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1. US, ROK Meet on Six Party Talks

Yonhap News ("S. KOREAN, U.S. CHIEF NUCLEAR ENVOYS MEET IN S. KOREA", 2006-03-06) reported that the ROK's new chief nuclear envoy met with his US counterpart on the weekend in Incheon, just west of Seoul, to discuss ways to revive the moribund six-way talks on the DPRK's nuclear program, officials here said Monday. "Chun Young-woo, South Korea's lead delegate to the six-party talks, had a breakfast meeting with Christopher Hill, Assistant Secretary of State, at the Hyatt Hotel near Incheon," Foreign Ministry spokesman Bae Young-han said. Speaking to reporters in Indonesia, Hill claimed that the US measures against the DPRK are directed at the crime, not the country itself. He stressed that the fate of the six-way talks lies in the hands of the DPRK.

(return to top) Reuters ("JAPAN, SOUTH KOREA SAY TO COOPERATE ON NORTH", 2006-03-06) reported that despite bilateral ties being strained by a dispute over Japan's militarist past, the ROK and Japan agreed on Monday to work closely together to try to resume talks on the DPRK's nuclear programme. The agreement came during a visit to Tokyo by senior ROK diplomat Yu Myung-hwan, during which he met Japanese officials including Foreign Minister Taro Aso. "On the problem of North Korea, it was agreed to continue to work closely together for a speedy resumption of six party talks," Japan's foreign ministry said in a statement issued following the meetings. (return to top) Kyodo News ("JAPAN URGES CHINA'S EFFORTS TO BRING N. KOREA BACK TO 6-WAY TALKS ", 2006-03-06) reported that Japan on Monday urged the PRC, the chair of the six-party talks on the DPRK's nuclear ambitions and the DPRK's biggest ally, to make further efforts to bring Pyongyang back to the nuclear negotiations, the Japanese Embassy in Beijing said. Kenichiro Sasae, Japan's chief delegate to the multilateral talks, made the comment to the PRC's head delegate Wu Dawei in a meeting in the PRC capital, the embassy said in a statement. (return to top)

2. ROK on Six Party Talks

JoongAng Ilbo ("BAN: NO FIRM DATE AGREED TO RESUME NUCLEAR TALKS ", 2006-03-03) reported that a firm date for the resumption of stalled six-party talks cannot be provided, ROK Foreign Minister Ban Ki-moon said yesterday, while expressing hope that a series of diplomatic efforts in the near future would provide a breakthrough in the nuclear negotiations. "If you ask me about the timing I have nothing to say," said the minister speaking to reporters at a press briefing. Mr. Ban said that a scheduled bilateral meeting between the US and the DPRK on Tuesday, a visit by Chinese President Hu Jintao to the US next month and visits by chief delegates to the six-party talks to the countries involved in the negotiations would hopefully help in setting a date.

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3. US-DPRK Counterfeiting Briefing

Yonhap News ("U.S. DRAWS LINE BETWEEN BRIEFING, NUKE TALKS AHEAD OF MEETING", 2006-03-06) reported that the US on Monday drew a strict line on the scope of Tuesday's contact with the DPRK, saying it will be only about Washington's actions against Pyongyang's illicit financial activities. DPRK officials are in New York to receive a briefing by US Treasury specialists on actions taken last September against Macau-based Banco Delta Asia (BDA).

(return to top) Yonhap News ("STATE DEPT. TO SEND HILL'S DEPUTY TO N.K. BRIEFING", 2006-03-06) reported that the US State Department will send a deputy assistant secretary to Tuesday's Treasury briefing for the DPRK, department officials said Monday. Kathleen Stephens of the East

Asian and Pacific Affairs Bureau will represent the department at the briefing that will be led by the Treasury and the Secret Service, they said. (return to top) Yonhap News ("N. KOREA, U.S. SET FOR SHOWDOWN IN NEW YORK ON FINANCIAL ROW", 2006-03-06) reported that after months of wrangling over Washington's application of financial restrictions on a Pyongyang-affiliated bank, the two sides are preparing for a rare bilateral contact this week. A contingent of DPRK officials led by senior Foreign Ministry official Ri Gun reportedly arrived in New York, a traditional rendezvous for high-level contact between the two sides, on the weekend. (return to top)

4. US on DPRK, Iranian Nuclear Programs

Yonhap News ("N.K. EXAMPLE OF WHY IRAN SHOULDN'T BE ENRICHING URANIUM: OFFICIAL", 2006-03-06) reported that in another comparison of nuclear scofflaws Iran and the DPRK on Monday, a US State Department official said Pyongyang is an example of why Tehran should not be allowed to enrich uranium. "If you look at what happened in North Korea, they completed the fuel cycle and then very quickly... took a civilian nuclear program and turned it, in about 30 days, into a bomb-making program," department spokesman Tom Casey said.

(return to top) Chosun Ilbo ("U.S. TO STRENGTHEN MISSILE DEFENSE AGAINST N.KOREA ", 2006-03-03) reported that the US has decided to beef up its missile defense systems over fears that the DPRK and Iran are continuing to develop their missile technologies. The Department of Defense's Missile Defense Agency (MDA) budget for fiscal 2007 rates the DPRK as "nuclear-capable" and says it has not given up ambitions to develop a long-range ballistic missile. The MDA estimates that the DPRK's Rodong missiles have a range of 1,300 km, enough to reach US military bases in the ROK and Japan. It says the DPRK is also poised to test Taepodong missiles, which the CIA believes could reach the US mainland with a nuclear payload. (return to top)

5. Inter-Korean Military Meeting

Taipei Times ("NORTH ASKS SOUTH KOREA TO END JOINT US EXERCISES", 2006-03-03) reported that the DPRK yesterday demanded an end to the ROK's military exercises with the US, as high-level inter-Korean military talks got under way for the first time in nearly two years. The DPRK routinely criticizes the ROK's drills with US troops as Washington's rehearsals to attack the DPRK, a charge Washington denies. "They raised the issue in a principled manner in an opening speech," ROK Unification Minister Lee Jong-seok told reporters in Seoul. "But I don't think it will act as an obstacle to the talks."

