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1. ROK on Six Party Talks

Reuters ("N.KOREA SEEKS NUCLEAR TALKS RETURN: SOUTH", 2006-03-23) reported that the DPRK appears to be signaling a desire to return to stalled six-country talks on its nuclear programs and to be interested in breaking the deadlock, the ROK's foreign minister said on Thursday. Ban Ki-moon also told Reuters a visit next month by PRC President Hu Jintao to the US could help create the right atmosphere for the nuclear talks to resume. He said the DPRK had recently declared its willingness to adopt international financial regulations, join a financial task force and punish anyone involved in the drug trade. "These kind of announcements and measures taken by North Korea seem to suggest they are trying to send out some messages to us, particularly the United States," Ban said.

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2. DPRK on ROK-US Military Exercises

Associated Press ("NORTH KOREA BRISTLES AT U.S.-SOUTH DRILLS ", 2006-03-23) reported that the DPRK warned Thursday it will react to upcoming joint US-ROK joint military exercises with an unspecified "strong measure of self-defense," condemning the drill as saber-rattling for a pre-emptive nuclear attack on the DPRK. "Now that the U.S. intention to stifle the DPRK has become very clear, the DPRK will react to it with a strong measure for self-defense," a spokesman for the DPRK's Foreign Ministry said in statement carried by the KCNA.

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3. Inter-Korean Reunion Event

Reuters ("ANGRY N.KOREA ALLOWS S.KOREAN FAMILIES TO DEPART", 2006-03-23) reported that the DPRK has allowed nearly 100 visiting RO Koreans to return home after delaying their departure over objections to news reports that it had abducted people, officials said on Thursday. They were supposed to leave on Wednesday afternoon, but the DPRK delayed their departure for about 10 hours, ROK officials said. The ROK media pool reports said the DPRK demanded that one ROK reporter who used the term abductee in a broadcast agree to exit the country before it would allow the ROK families to depart.

(return to top) Chosun Ilbo ("S.KOREAN PRESS WALK OUT OF FAMILY REUNIONS ", 2006-03-23) reported that the ROK press corps on Thursday decided to leave the DPRK in protest at authorities' interference with their coverage of an ongoing reunion event of families divided between the DPRK and ROK. The ROK press corps in a statement on Thursday said, "The North has obstructed our reporting and failed to respond to our demand for free press activity, let alone apologized. We interpret that to mean the North will continue to curb South Korean press activities during the

second part starting on Thursday, and have decided to leave." Unification Minister Lee Jong-seok expressed deep regret that the DPRK obstructed ROK press activities and prevented the first group of ROK families from coming back home on time. (return to top)

4. Inter-Korean Military Relations

Yonhap News ("S. KOREA TO ISSUE DEFENSE WHITE PAPER IN SEPTEMBER", 2006-03-23) reported that the ROK will publish its biennial defense policy report in September without labeling the DPRK its "main enemy," military sources said Thursday. The ROK has not termed the DPRK its principal enemy since the publication of its 2004 edition in a bid to keep up the momentum of reconciliation and cooperation with the country.

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5. Inter-Korean Economic Cooperation

United Press International ("S.KOREA TO TRAIN NORTH KOREAN WORKERS", 2006-03-23) reported that the ROK plans to open a job training center in the DPRK to improve the skills of DPR Koreans who work in ROK-owned companies. The training center, to open in June, each year will offer training in 13 areas of work to 4,000 employees of midsized companies, the state-funded Human Resources Development Service of Korea said in a statement. The center will conduct job training and supply a quality workforce to our companies which will move in the Kaesong Industrial Complex, it said. The ROK government has allocated $16.4 million to construct the training center in the industrial zone, The Korea Herald reported Thursday.

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6. UN, PRC on DPRK Defectors

Chosun Ilbo ("UN TELLS CHINA TO CEASE REPATRIATION OF DEFECTORS ", 2006-03-23) reported that Antonio Guterres, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees said on Thursday that even those DPR Koreans who crossed the border for purely economic reasons would be in grave danger if they were returned to their country and therefore need to be seen as refugees. However, through a briefing by the Foreign Ministry spokesman on Tuesday, the PRC government reaffirmed that they can not recognize DPRK defectors as refugees, referring to them as "illegal migrants who enter into Chinese territory."

