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I. NAPSNet

1. US Action on Swiss Firm

Associated Press ("US FREEZES ASSETS OF SWISS FIRM OVER NORTH KOREA ", 2006-03-30) reported that the US government froze the assets of a Swiss firm that it accused of involvement in weapons proliferation by the DPRK. The company, Kohas AG, and its Swiss chairman, Jakob Steiger, were also banned from trading with any US entity, the Treasury Department said in a statement. "Kohas AG acts as a technology broker in Europe for the North Korean military and has procured goods with weapons-related applications," said the statement. Kohas and Steiger "have been involved in activities of proliferation concern on behalf of North Korea since the company's founding in the late 1980s," added the Treasury. Kohas is an industrial supply wholesaler. Nearly half of the company's shares are owned by a subsidiary of Korea Ryonbong General Corporation, which was put on a US weapons proliferation blacklist last year.

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2. ROK on Six Party Talks

Chosun Ilbo ("N.KOREA 'MUST SCRAP NUKES BEFORE PEACE DEAL' ", 2006-03-30) reported that Seoul hopes to "jump right into" negotiations for a permanent peace on the Korean Peninsula, but only once visible progress has been made in talks on the DPRK's nuclear weapons program, Defense Minister Yoon Kwang-ung said Thursday. The minister warned against putting the cart before the horse. "If negotiations on a peace framework are put before the six-party talks, it could in fact have a negative effect on a resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue," he told a seminar sponsored by Korea International Defense Association.

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3. Trilateral Ambassador Meeting

Reuters ("N.KOREA ON AGENDA AS US ENVOYS MEET IN BEIJING", 2006-03-29) reported that the US ambassadors to the PRC, Japan and the ROK will meet in Beijing to discuss how to get stalled six-country talks on the DPRK's nuclear programs back on track, a ROK newspaper said on Thursday. The US embassy in Beijing confirmed the meeting was taking place, but a US embassy source in Japan said the ROK media was reading too much into it. "It's not about the six-way talks, although I'm sure they'll touch on it," the source said.

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4. Inter-Korean Ministerial Meeting

Chosun Ilbo ("SEOUL SUGGESTS NEW DATE FOR INTER-KOREAN MEET ", 2006-03-30) reported that Seoul has suggested April 20 as a tentative new date for the 18th inter-Korean ministerial meeting after Pyongyang postponed the meeting originally scheduled for this week in protest at the annual ROK-US military exercises taking place in the ROK. Unification Vice Minister Shin Un-sang told reporters on Thursday the government made the proposal to the DPRK last week but the DPRK has yet to respond.

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5. DPRK on Inter-Korean Tourism

Korea Times ("NK THREATENS SOUTH OVER TOURISM BUSINESS ", 2006-03-28) reported that the DPRK Tuesday warned the ROK of the possibility of stopping the visits of ROK tourists to the DPRK. According to the KCNA, Rodong Shimmun said in an editorial that the ROK government will not benefit from souring relations between the two Koreas, which it attributed to the annual joint military drills of the ROK and its ally the US that started last Saturday.

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6. DPRK-Japan Relations

Yonhap News ("PYONGYANG WARNS JAPAN IT WILL TAKE SANCTIONS AS ACT OF WAR", 2006-03-30) reported that the DPRK said Thursday that it will regard any economic sanctions imposed on it by Japan as a declaration of war. "Any sanctions will be regarded as a declaration of war," the DPRK's Korean Central Television Station said in a commentary. "We will not hesitate to take appropriate self-defense measures against (Japan)." But the television station stopped short of saying what measures could be expected.

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7. ROK on Japan Textbook Issue

Washington Post ("S. KOREA BLASTS JAPAN OVER WWII HISTORY", 2006-03-30) reported that the ROK government sharply denounced Japan for "whitebring, distorting and glorifying" its militarist past after Japanese officials ordered a series of controversial new changes to high school textbooks. The revised books clearly label disputed territories-- including a small island chain under ROK control but claimed by Japan -- as Japanese territory. Also, references to the 1937 Nanjing Massacre were changed to indicate the number of people killed by the Japanese may have been less than the 300,000 victims claimed by the PRC.

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8. US-Japan Missile Defense Cooperation

Kyodo ("AOMORI GOV. APPROVES HOSTING OF U.S. MISSILE DEFENSE RADAR", 2006-03-30) reported that Aomori Gov. Shingo Mimura said Thursday he has agreed to host a US military missile-defense radar at an Air Self-Defense Force base in Aomori Prefecture, as agreed upon between the Japanese and US governments. Japan and the US have agreed to deploy the mobile X-band radar for an advanced early warning system against ballistic missiles at the ASDF's Shariki base in Tsugaru in the latter half of this year.

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9. PRC on East Sea Territorial Dispute

Kyodo ("CHINA REPEATS CLAIM OVER DISPUTED ISLES", 2006-03-30) reported that the PRC repeated its claim over disputed isles in the East China Sea, a day after Japan's education ministry said it urged Japanese textbooks to clarify them as Japanese territory in its annual textbook screening. "The Diaoyu Islands have been an integral part of China's territory since ancient times,"

PRC Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang said, referring to the territory known as the Senkaku Islands in Japan.

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10. Japan on PRC Military

Kyodo ("JAPAN ENVOY URGES NEED FOR TRANSPARENCY IN CHINA DEFENSE SPENDING", 2006-03-30) reported that Japan's new Ambassador to the PRC Yuji Miyamoto on Thursday urged the PRC to be more transparent in its defense spending, citing the opaque nature of Beijing's military expenditures. "It is inevitable that China needs to increase its military transparency for acceptance by the international community," Miyamoto said.

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11. US, Japan on Intellectual Property Rights

Agence France-Presse ("US, JAPAN PLEDGE TO DEFEND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY", 2006-03-30) reported that the US and Japan pledged to work together to defend intellectual property rights amid concern in both countries about piracy in rapidly growing PRC. Gutierrez agreed in talks with Japanese trade minister Toshihiro Nikai that the two countries would "enhance bilateral cooperation" on protecting intellectual property rights.

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12. US-PRC Trade Relations

The Associated Press ("U.S. FILING TRADE CASE AGAINST CHINA ", 2006-03-30) reported that the Bush administration said that it is filing a trade case against the PRC before the World Trade Organization in a dispute involving auto parts from the US and other nations. The 25-nation European Union joined in the complaint, which alleges that the PRC is imposing high taxes on imported auto parts in violation of pledges it made when the PRC joined the WTO in late 2001.

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13. PRC Environment

Agence-France Presse ("CHINA TO SPEND 1.2 BILLION DOLLARS CLEANING UP SONGHUA RIVER", 2006-03-30) reported that the PRC said it would spend 1.2 billion dollars cleaning up its third biggest river following a major chemical spill last year that contaminated water supplies for millions of people. The State Council, or cabinet, on Wednesday approved the plan to invest 10 billion yuan (1.2 billion dollars) over five years cleaning up the Songhua river in the industrial northeast of the country, the State Environmental Protection Administration said.

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