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1. Working Group: Japan-DPRK

Reuters ("JAPAN, N. KOREA TALKS STALL AGAIN ON HISTORICAL ISSUES", 2007-03-08) reported that Japan and DPRK talks cut short after wrangling again over historical differences. While Japan says forming ties is impossible without resolution of the issue of Japanese abducted in the 1970s and 1980s, the DPRK is pressing for settlement of issues stemming from Japan's harsh 1910-45 colonial rule over the Korean peninsula.

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2. EU-DPRK Relations

Associated Press ("NORTH KOREA SIGNALS WILLINGNESS TO EU TO MOVE AHEAD WITH AGREEMENT ON NUCLEAR PROGRAM", 2007-03-08) reported that during two days of "detailed" and "frank" talks with the EU, the DPRK "expressed its determination to implement in full the 13 February agreement." The talks were with delegates from the EU presidency, the European Commission and the 27-nation bloc's Secretariat General, known collectively as the EU Troika. The European Union will look into improving relations with the DPRK if Pyongyang implements last month's agreement on its nuclear program as it has indicated it will, Germany's EU presidency said.

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3. DPRK Foot and Mouth Disease Outbreak

Associated Press ("N. KOREA KILLS LIVESTOCK AFTER OUTBREAK", 2007-03-08) reported that the DPRK already suffering food shortages, has slaughtered hundreds of cows and pigs after an outbreak of foot and mouth disease. According to the World Organization for Animal Health, the outbreak occurred in January at a farm in the capital, Pyongyang, sickening 431 cows. The DPRK issued a report that was posted on the Web site of the Paris-based animal health agency, known by the initials OIE. The DPRK's Agricultural Ministry said some 100,000 animals within the 44-mile radius of the outbreak site will be vaccinated. The sickened cows were imported from Tieling, China, the report said.

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4. US-ROK Security Alliance

Korea Times ("USFK COMMANDER WARNS OF SECURITY VACUUM", 2007-03-08) reported that the top American general in the ROK said he was worried that the ROK government's plans to reduce its number of troops over the next decade and cut the length of mandatory military service could cause a security vacuum on the Korean Peninsula. "It is our hope that the Republic of Korea carefully considers these large force cuts unless they are matched by similar North Korean reductions," Gen. B. B. Bell, commander of the U.S. Forces Korea (USFK), said.

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5. US-ROK Trade Relations

Korea Times ("US PROMISES 'HIGH-QUALITY' FTA", 2007-03-08) reported that the ROK and the US could reach a "balanced, high-quality" free trade agreement (FTA), said Wendy Cutler, the chief US

negotiator for the free trade talks. Asked about the issue of the ROK's import of US beef, she argued that it is impossible to reach a final agreement in the talks if the ROK maintains its position to allow only boneless beef.

(return to top) Yonhap ("HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE VOICE OPPOSITION TO FTA TALKS", 2007-0--08) reported that a group of about 870 people, including 23 lawmakers, voiced their opposition Thursday to the free trade talks between the ROK and the US underway here, said organizers, witnesses and police. "The two governments are trying to close the deal hurriedly through clandestine high-level talks while totally unprepared and lacking substantial materials," they said in a statement. (return to top)

6. ROK Constitutional Revision

Chosun Ilbo ("PROMISE TO CHANGE PRESIDENTIAL TERM AND I'LL LAY OFF: ROH", 2007-03-08) reported that President Roh Moo-hyun said he will not seek to change the presidential term in office from a single five-year term to a renewable four-year term provided political parties and presidential hopefuls promise to revise the Constitution to that effect under the next administration. He made the offer at a special press conference in the afternoon.

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7. Japan Missile Defense Program

Kyodo News ("JAPAN COMPILES GUIDELINE TO MOBILIZE MISSILE-DEFENSE SYSTEM", 2007-03-08) reported that Japan has compiled a guideline allowing its defense minister to issue an order without gaining approval from the prime minister to intercept incoming ballistic missiles in the event of emergencies. It states that the defense minister can issue such an advance order to the Self-Defense Forces when there are suspicions or fears that missiles have been fired against Japan or when satellite-launch vehicles are feared to fall on the country.

