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Preceding NAPSNet Report

I. United States

1. US, ROK, and Japan on DPRK Nuclear Talks

Joongang Ilbo ("THREE CHIEF NEGOTIATORS MEET ON NORTH", 2005-02-28) reported that the head negotiators from the ROK, Japan and the US on the DPRK nuclear issue met in Seoul Saturday, and again urged Pyeongyang to return to the six-party talks without preconditions. Kenichiro Sasae, director-general of the Japanese Foreign Ministry's Asia-Oceania bureau, Christopher Hill, the US ambassador to Seoul who has been named Washington's chief delegate to the talks, and ROK Deputy Foreign Minister Song Min-soon met at Korea's Foreign Ministry Saturday.

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2. PRC, Japan on DPRK Nuclear Talks

Kyodo ("CHINA ASKS JAPAN TO CONVINCE U.S. TO BE FLEXIBLE OVER N. KOREA", 2005-02-28) reported that the PRC has asked Japan to help convince the US to soften its stance over the DPRK in order to bring Pyongyang back to the six-way talks on its nuclear ambitions, a move that could put Tokyo in an awkward position, diplomatic sources said Friday. Beijing made the request to Japan following a visit to Pyongyang by Wang Jiarui, head of the PRC Communist Party's International Department, which took place from late last week to early this week, according to the sources.

(return to top) Reuters ("ANYTHING UP FOR DISCUSSION, NORTH KOREA TOLD", 2005-02-28) reported that the ROK, Japanese and US negotiators agreed on Saturday they can discuss all issues of concern to Pyongyang in a bid to lure the DPRK back to six-party talks on its nuclear ambitions.

"We urge the North to return to the talks without delay, and stressed that the talks are a forum to discuss all issues including North Korea's concerns," ROK Deputy Foreign Minister Song Min-soon told reporters after the meeting. (return to top) Donga Ilbo ("POSSIBILITY OF NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN DPRK AND U.S. WITHIN FRAMEWORK OF SIX-PARTY TALKS ", 2005-02-28) reported that Christopher R. Hill, the US Ambassador to the ROK, a US chief representative, expressed his opinion in the conference, saying, “We have a full intention to meet North Korean representatives separately and discuss if it is within the framework of the six-party talks.” It is different from the fact that the US has been moderate even in making contact between the DPRK and the US within the framework of six-party talks in the first, second, and third rounds of six-party talks so far. (return to top)

3. DPRK on Nuclear Talks

Kyodo ("N. KOREA SETS 4 CONDITIONS FOR RETURN TO SIX-WAY TALKS", 2005-02-28) reported that DPRK leader Kim Jong Il has effectively presented four conditions for returning to the six-way talks on its nuclear programs, including a demand for a security guarantee from the US, diplomatic sources said Monday. Kim also told a senior PRC official on Feb. 21 that he wants the US to give its reasons for describing the DPRK as one of the world's "outposts of tyranny," provide an assurance that it will negotiate with the DPRK on an equal basis and show by actions that it can be trusted, according to the sources.

(return to top) Reuters ("N.KOREA WILL REJOIN 6-WAY TALKS IN JUNE -PAPER", 2005-02-28) reported that the DPRK has told officials in the ROK it is willing to take part in six-party talks on its nuclear arms program in June, a Japanese newspaper reported. Pyongyang also said in its message, which was conveyed to the ROK by unofficial routes and then to Japan by Seoul, that it was willing to sign a treaty with the US by October, the conservative Sankei Shimbun said on Monday. The report cited a government source, but a Japanese Foreign Ministry official told Reuters he was unaware of the report. (return to top) Agence France-Presse ("NKOREA READY TO SUSPEND NUCLEAR DRIVE FOR AID, US ASSURANCES", 2005-02-28) reported that the DPRK has told the ROK it would return to talks on its nuclear drive in June and offer to suspend the program in hopes of aid and a US pledge not to invade, the Sankei Shimbun said, citing Japanese government sources. The Sankei said the DPRK would offer at the next six-nation talks to suspend its nuclear program in exchange for economic aid. With the progress in hand, Pyongyang would hope to reach an agreement in October with the US in which Washington would pledge not to invade, the report said. ROK and Japanese officials denied the report. (return to top)

4. ROK on DPRK Nuclear Talks

Chosun Ilbo ("NUKE NEGOTIATORS 'WON'T WAIT FOREVER' FOR N.KOREA", 2005-02-28) reported that the ROK's point man in stalled six-party talks on the DPRK nuclear disarmament said Monday the parties could not "wait forever" for Pyongyang to return to the negotiating table. Deputy Foreign Minister Song Min-soon, who heads Seoul's delegation, said that while he could not give a specific date, the heads of relevant nations would draw the line at some point. Song's statement, following a meeting with the delegation heads of the US and Japan, suggested that the three nations have a specific deadline in mind, and that deadline might be approaching.

