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Preceding NAPSNet Report

I. United States

1. DPRK Nuclear Talks

The Associated Press ("U.S. ENVOY MEETS WITH CHINA, JAPAN, SOUTH KOREA IN EFFORT TO RESUME NORTH KOREA NUCLEAR TALKS", 2005-03-17) reported that envoys from the US, PRC, Japan and the ROK discussed Thursday how to restart formal talks on ending the DPRK's nuclear weapons program, officials said, but there was no indication that a Pyongyang representative attended. US envoy Joseph DeTrani and PRC Foreign Ministry officials were among those attending the meetings, officials said. Scholars and experts on the region also were there. "We believe this meeting will nurture new opinions and approaches for promoting the resumption of the six-party talks," said PRC Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao, at a briefing in Beijing.

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2. US-ROK-Japan on DPRK Nuclear Talks

Korea Times ("TEAMWORK GETTING SHAKY IN NUCLEAR GAME", 2005-03-17) reported that the worsening ties between the ROK and Japan are threatening the "triangular teamwork," which has been one of the most important strategic pillars of the US in its uphill struggle to bring the DPRK to its knees. With the US and the DPRK upping the ante only outside the ring with some erratic jabs, the ROK and US also seem to be on sulky terms, an ominous sign ahead of the top US diplomat's visit to the ROK this weekend. Amid a rising suspicion among some Americans that Seoul appears to be moving closer to the PRC, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's Asian tour will likely be a critical moment for the US' efforts to keep the three-way cooperation robust.

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3. DPRK on Nuclear Talks

Agence France Presse ("NORTH KOREAN OFFICIAL BLAMES US FOR FAILURE OF NUKE TALKS", 2005-03-17) reported that the DPRK Vice President Yang Hyong-Sop Thursday blamed the US for stalled six-nation talks aimed at persuading the DPRK to halt its nuclear weapons program and said it would only resume negotiations if the US created the right conditions. "We have attended three rounds of the six-way talks during which we displayed extreme patience," Yang told reporters after meeting with South African Deputy President Jacob Zuma. He said: "In order for the DPRK to attend the next six-way talks, the US must create the appropriate atmosphere."

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4. DPRK on Nuclear Program

Itar-Tass ("DPRK TO CONTINUE BUILDING NUCLEAR DEFENSE, SAYS MOSCOW EMBASSY", 2005-03-17) reported that the DPRK "will continue to build up defensive nuclear arsenal for the defense of its ideology and system". This was announced today by the DPRK embassy in Moscow in comment to the statements by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. "It is even difficult to imagine that the DPRK would go to these talks with the demeaning label of 'stronghold of tyranny'", the embassy announced. "If the United States so much want talks, they should behave realistically".

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5. ROK on DPRK Nuclear Talks

Korea Times ("PARK CALLS FOR CONCRETE U.S. PROPOSALS ON N.K.", 2005-03-17) reported that the ROK's main opposition Grand National Party Chairwoman Park Geun-hye called on the US yesterday to "initiate more concrete and realistic proposals" to persuade the DPRK to return to multinational disarmament talks. Park, who has just begun an eight-day visit to the US, pointed to "the economic assistance and normalization of diplomatic relations" as examples of ways to draw the DPRK back into the six-party talks.

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6. Russia on DPRK Nuclear Talks

Interfax ("MOSCOW WANTS NORTH KOREA FREE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS", 2005-03-17) reported that Moscow is in favor of keeping the Korean peninsula free of nuclear weapons through a flexible approach and democratic compromises, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Alexeyev said on Thursday. "We are in favor of resuming the six-sided negotiations [on the Korean peninsula's nuclear problem] as soon as possible and finding solutions that would correspond with the interests of all sides in the negotiation process," Alexeyev said, speaking at the DPRK Embassy in Moscow on Thursday.

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7. ROK on Inter-Korean Relations

Korea Times ("GNP LEADER CALLS NK MAIN ENEMY", 2005-03-17) reported that Rep. Park Geun-

hye, chairwoman of the main opposition Grand National Party (GNP) Wednesday called the DPRK the country's main enemy. In a breakfast meeting at the Johns Hopkins School for Advanced International Studies (SAIS) in Washington, D.C., Park was quoted as saying, "The North is the country's main enemy militarily, though it can be viewed as both the subject of unification and threat to national security."