(return to top) JoongAng Ilbo ("GENERALS END 2-DAY TALKS: NO PROGRESS", 2006-03-06) reported that general officers from the ROK and DPRK failed in efforts to map out measures to reduce military tensions on the peninsula and in the Yellow Sea yesterday. The breakdown in the talks, military sources here said yesterday evening, resulted from DPRK demands to redraw the sea boundary that divides the two nations' territorial waters to the west. (return to top)

6. Inter-Korean Economic Cooperation

Chosun Ilbo ("ROH AIMS FOR INTER-KOREAN 'COOPERATIVE ECONOMY' ", 2006-03-03) reported that President Roh Moo-hyun on Friday announced plans to build a "cooperative economy" between the ROK and DPRK. "Through infrastructure projects like the Kaesong Industrial Complex as well as energy, materials distribution and information networks, we will lay the foundation for a cooperative economy between North and South," the president said at a graduation ceremony at the Korean Military Academy.

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7. DPRK on UN HQ in ROK

Yonhap News ("N. KOREAN DIPLOMAT CALLS FOR DISBANDING U.N. COMMAND IN SEOUL", 2006-03-04) reported that a senior DPRK diplomat has urged the UN to disband its command headquarters in Seoul, accusing the post of being a US attempt to prolong its regional hegemony, ROK officials said Saturday. Ambassador Park Gil-yon, chief of the DPRK mission to the UN, made the request in a letter to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan on Monday, said officials at the ROK's mission to the world body.

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8. ROK on Former Spies in DPRK

Yonhap News ("FAMILIES RELEASE LIST OF 41 FORMER S. KOREAN SPIES HELD IN N.K.", 2006-03-04) reported that an association of families of former ROK spies sent to the DPRK on Saturday released the names of people still believed to be held in the state and called on the Seoul government to demand their release. The list, according to the association, contains the names of 41 former spies believed to have been captured while carrying out secret missions in the DPRK until the early 1970s.

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9. US-ROK OPLAN 5029 Consultations

Chosun Ilbo ("KOREA, U.S. 'CLOSE' TO AGREEING N.K. CONTINGENCY PLAN", 2006-03-06) reported that Seoul and Washington have virtually concluded negotiations on a contingency plan for radical upheaval in the DPRK, including natural disaster and regime change, which has been causing headaches in the alliance. If all goes smoothly, the two defense ministers will sign off on supplementary guidelines for Concept Plan 5029 in April.

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10. USFJ Base Realignment

Voice of America ("US, JAPAN DISAGREE OVER MILITARY REALIGNMENT AGREEMENT ISSUES", 2006-03-06) reported that the US and Japan are about to start five days of talks in Honolulu Tuesday to finalize a sweeping agreement on realigning and downsizing US forces in Japan. Washington thought it had a deal last October but parts of the agreement were rejected by local governments on Okinawa, where the bulk of the 50,000 US military personnel in Japan are stationed.

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11. PRC-Japan East Sea Gas Dispute

Kyodo ("JAPAN REPORTS 'FRANK' TALKS WITH CHINA ON 1ST DAY ", 2006-03-06) reported that Japan's representative to talks with the PRC aimed at solving a dispute over gas exploration rights in the East China Sea reported having "a very serious and frank discussion" Monday on the dispute, but revealed little else after completing the first day of their two-day meeting.

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12. Taiwan Wargames

Agence France Presse ("TAIWAN TO STAGE WARGAMES AMID HIGH TENSIONS WITH CHINA ", 2006-03-06) reported that Taiwan is to stage the island's largest ever military exercises in July, a newspaper has reported, amid mounting tensions between Taipei and Beijing. More than 20,000 soliders would be mobilized for the wargames to be held in northeast Ilan county, although 50,000 personnel would be involved in the exercises overall, the Apple Daily said.

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13. PRC Defense Spending

Xinhua ("CHINA'S DEFENSE BUDGET TO INCREASE 14.7% IN 2006 ", 2006-03-06) reported that the PRC's defense budget for 2006 is expected to hit 283.8 billion yuan (about 35.1 billion US dollars), 14.7 percent higher than last year, a spokesman for the PRC's top legislature said Saturday in Beijing. This year's defense budget accounts for 7.4 percent of the budgeted fiscal expenditure, compared with 7.74 percent in 2003.

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14. PRC Rural Poverty

Xinhua ("CHINA PLEDGES HELP FOR RURAL POOR ", 2006-03-06) reported that the PRC's key annual political event has opened, with the government promising to take measures to close the divide between the new rich and numerous poor. Premier Wen Jiabao promised extra money for rural areas and farmers, to spread growing wealth to the impoverished countryside. "Building a 'new socialist countryside' is a major historic task," Mr Wen told the conference.

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15. PRC Bird Flu

Agence France-Presse ("CHINA SEES 9TH BIRD FLU DEATH, BAKU FEARS EUROPE'S FIRST VICTIMS ", 2006-03-06) reported that the PRC confirmed that a ninth person had died from bird flu, state media reported. Hong Kong, which borders the province of Guangdong where the latest PRC fatality occurred, slapped a ban on imports of poultry and other birds from Guangdong.

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