(return to top) Reuters ("INCENTIVES, PRESSURE TO BRING N.KOREA TO TALKS", 2005-02-28) reported that the DPRK can expect to have its demand for direct talks with the US answered at six-party negotiations aimed at ending its nuclear ambitions, the ROK's top nuclear negotiator said on Monday. It was the clearest statement yet that the format of the stalled talks could be modified to entice the DPRK back to negotiations. "What we mean by a wide-ranging forum of discussions is that

it would include the format that North Korea wants," Song said on KBS radio. (return to top) The Associated Press ("SOUTH KOREA URGES FLEXIBILITY OVER NUKES", 2005-02-28) reported that President Roh Moo-hyun said it will take both flexibility and a principled stand to persuade the DPRK to abandon its atomic weapons program. In a major policy speech before the National Assembly, Roh also assured that the ROK's alliance with the US was more stable than ever, saying his government's policy of "saying what we want to say and argue what we want to argue" has made its relations with the US healthier. "Although an unexpected development occurred, it doesn't greatly change the fundamental structure" of the nuclear standoff, Roh said. (return to top)

5. PRC on DPRK Nuclear Talks

The Japan Times ("CHINA PROMISES 'URGENT' EFFORT OVER NORTH KOREA", 2005-02-28) reported that the PRC promised Sunday to work diplomatically "with a sense of urgency" to bring the DPRK back to the six-way talks on its nuclear ambitions, a Japanese government source said. The move was in response to a call from Japan, ROK and the US for Beijing to step up its efforts. But PRC Vice Foreign Minister Wu Dawei, in a meeting with Kenichiro Sasae, head of the Foreign Ministry's Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau, did not elaborate on the specific steps the PRC plans to take, according to the source.

(return to top) Kyodo ("KOIZUMI SEEKS CHINA'S HELP ON EARLY N. KOREA TALKS", 2005-02-28) reported that Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi on Monday urged the PRC to increase pressure on the DPRK to return to the stalled six-party talks on its nuclear ambitions. "We're asking (China) to redouble its efforts," the premier told reporters, suggesting that PRC use its considerable influence on the DPRK to have Pyongyang return to the negotiating table. Earlier Monday, Vice Foreign Minister Shotaro Yachi made a similar call, telling a press conference, "We think that China's attitude (toward the DPRK) will have more significance from now on." (return to top)

6. PRC, ROK on DPRK Nuclear Talks

Yonhap ("CHINESE ENVOY TO VISIT SEOUL TO TRY TO JUMP-START NUKE TALKS", 2005-02-28) reported that a PRC envoy will visit Seoul this week to discuss ways of reviving stalled six-way talks on the DPRK's nuclear weapons program, ROK officials said Monday. Wu Dawei, who serves as Beijing's chief nuclear negotiator, will arrive in Seoul on Wednesday for three days of talks with his ROK counterpart, Song Min-soon, and Vice Foreign Minister Lee Tae-shik, the Foreign Ministry officials said. "Wu will discuss how South Korea and China should move forward to resume the six-way talks at an early date," a ministry official said, requesting anonymity.

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7. US, Russia on DPRK Nuclear Talks

Chosun Ilbo ("BUSH, PUTIN AGREE ON DENUCLEARIZATION OF KOREAN PENINSULA", 2005-0--28) reported that the US President George W. Bush and Russian President Vladimir Putin on Thursday said neither Iran nor the DPRK should be allowed to possess nuclear weapons. At a joint press conference following a summit in the Slovak capital of Bratislava, Bush said his Russian counterpart agreed that DPRK should be nuclear-arms free, while Putin also stressed the two leaders shared the same opinion. A spokesperson for the Russian Foreign Ministry said the two presidents were committed six-party talks on the DPRK's nuclear disarmament.

