arms Policy

Taipei Times ("WEAPONS BILL PLAN GAINS TRACTION", 2006-04-24) reported that although the nation's opposition parties continue to block arms procurement from the US, members of the legislature's National Defense Committee have reached an agreement supporting the purchase of diesel submarines and P-3C Orion maritime patrol aircraft.

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21. Cross Strait Relations

China Post ("'PAN BLUE' SEEKS CROSS-STRAITS VOTE", 2006-04-24) reported that the opposition alliance of the Kuomintang and the People First Party is ready to vote on amendments to the Statute Governing the Relations Between the People of the Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area to make direct flights and shipping to the PRC possible.

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22. Democracy in Hong Kong

International Herald Tribune ("ON THE LONG ROAD TO DEMOCRACY, HONG KONG FALTERS", 2006-04-24) reported that not quite a decade after British colonial rule ended and Beijing reassumed sovereignty, Hong Kong's evolution into a more democratic society has stalled decisively in recent months, these observers assert, and its political leaders now appear unable to meet the demands of an increasingly sophisticated and expectant citizenry.

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