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7. Japanese Investigation into DPRK Abductions

Associated Press ("POLICE SEARCH NORTH KOREAN GROUP OVER 1980 KIDNAPPING OF JAPANESE MAN ", 2006-03-23) reported that police investigating the 1980 kidnapping of a Japanese man by DPRK agents raided the offices of a group affiliated with the DPRK's de facto embassy in Japan on Thursday, officials said. National broadcaster NHK showed investigators pushing into the Osaka offices of the Chamber of Commerce of North Koreans. NHK and Kyodo News agency said the search was linked to the abduction of Tadaaki Hara. The DPRK admitted in 2002 that it had abducted the 13 Japanese citizens, apparently to train spies in Japanese language and culture. Pyongyang returned five of the victims but said the remaining eight, including Hara, were dead. NHK said police believe two people involved in Hara's kidnapping were top officials at the chamber of commerce at the time.

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8. DPRK Human Rights Conference

Chosun Ilbo ("BRUSSELS MEET URGES GLOBAL EFFORT FOR N.KOREA RIGHTS ", 2006-03-23) reported that human rights activists from Europe, the US, the ROK and Japan on Thursday announced a “Brussels Declaration” vowing to strengthen global solidarity on behalf of DPR Koreans and their rights. The declaration calls for increased cooperation with international organizations including filing regular reports so that now the UN Commission on Human Rights has been transformed into the UN Human Rights Council, it can directly address the DPRK human rights issue as a standing concern. They also resolved to raise awareness of DPRK refugees around the world. The first step will be arranging for defectors to testify before the Italian parliament in May.

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9. PRC on UN Security Council

Xinhua ("CHINA SAYS NO TO JAPAN'S PROPOSAL ON UN DUES", 2006-03-23) reported that the PRC "firmly" opposes Japan's proposal to the UN General Assembly budget committee saying each of the five permanent council members should contribute at least 3 percent or 5 percent of the UN budget. The PRC's and Russia's dues currently account for 2.1% and 1.1% of the total.

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10. HKSAR-Canada Relations

Xinhua ("HK SIGNS AIRCRAFT MAINTENANCE PACT WITH CANADA", 2006-03-23) reported that the government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region signed an agreement on aircraft maintenance in Montreal. Under the agreement, aircraft maintenance organizations in Hong Kong can provide maintenance service to aircraft registered in Canada without the need for additional approval from the Canadian government and in turn, the Canadian side can provide maintenance service to Hong Kong aircraft under the same condition.

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11. PRC-Brazil Relations

Xinhua ("CHINA, BRAZIL PLEDGE TO STRENGTHEN RELATIONS", 2006-03-23) reported that the PRC Vice President Zeng Qinghong said here that the PRC would work closely with Brazil to promote bilateral relations to enhance high-level exchanges, explore new ways of cooperation and enhance coordination in international and regional affairs.

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12. PRC Monetary Policy

Xinhua ("CENTRAL BANK PLEDGES TO MAKE YUAN MORE FLEXIBLE", 2006-03-23) reported that the PRC's central bank said it would increase the "floating flexibility" of yuan. The People's Bank of China reiterated in that the PRC will continue to improve its exchange rate mechanism.

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13. PRC-Russia Trade

Xinhua ("CHINA, RUSSIA TO USE LARGE CONTAINERS TO CARRY GOODS", 2006-03-23) reported that transporting crude oil by direct trains from Zabaikalye, Russia, to Manzhouli, the PRC's largest land port in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, has gained a success, and the two countries decided to explore the possibilities of transporting ore and fertilizer. The railway departments of both countries furthermore agreed to use large containers to carry goods as they work to expand transportation capacities in 2006 and 2007.