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8. KEDO on DPRK Nuclear Talks

Yonhap ("US-LED GROUP PLEDGES NORTH KOREA ENERGY AID IF SIX-WAY TALKS RESUME", 2005-02-28) reported that a US-led international consortium has told the DPRK that it is willing to resume energy aid to the DPRK if Pyongyang eases concerns over its nuclear weapons program, a ROK official said Sunday 27 February. Kim Young-mok, a ROK deputy executive director of the consortium, called the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization, said measures will be taken "in a rapid and comprehensive manner" to address the DPRK's energy needs if progress is made in stalled six-way talks on the DPRK's nuclear program.

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9. IAEA on DPRK Nuclear Talks

Reuters ("N.KOREA NUKE STATEMENT OF UTMOST CONCERN-ELBARADEI", 2005-02-28) reported that the DPRK's declaration that it has nuclear weapons is "a matter of the utmost concern" and a diplomatic solution should be found urgently, the head of the UN nuclear watchdog, Mohamed ElBaradei, said Monday. "The recent declaration by (the DPRK) that it possesses nuclear weapons is a matter of the utmost concern and has serious security implications, and highlights yet again the importance and the urgency of finding a diplomatic solution through dialogue," ElBaradei said in a statement to the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) board of governors.

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10. US on DPRK Nuclear Issue

Wall Street Journal ("OPTIONS WITH IRAN, NORTH KOREA ARE LIMITED; U.S. MILITARY'S AVAILABLE CHOICES TO CURB SPREAD OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS CARRY HAZARDS", 2005-02-28) reported that an American strike on the DPRK or Iranian nuclear facilities seems far from likely. In both countries, Mr. Bush lacks good military options to eliminate or significantly degrade nuclear ambitions. If the DPRK isn't bluffing, the nuclear weapons and the weapons-grade plutonium could be hidden almost anywhere in the country, making it harder for the US to destroy them. The US also believes that the DPRK has developed a separate, uranium-based effort, but officials say they have no idea where those facilities may be hidden. The US does seem better equipped today than before to respond to a DPRK conventional military attack thanks to precision-guided munitions and better intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance systems, said Thomas Mahnken, a professor at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies in Washington. Still, he said, the damage to Seoul with conventional artillery cannons would likely be vast if the DPRK attacked, so initiating hostilities "is not an attractive option in the least."

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11. DPRK Nuclear Program

Jane’s Digest ("IS NORTH KOREA BLUFFING AGAIN?", 2005-02-28) reported that given the almost complete absence of reliable intelligence and the virtual impossibility of access to the DPRK, any assessment of the 'Hermit Kingdom's' nuclear program is necessarily based on incomplete and unverifiable information. However, there are some points of agreement among Western and ROPK intelligence analysts. The most important fact is that, to date, no nuclear test has been carried out by Pyongyang. As a result, ROK and other international officials stressed that it is still too early to

declare that the DPRK is now a nuclear power. They add that the alleged weapons have neither been tested, nor have their existence been confirmed beyond doubt.

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12. PRC on DPRK Nuclear Program

The Associated Press ("REPORT: CHINA AGREES WITH U.S. CLAIMS ON NORTH KOREA'S URANIUM PROGRAM", 2005-02-28) reported that the PRC has dropped initial doubts and now agrees with the US that the DPRK has a uranium-based nuclear program, a Japanese newspaper reported Sunday. The PRC had long questioned the US accusation, saying Washington had not shown conclusive evidence that a uranium program exists. But Beijing in recent months has edged toward the US position, the Asahi Shimbun newspaper said Sunday in a report from the US, citing anonymous sources from the US government and six-nation nuclear talks involving Pyongyang.

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13. ROK on DPRK Nuclear Program

Agence France-Presse ("'N. KOREA HAS NO WORKING FACILITY FOR ENRICHED URANIUM'", 2005-02-28) reported that the DPRK has some components of an atomic program but is unlikely to be able to produce nuclear weapons, the ROK's intelligence agency said on Thursday in a report to parliament. The National Intelligence Service (NIS) said Pyongyang probably purchased materials in 2000 to produce the prototypes for centrifuges needed for an enriched uranium program that would be the first step towards building a nuclear arsenal. But tight international surveillance had prevented the DPRK from obtaining other key equipment, the report said.