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8. DPRK-Japanese Relations

Donga Ilbo ("NORTH KOREAN, JAPANESE DIPLOMATS CONFRONT EACH OTHER AT U.N. COMMITTEE MEETING", 2005-03-17) reported that representatives of the DPRK and Japan engaged in a direct confrontation at a senior officials' meeting of the UN Human Rights Committee located in Geneva, Switzerland on March 16. The DPRK focused on past Japanese crimes against humanity, and Japan focused on the DPRK`s human rights situation.

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9. Sino-DPRK Economic Cooperation

KCNA ("DPRK REPORTS CONSTRUCTION OF CHINESE-FUNDED FACTORY CONTINUING", 2005-03-17) reported that the Taean Friendship Glass Factory which is under construction amid the deep concern of the peoples and builders of the DPRK and PRC has begun to show its imposing appearance. Builders and technicians of the two countries have dynamically pushed forward the construction of the factory in a little more than eight months since the successful blasting involving 1m cu.m. of earth. With the fast progress of the construction of the main production building, which may be called the heart of the factory, a definite prospect has opened for an earlier completion of the overall construction.

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10. DPRK-Mongolian Relations

International Herald Tribune ("A SOFTER APPROACH TO NORTH KOREA", 2005-03-17) reported that officials in the drab Soviet-era government buildings that dominate the skyline here concede that Mongolia is used to being an afterthought in global geopolitics. Yet even as the great powers grapple with the DPRK's nuclear ambitions, Mongolia has quietly been using its nonthreatening status to open a dialogue with the DPRK government and woo its leaders toward change. The primary tool Mongolians are using to engage the DPRK is the story of Mongolia's own successful transition from an isolated Stalinist state to a free-market democracy.

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11. DPRK-Irish Relations

Asia Pulse ("NORTH KOREA'S TOP LEGISLATOR GREETS IRISH PRESIDENT ON ST PATRICK'S DAY", 2005-03-17) reported that Kim Yong-nam, president of the Presidium of the DPRK Supreme People's Assembly, sent a message of greetings to Mary McAleese, president of Ireland, on 17 March on the occasion of its (Ireland's) national day. In the belief that the friendly and cooperative ties between the two countries would grow stronger, he wished the Irish people well-being and prosperity.

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12. DPRK Closes UN Humanitarian Office

Yonhap news ("NORTH KOREA REQUESTS CLOSURE OF PYONGYANG UN OFFICE", 2005-03-17) reported that a ranking UN official said Wednesday 16 March that the DPRK has requested the closure of a UN office in its capital Pyongyang. Jan Egeland, UN under-secretary-general for humanitarian affairs, said that the DPRK is hoping that the Pyongyang chapter of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) will be shut down. Pyongyang has called for the UN to simplify its monitoring of humanitarian activities in the country since last August, according to sources.

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13. DPRK Public Execution

The Associated Press ("JAPAN GROUP HAS N. KOREA EXECUTION VIDEO", 2005-03-17) reported that a firing squad fires a few shots. In the distance, the blurry DPRK figures condemned to die for attempting to escape the DPRK slump over, lifeless. A Japanese media company said Thursday it has obtained footage of two sessions of public executions they say were carried out in the DPRK on March 1-2. Nippon Television Network Corp. broadcast portions of the tape Wednesday.

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14. Japan on DPRK Bird Flu Outbreak

Kyodo News ("JAPAN HALTS IMPORTS OF NORTH KOREAN POULTRY", 2005-03-17) reported that Japan has halted imports of poultry from the DPRK following a ROK report about a bird flu outbreak in Pyongyang, the government said Wednesday (16 March). The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries said it has not been able to confirm the facts with DPRK authorities, and decided to impose a pre-emptive import embargo.

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15. US - ROK Military Alliance

Korea Herald ("KOREA-U.S. PROVISIONALLY AGREE TO CUT USFK BUDGET", 2005-03-17) reported that ROK and US negotiators reached a provisional agreement yesterday to cut the ROK's share in the budget for maintaining the US troops here, a Foreign Ministry official said. The specifics of the amount for the final agreement were not disclosed. The talk was successful and the US side has accepted most of the ROK's demands, the official explained in a briefing after the SMA meeting. The US negotiators will return to Washington with the provisional consensus and notify within two weeks for the final decision.