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8. Japan Constitutional Revision

Asahi Shinbun ("COALITION TO PUSH REFERENDUM BILL IN DIET FOR CONSTITUTIONAL REVISION", 2007-03-08) reported that Japan's ruling coalition plans to pass a national referendum bill in the Lower House this month to revise the pacifist Constitution, even if it requires steamrolling the legislation through the Diet. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said he intends to have the referendum law enacted by Constitution Day, on May 3, and wants constitutional revision to be a focal point in the Upper House election this summer. Abe said he also wants studies conducted on Japan's exercising of the right to collective self-defense, which is banned under current interpretations of the Constitution.

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9. Japan Comfort Women Issue

BBC News ("JAPAN PARTY PROBES SEX SLAVE USE", 2007-03-08) reported that Japan's ruling party will hold a new inquiry into the use of sex slaves by the Japanese army during World War II, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has said. The study follows calls by some 130 MPs from Mr Abe's Liberal Democratic Party for the issue to be reviewed. Tokyo apologised in 1993 for its role in setting up

army brothels, but the MPs believe the apology went too far.

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10. Cross Strait Relations

Agence France Presse ("TAIWAN SHOWS FORCE AMID TENSIONS WITH CHINA", 2007-03-08) reported that Taiwan ran a series of exercises featuring its special airborne force amid escalating cross-strait tensions stoked by the independence-leaning President Chen Shui-bian's recent provocative remarks. The force is seen as a key unit to counter rival PRC's special operation force, whose continued build-up has alarmed Taiwan.

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11. Sino-US Relations

Bloomberg News ("GATES SAYS CHINA ISN'T U.S. ADVERSARY, WANTS CANDOR", 2007-03-08) reported that Defense Secretary Robert Gates said he doesn't view the PRC as a foe of the US, even though he would like PRC officials to be more forthcoming about the purposes of their military modernization program. Gates said the PRC "clearly are making a significant investment in their military forces, and in both strategic and tactical modernization. I think that greater transparency would help, from the standpoint of the Chinese, in terms of both what they're doing and what their strategies are, their intent in modernizing these forces."

(return to top) The New York Times ("PAULSON URGEST CHINA TO OPEN ITS MARKETS MORE QUICKLY", 2007-03-08) reported that US Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson delivered a speech in Shanghai in which he said that the PRC needed to quicken the pace of its economic reforms and do more to open its financial markets to foreign competition. Though the speech did not contain any new points, it was significant because it reflected the mounting tensions in the US-PRC relationship. It was the third time in six months that the Treasury Secretary has traveled to the PRC to press the leadership to open up its economy, a highly unusual display of American pressure. (return to top)

12. PRC on US Human Rights

Agence France Presse ("CHINA TAKES US TO TASK IN HUMAN RIGHTS RETORT", 2007-03-08) reported that the PRC has assailed the human cost of America's overseas wars as well as rights infringements within the US in its annual riposte to Washington's critique of the PRC's record on human rights. The report, titled "The Human Rights Record of the United States in 2006," cited massive civilian casualties in the Iraq conflict, abuse of Iraqi prisoners and terror suspects, and the killings of unarmed civilians by US troops abroad.

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13. PRC Private Property Law

Washington Post ("CHINA LEGISLATURE INTRODUCES PROPERTLY LAW", 2007-03-08) reported that the PRC's legislature has begun examining a much-debated law that helps protect private property. The latest draft of the property law seeks to strike a delicate balance between the need to continue promoting the PRC economy, which depends on private investment, and satisfying old guard officials reluctant to see the socialist ideals jettisoned. Individuals shall own "their lawful incomes, houses, articles for daily use, means of production and raw materials," the legislation

states.

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