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14. Japan on Sanctions on the DPRK

Kyodo ("SANCTIONS ON N. KOREA ARE THE ONLY WAY FORWARD: ABE", 2005-02-28) reproted that the Liberal Democratic Party's Acting Secretary General Shinzo Abe said Monday that imposing economic sanctions on the DPRK is the only way for Japan to move forward on the abduction issue. Speaking at a symposium in Tokyo on the DPRK, Abe said, "This may not have a crucial impact, but there is no other way at this point when there is no possibility of progress (on the abduction issue)."

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15. ROK Aid to the DPRK

Agence France-Presse ("SOUTH KOREA SENDS FOOD TO NORTH ", 2005-02-28) reported that the ROK has started to deliver a final shipment of food aid promised to the DPRK last year despite a row about the DPRK's drive for nuclear weapons, officials said on Sunday. About 6,500 tons of corn, the last batch of 100,000 tons that Seoul pledged the UN's world food program (WFP) last year, would be shipped this week, they said.

(return to top) Yonhap ("S. KOREAN FIRMS TO EXCHANGE PHARMACEUTICALS WITH N. KOREA", 2005-02-28) reported that a ROK pharmaceutical trade group said Saturday it will establish an office in an industrial complex in the DPRK to promote the inter-Korean exchange of pharmaceutical products. The Korea Pharmaceutical Traders Association decided at its annual

assembly on Friday to set up the office in the DPRK city of Kaesong to increase the exchange of pharmaceuticals between the two Koreas and stimulate inter-Korean economic cooperation. (return to top)

16. ROK on Inter-Korean Agriculture Project

Yonhap ("S. KOREAN RED CROSS TO DONATE 300,000 NUT PINES TO N. KOREA", 2005-02-28) reported that the ROK will provide the DPRK with 300,000 nut pine seedlings next month for a joint tree-planting event slated for the following month at the DPRK's Geumgang mountain, the ROK's Korean National Red Cross (KNRC) said Friday. Children from the two Koreas will plant the seedlings in the small village of Onjong-ri at the foot of the mountain early next month, the KNRC said.

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17. Civic Group on ROK Aid to the DPRK

Yonhap ("CIVIC GROUP OPPOSES N. KOREAN AID UNTIL NUKE PROBLEM IS SOLVED", 2005-0--28) reported that a group of protesters burned a DPRK flag, a picture of the regime's leader Kim Jong-il and a replica of one of its missiles in downtown Seoul Sunday in protest against the ROK's continued aid to the DPRK. About 20 protesters, which belong to an anti-DPRK civic group, also burned a Japanese flag in anger over a controversial claim by Japanese Ambassador to the ROK Toshiyuki Takano regarding the ownership of certain ROK islets.

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18. ROK on Inter-Korean Relations

Yonhap ("S. KOREANS EXPECT BETTER INTER-KOREAN RELATIONS IN 2005: WEB POLL", 2005-02-28) reported that about seven out of 10 ROK Internet users believe inter-Korean relations will improve this year despite a series of nuclear challenges by the DPRK, according to a survey released Saturday by a presidential advisory body. The survey, conducted by the Advisory Council on Democratic and Peaceful Unification, showed 73.8 percent out of 622 Internet users surveyed believed relations between the two Koreas will improve in 2005.

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19. ROK on DPRK Satellite Launch

Yonhap ("S. KOREA ADMITS TO N. KOREAN SATELLITE LAUNCH", 2005-02-28) reported that the ROK's leading intelligence agency admitted this week that DPRK launched a satellite in 1998, overturning a previous assessment that the DPRK fired a long-range missile. In a parliamentary report, Ko Young-koo, head of the National Intelligence Service, said Thursday that a "Daepodong-1" missile was used in launching the satellite in August 1998.

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20. DPRK on ROK-Japanese Territorial Dispute

Yonhap ("N.K. DENOUNCES JAPAN FOR LAYING CLAIM TO S. KOREAN ISLETS", 2005-02-28) reported that in a rare move, the DPRK joined hands with the ROK in attacking Japan for laying

claim to the ROK islets, Dokdo. A new wave of anti-Japanese sentiment has been rising in the DPRK after Japanese Ambassador to the ROK Toshiyuki Takano claimed his country's sovereignty over Dokdo last Wednesday.