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16. ROK-Japanese Territorial Dispute

Washington Post ("ISLANDS COME BETWEEN SOUTH KOREA AND JAPAN; ORDINANCE INTENSIFIES DIPLOMATIC DISPUTE", 2005-03-17) reported that ROK officials denounced an ordinance passed Wednesday by a Japanese local council that reinforces Japan's claim to a disputed

island chain between the two countries. The new law, and the ROK's reaction, escalated a quarrel that analysts say could damage their diplomatic ties. The bill was approved by Japan's Shimane prefecture assembly as hundreds of nationalists sporting paramilitary gear urged the council on. The measure established an annual Takeshima Day, which highlights Japan's claim to the uninhabited volcanic outcroppings.

(return to top) The Los Angeles Times ("A CLUSTER OF ROCKS ERUPTS INTO A MOUNTAIN OF EMOTION IN S. KOREA", 2005-03-17) reported that if there were doubts about the passion some ROK feel over a group of barren islets off their east coast, a 61-year-old grandmother probably erased them when she sliced off her little finger in protest of a Japanese claim of sovereignty over the land. The protests rose to a crescendo Wednesday after a local assembly in Shimane, the Japanese prefecture closest to the islets, passed a resolution designating Feb. 22 as a day of celebration of Japanese claim to sovereignty over them. Sovereignty over the islands, which have been administered by the ROK since 1953, is an unending issue for the nations, but the latest strife is the most heated in recent memory. (return to top)

17. ROK on ROK-Japanese Territorial Dispute

Choson Ilbo ("JAPAN COVETING GAS DEPOSITS UNDER DOKDO: EXPERTS", 2005-03-17) reported that the Korea Gas Corporation (KOGAS) on Thursday suggested one reason Japan remains keen to get its hands on Korea's Dokdo Islets is the huge energy resources believed to be deposited deep under the waters of the East Sea southwest of the uninhabited rocks. KOGAS said it explored every part of the East Sea from 2000 through 2004 along with the Korea Institute of Geoscience and Mineral Resources, and found the Ulleung Basin has large deposits of gas hydrate that could translate into some 600 million tons of liquid natural gas (LNG).

(return to top) Reuters ("SOUTH KOREA SAYS ROW OVER ISLANDS HAS HURT JAPAN TIES", 2005-03-17) reported that ties between Japan and the ROK have been seriously hurt by a territorial dispute over desolate islands that lie in gas-rich waters, ROK officials said on Thursday. National Security Council chairman Chung Dong-young said Seoul regarded any Japanese claim to the islands as an attempt to justify Japan's brutal 1910-1945 rule over the Korean Peninsula. "The government sees recent acts in Japan related to Tokto and past issues as arising from an attempt to justify its past colonial invasion, and will respond sternly," he told reporters. (return to top)

18. Japan on ROK-Japanese Territorial Dispute

Kyodo News ("JAPAN SAYS FLIGHT TO DISPUTED ISLAND WAS "ROUTINE"", 2005-03-17) reported that Japan on Thursday (17 March) downplayed Wednesday's approach by an Air Self-Defense Force (ASDF) spy plane to a disputed island controlled by the ROK as "routine," despite Seoul's concerns that the incident has added further strain to bilateral ties. A Japanese reconnaissance plane approached the island but retreated after receiving warnings from the ROK Air Force, the Defense Ministry in Seoul said Thursday.

(return to top) The Associated Press ("JAPAN SEEKS TO PLACATE SOUTH KOREA AMID UNRAVELING TIES OVER ISLAND SPAT", 2005-03-17) reported that Japan's foreign minister sought to mend fast unraveling relations with the ROK Thursday, acknowledging that Japan had to face the bitter feelings its past colonization still incites in its neighbor. "Our country humbly accepts the fact that in the past it caused great damage and pain to people from Asian countries, and it's necessary to face the feelings of the Korean people with deep understanding and sympathy," the statement said. "An emotional confrontation does not benefit either Japan or South Korea. We believe its necessary to keep the matter in perspective considering Japan-Korea relations as a

whole," he said, calling for patience and tolerance. (return to top)

19. PRC Uranium Imports

Sydney Morning Herald ("URANIUM ELEMENTAL TO CHINA TRADE LEAP", 2005-03-17) reported that Australia is in negotiations with the PRC to sell it uranium, reversing a long-standing policy in dealing with the nuclear weapons state, the Federal Government has announced. And reflecting ever closer political, economic and military links between the two countries, the Minister for Defence, Robert Hill, yesterday described the PRC as a type of democracy. Saying he had "quiet confidence" the negotiations would be successful, Mr Downer said the deal hinged on the PRC agreeing to safeguards ensuring that the uranium would not be used to build nuclear weapons, is not given to other parties and would be safely handled.