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14. PRC-US Cooperation

Xinhua ("SINO-US RESEARCH CENTER FOR CLINICAL DRUGS FOUNDED", 2006-03-23) reported that a Sino-US research center for clinical drugs has been founded in Beijing. The center was jointly established by Peking Union Medical College Hospital and Wythe from the United States. Wythe will set up a training and research program and provide drugs for research and some of the full-time researchers to cooperate in clinical research for diseases including senile dementia, apoplexy, diabetes, osteoporosis and cancer.

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15. PRC-Japan Economic Relations

Xinhua ("JAPAN'S FREEZING OF LOANS HARMS CHINA-JAPAN RELATIONS: SPOKESMAN", 2006-03-23) reported that Japan's decision to freeze loans to the PRC is detrimental to PRC-Japan relations. "Providing loans to China is not giving alms to China," spokesman Qin Gang told the regular press briefing.

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16. Cross Strait Relations

The China Post ("GOV'T TIGHTENS ITS GRIP ON CHINA INVESTMENTS", 2006-03-23) reported that Taiwan introduced measures to reduce its economic reliance on the PRC, toughen rules governing investment in the mainland and crack down on smuggling.

(return to top) Crisscross News ("TAIWAN OPPOSITION PARTY DELEGATION VISITS CHINA", 2006-03-23) reported that a delegation from Taiwan's opposition Nationalist Party met with PRC officials in Beijing to discuss economic exchanges. (return to top)

17. USFJ Forces Realignment

The Asahi Shimbun ("JAPAN SUGGESTS LOANS FOR MARINES' MOVE TO GUAM", 2006-03-23) reported that Japan plans to ask the United States to accept a loan plan to shoulder part of the mammoth costs to relocate the 8,000 U.S. Marines from Okinawa Prefecture to Guam. Japan will be able to curb its financial burden if it offers loans instead of grants and the loan plan would be easier for the public to accept. The plan follows the established Public Private Partnership system.

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18. PRC Refugees

The Japan Times ("U.N. REFUGEE AGENCY TO WORK WITH CHINA ON ASYLUM SYSTEM", 2006-03-23) reported that U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres said he will work with PRC officials over the coming months to establish a national asylum system that specifies which foreigners, including DPRK Nationals, should qualify for refugee status in the country.

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19. Japan on Belarus Election

Crisscross News ("JAPAN CRITICIZES BELARUS ELECTION", 2006-03-23) reported that Japan criticized Sunday's presidential election in Belarus for being undemocratic, following the line of the European Union and the United States.

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20. Japan-US Bilateral Relations

Crisscross News ("EX-MITSUBISHI EXECUTIVE PICKED AS JAPAN CONSUL GENERAL FOR NEW YORK", 2006-03-23) reported that Japan's Foreign Ministry appointed Motoatsu Sakurai, former head of the U.S. unit of Japanese trading house Mitsubishi Corp, as the new consul general for New York. The appointment of Sakurai marks the first time someone from the private sector has been appointed to the post of consul general in New York.

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21. PRC-Russia Relations

ITAR-TASS: News Agency ("CHINA-RUSSIA TIES NOT AIMED TO COUNTER US INFLUENCE - SPOKESMAN", 2006-03-23) reported that the Foreign Ministry denied the claims that the PRC is strengthening strategic partnership with Russia to counterbalance the influence of the United States. "The talk of setting up one bloc to confront another - is a hopelessly obsolete vestige of the "Cold War," Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang.

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22. PRC-US Bilateral Relations

Agence France-Presse ("CHINA-US TENSIONS HEAT UP AHEAD OF HU'S TRIP TO WASHINGTON", 2006-03-23) reported that the PRC accused the United States of severely undermining the world trade system as tensions between the two nations heated up ahead of Chinese President Hu Jintao's visit to Washington.

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23. Japanese Nuclear Power

BBC News ("BLAZE AT JAPANESE NUCLEAR PLANT", 2006-03-23) reported that a fire has broken out at a nuclear plant in western Japan, injuring two people but causing no radiation leak. The blaze

took hold in a waste disposal facility at the Ohi power plant in Fukui, 380km (236 miles) west of Tokyo.

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