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21. DPRK on ROK Maritime Border Violation

Korean Central News Agency (BBC translating) ("NAVY WARNS SOUTH OVER "MILITARY PROVOCATIONS"", 2005-02-28) reported that recently the ROK army infiltrated its warships into the waters of the DPRK side in the West Sea of Korea. On 27 and 28 February following 24 February the ROK military authorities again infiltrated warships several times into the waters of our side South of Kuwol Hill and Sunwi Islet, thus escalating military tension there. The South Korean army's undisguised military provocation in the West Sea, which is timing to coincide with the US imperialists' frenzied war moves against the DPRK to stifle it by force under the pretext of the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula, is an intolerable challenge to us and a traitorous act.

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22. DPRK Media Reform

Korea Times ("NORTH KOREA: NEWSPAPER RUNS COMMERCIAL ADVERTISEMENTS", 2005-0--28) reported that a Pyongyang newspaper recently began to run commercial advertisements, a pro-DPRK newspaper in Japan reported last weekend. The unexpected development in the DPRK is considered as an attempt to trigger change in its media sector, a DPRK expert in Seoul said Sunday. The Chosun Shinbo, published by the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan, or Chongnyon, reported on its Web site Saturday that the Pyongyang Shinmun has begun running commercial advertisements. The Internet news story did not say exactly when the Pyongyang Shinmun began to place commercial advertisements, which have been criticized in the communist country as a symbol of capitalism.

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23. DPRK - Iranian Relations

Yonhap ("N. KOREAN OFFICIAL MEETS HEAD OF IRANIAN NEWS AGENCY", 2005-02-28) reported that the DPRK said Monday that a high-level official met with the head of Iran's official news agency to discuss relations between the two countries. Yang Hyong-sop, vice chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly, met with Abdollah Nasseri Taheri, managing director of the Tehran-based Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA), in Pyongyang, the DPRK's Korean Central News Agency said.

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24. DPRK Ministerial Replacement

Kyodo ("N. KOREA'S VICE MINISTER MAY HAVE BEEN REPLACED: SOURCE", 2005-02-28) reported that the DPRK's Vice Foreign Minister in charge of Asia, Kim Yong Il, may have been replaced by another diplomat due to health problems, a source knowledgeable about PRC-DPRK relations said Monday. Kim underwent an operation related to heart problems in the PRC last December and is still recuperating in Pyongyang, the source said. Another Foreign Ministry official,

Kim Hyong Jun, has been attending events linked to relations between the PRC and DPRK since January, and the PRC believes that the post has been taken over by Kim Hyong Jun, according to the source.

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25. DPRK Cabinet on Agriculture, Energy

Yonhap ("NORTH KOREAN CABINET MEETS FOR FARMING, ENERGY", 2005-02-28) reported that the DPRK said Sunday that it held a Cabinet meeting earlier this month to discuss ways to save energy and raise agricultural production. The DPRK Cabinet held an extended meeting attended by all members and the heads of local authorities over farming and energy use issues, said Minju Josun, the Cabinet newspaper, said in its latest edition published on Feb. 6. The date of the meeting was not specified.

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26. DPRK Leadership

Yonhap ("N. KOREANS URGED TO BECOME 'SHIELD' TO SAFEGUARD KIM JONG-IL", 2005-02-28) reported that a top DPRK military official called on the DPRK populace to become a "shield" Friday to safeguard leader Kim Jong-il amid heightened tension over the DPRK's nuclear weapons program. Kim Il-chol, minister of the People's Armed Forces, also urged the DPRK's 1.1-million-strong army to defend the socialist country and unite around their leader in building a prosperous and powerful nation.

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27. US on DPRK Human Rights

Yonhap ("U.S. ACCUSES CHINA OF DENYING N. KOREANS' ACCESS TO UNHCR", 2005-02-28) reported that the US criticized the PRC for blocking DPRK defectors' access to UN officials in its latest report on Pyongyang's human rights condition. The US State Department produces an annual report on the DPRK's human rights situation but this week's report was mandated by a new human rights law requiring President George W. Bush's administration to present an assessment report to Congress within 120 days of it being enacted.

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28. US on DPRK Defectors

The Associated Press ("REPORT DETAILS DANGERS FOR NORTH KOREANS", 2005-02-28) reported that some DPRK defectors who seek political asylum abroad can face execution if they are forced back to their homeland, according to a State Department report. DPRK defectors sent home after leaving without authorization are subject to at least five years of "labor correction," the report said. In serious cases, they can receive "an indefinite term of imprisonment and forced labor, confiscation of property, or death," it said. The report said US officials have been told that the harshest treatment is reserved for those who have had extensive contact with Christian missionaries and other activists in the PRC. But officials also have learned, the report said, that current treatment of returned migrants is generally better than it has been in the past.