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20. PRC on Cross Strait Relations

The Associated Press ("CHINA PROTESTS U.S. CRITICISM OF ITS ANTI-SECESSION LAW", 2005-03-17) reported that the PRC voiced strong opposition Thursday to US congressional criticism of its anti-secession law designed to curb rival Taiwan. US House of Representatives voted 424-4 Wednesday to approve a resolution expressing its "grave concern" about the law. The PRC "firmly opposes the act adopted by the U.S. House of Representatives on China's anti-secession law, and has lodged solemn representations to the U.S. side," the government's Xinhua News Agency said, citing Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao.

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21. Cross Strait Relations

The New York Times ("TAIWAN LEADER CRITICIZES CHINA", 2005-03-17) reported that President Chen Shui-bian of Taiwan on Wednesday night strongly criticized the PRC's adoption of an antisecession law, and urged residents to join an islandwide day of protest on March 26. But Mr. Chen stopped short of ruling out proposals from both sides of the Taiwan Strait for improving relations, like someday allowing more charter flights. Philip Yang, an expert on cross-strait relations at National Taiwan University, said Beijing had so antagonized centrist voters here with the antisecession law that Mr. Chen could please centrists and independence supporters alike by assailing it.

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22. US on PRC Human Rights

The Associated Press ("U.S. WON'T CHIDE CHINA OVER HUMAN RIGHTS", 2005-03-17) reported that the Bush administration will not propose a UN resolution critical of the PRC's human rights policy this year because of recent "positive steps" by Beijing, US officials said Thursday. The decision removes one of the major flash points of the annual six-week session of the 53-nation UN Human Rights Commission, which began Monday. "In the past year China has taken several steps which we have been seeking in some cases for many years, and accordingly we've decided not to table a resolution on China considering these positive steps," one official told The Associated Press.

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23. PRC on Arms Ban

Reuters ("CHINA PUSHES EU ON ARMS BAN", 2005-03-17) reported that the PRC Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing says he hopes the European Union will lift what he called its "irrational" ban on arms sales to the PRC. He insisted on Thursday Beijing posed no threat to Taiwan -- the basis on which the US administration has vigorously tried to stop the EU from lifting the ban. "I think the European Union, as a very important group of countries, will have enough political wisdom and courage to lift as quickly as possible this measure which is irrational and constitutes political discrimination towards China," he told reporters in Brussels, headquarters of the 25-nation EU.

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II. Japan

24. CanKor #200

CANADA-KOREA ELECTRONIC INFORMATION SERVICE ("UN NUTRITIONAL SURVEY: MALNUTRITION REMAINS HIGH", 2005-03-17) At a press conference in Beijing, UNICEF and the UN World Food Programme announce the results of a large-scale survey of child and maternal nutrition carried out last October by the DPRK's Central Bureau of Statistics and Institute of Child Nutrition. The UN agencies attribute the relative decline in malnutrition rates among children to substantial, well-targeted international assistance. www.cankor.ca

(return to top) CANADA-KOREA ELECTRONIC INFORMATION SERVICE ("DPRK ASKS UN TO CLOSE OCHA OFFICE IN PYONGYANG", 2005-03-17) The DPRK requests the United Nations to close the Pyongyang branch of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), staffed by one person. Sources say it may be part of the DPRK's announced goal of reducing the monitoring activities of international aid agencies. www.cankor.ca (return to top) CANADA-KOREA ELECTRONIC INFORMATION SERVICE ("SOUTH TO NORTH POWER SUPPLY BEGINS IN KAESONG", 2005-03-17) The ROK will begin supplying the Kaesong Industrial Park with electric power this week. The Kaesong project is increasingly garnering the interest of South Korean firms eager to benefit from skilled but cheaper manufacturing labour. Where South Korean policy makers see engagement as a way toward political transformation in the DPRK, critics see it as turning a blind eye to the potential benefits of an abrupt end to the current regime. This week' s CanKor FOCUS reviews the latest progress of the Kaesong experiment. www.cankor.ca (return to top)

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Nautilus Institute
608 San Miguel Ave., Berkeley, CA 94707-1535 | Phone: (510) 423-0372 | Email: nautilus@nautilus.org