(return to top) Joongang Ilbo/IHT ("U.S. ASYLUM FOR DEFECTORS BEING DISCUSSED", 2005-0--28) reported that Seoul and Washington are having detailed discussions about granting DPRK defectors political asylum in the US, a US State Department official said Saturday. The official, who asked for anonymity, told the JoongAng Ilbo that the two governments have discussed a measure under which the US would accept about 10 percent of the 1,800 DPRK defectors who came to the ROK last year. (return to top)

29. Jenkins Case

The Associated Press ("U.S. ARMY DESERTER TO SEEK U.S. PASSPORT", 2005-02-28) reported that a US Army deserter who spent nearly 40 years in captivity in the DPRK before resettling in Japan hopes to return to the US - but only for a visit. Charles Robert Jenkins, 65, plans to travel to Tokyo Wednesday to apply for a US passport, officials in the Japanese village of Mano said Monday.

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30. US MIA Remains Found in the PRC

The New York Times ("REMAINS OF MISSING U.S. PILOT IN KOREA WAR FOUND IN CHINA", 2005-02-28) asked whatever happened to the pilot, Capt. Troy Gordon Cope, after he was shot down in a dogfight above the PRC border with the DPRK? Had he been captured alive and taken with other downed American pilots to a Russian gulag? Was he still alive today? The US government finally provided an answer on Saturday. A Pentagon official in the PRC announced that human remains excavated last year from a site inside the PRC border were those of Captain Cope. The remains, unearthed along with pieces of an airplane that struck nose first, have been tested at a government laboratory in Hawaii and will be returned to the family for burial with military honors in May.

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31. Japan on Nuclear Fuel Cycle Freeze

Kyodo ("JAPAN OPPOSES IAEA CHIEF'S PROPOSAL ON FREEZING NUCLEAR FUEL CYCLE", 2005-02-28) reported that Japan has notified the International Atomic Energy Agency of its opposition to a proposal by the IAEA chief for freezing nuclear fuel cycle development work for five years as a way to prevent nuclear proliferation, diplomatic sources said Sunday. Japan opposes the proposal made by Mohamed ElBaradei, director general of the UN nuclear watchdog, because of the negative impact it would have on Japan's nuclear fuel cycle work at a nuclear fuel-reprocessing plant in Rokkasho, Aomori Prefecture, the sources said.

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32. Japanese Space Program

Agence France-Presse ("JAPAN AIMS FOR LUNAR STATION", 2005-02-28) reported that Japan's space agency, fresh from its first satellite launch since a 2003 failure, wants to put a manned station on the moon in 2025 and to set up a satellite disaster alert system. "We will include it as one of the future goals in our new long-term vision, which we are going to submit with the government's Space Activity Commission by the end of March," said an official with the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency.

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33. Cross Strait Relations

Washington Post ("CHINA PROPOSES BUSINESS, TRAVEL LINKS TO TAIWAN", 2005-02-28) reported that the PRC suggested new economic and travel links with Taiwan on Friday designed to benefit the island's high-tech businessmen, its produce farmers and many families with loved ones on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. "We will try our best to do everything that is good for our compatriots in Taiwan," Li Weiyi, chief spokesman for the Taiwan Affairs Office, said at a news conference in Beijing. Li said the PRC was prepared to start talks about scheduling more direct charter flights between mainland cities and Taiwan.

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34. US on Cross Strait Relations

Donga Ilbo ("U.S. AIR FORCE PLANS TO INTERVENE IN ARMED CONFLICTS ACROSS TAIWAN STRAIT ", 2005-02-28) reported that a US Air Force cadre said that the US Army will take out surface ships approaching the Taiwan Strait if armed conflicts occur, a Hong Kong-based PRC daily newspaper Wen Hui Bao reported on Monday. He said, "If an armed conflict occurs in the Taiwan Strait, the US Army will help Taiwan, and the US Navy will sink Chinese ships to eliminate military threats toward Taiwan." He added that the US will use its Air Force units stationed at Kadena Air Base in Okinawa, the largest air base in East Asia, to address the conflict.

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35. US Arms Purchase

Agence France-Presse ("US MAY BUY MILITARY EQUIPMENT FROM TAIWAN: REPORT", 2005-0--28) reported that the US is considering purchasing military equipment from Taiwan as the Pentagon seeks to reduce costs by diversifying its sources of arms supplies, it was reported. A group organized by the Comparative Testing Office (CTO) of the US Department of Defense is scheduled to arrive in Taipei Saturday to evaluate the island's capability of supplying the equipment, the United Daily News said. The trip will come as the US Department of Defense seeks to increase its procurement of military equipment from Asia Pacific, where the manufacturing cost is only one-third to one-fifth of that of the US, it said.

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36. Taiwanese Media

The Los Angeles Times ("THEY CAN'T HANDLE THE TRUTH", 2005-02-28) reported that Taiwan's media have the reputation of being among the most aggressive in Asia. In a region where print and broadcast reporters are often de facto cheerleaders for governments and billionaires, Taiwan's no-holds- barred journalism is alternately seen as a gutsy check on authority and the embodiment of chaos. Concerned about the media's excesses and ability to ruin reputations and lives, reformers in and outside the industry are trying to stem the sensationalism, partisanship and corruption that characterize the business.

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37. PRC Economic Influence

Washington Post ("CHINA'S QUIET RISE CASTS WIDE SHADOW EAST ASIAN NATIONS CASH IN ON GROWTH", 2005-02-28) reported that Leong Kai Hin is off on a new project that, according to his assessment, says a lot about where East Asia is headed. In partnership with a PRC friend, Leong is organizing a strawberry importing business, hoping to cash in on Malaysia's hunger for juicy berries and the ability of PRC farmers to grow them cheaply. Leong's out-of-character leap from the classroom into competitive business, he says, is just a small example of rapidly expanding economic activity generated across East Asia by the PRC's 9 percent annual growth. From Japan southward to Indonesia, companies and governments have come to rely on the PRC as a market for vital exports -- from palm oil to semiconductors -- and a source for the imports that delight local business people.

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38. PRC Religious Freedom

The Associated Press ("CHINA ENACTING NEW REGULATIONS ON RELIGION", 2005-02-28) reported that the PRC is implementing new regulations that the government says will protect freedom of faith. Critics contend that the broad guidelines could instead be used to persecute religious groups deemed troublesome by authorities. The new rules say that "anyone who compels citizens to believe in or not believe in any religions ... shall be ordered to make corrections by the religious affairs department" and could face criminal charges, the state-run newspaper China Daily said. Such language could be used to persecute the faithful, said Nicolas Becquelin, research director of the New York-based Human Rights in the PRC.

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39. PRC Gender Imbalance

The Associated Press ("CHINA SEEKS TO COMBAT ABORTION IMBALANCE", 2005-02-28) reported that the PRC's top lawmakers want to make it a crime for doctors to detect an unborn baby's sex for non-medical reasons, in a bid to combat the abortion of female fetuses, government-run newspapers reported Sunday. It is already illegal in the PRC to use an ultrasound or other means determine if a fetus is a boy or a girl, but doctors who do so only face administrative penalties and not criminal charges, the China Youth Daily reported.

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40. PRC Security

Agence France-Presse ("CHINA'S TOP SECURITY OFFICIAL CALLS FOR CRACKDOWN ON "HOSTILE FORCES"", 2005-02-28) reported that the PRC has called for a crackdown on "hostile forces" that threaten national security ahead of an annual high-profile parliamentary meeting. The demand was made by Luo Gan, the PRC's top security official and one of nine members of the communist party's most elite decision making body, the Politburo, in the latest issue of the party's Qiushi magazine. The National People's Congress session, which begins on Saturday, is typically a time when people with grievances head to Beijing to express their complaints. As a result, authorities are on high alert.

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41. PRC Cultural Relics

Agence France-Presse ("THEFTS OF CHINESE CULTURAL RELICS JUMP BY 80 PERCENT", 2005-02-28) reported that the theft of cultural relics from ancient sites and museums in PRC jumped by 80 percent last year, officials said as they announced plans to stop the plunder. Forty cases involving 222 items stolen from protected sites and museums were recorded in 2004, an 81.8 percent increase year-on-year, the State Administration of Cultural Heritage said.

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