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I. NAPSNet

1. US-PRC Meeting on DPRK

Chosun Ilbo ("N.KOREA QUESTIONS LOOM AS HU STARTS U.S. VISIT", 2006-04-18) reported that PRC President Hu Jintao arrived in Seattle on Monday (local time) for a four-day US trip. On Wednesday, he will meet with President George W. Bush at the White House -- the fifth meeting between the two heads of state. A senior official in Washington said Bush will bring up the PRC's continuing repatriation of DPRK refugees. The official recalled a recent statement from Bush's staff condemning the forceful repatriation of a DPRK refugee using the pseudonym Kim Chun-hee. "The president feels very strongly about the plight of the North Korean people. He discusses it often with us," the official said. The insider said Bush will ask for the help of the PRC to bring the DPRK back to six-party nuclear negotiations but added it was unlikely the US leader would have any new proposals on the issue.

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2. US on Six Party Talks

Associated Press ("BUSH TO URGE CHINESE LEADER TO STEP UP PRESSURE ON IRAN, NORTH KOREA ON NUCLEAR DISPUTE", 2006-04-17) reported that President Bush will urge PRC President Hu Jintao to step up pressure on both Iran and the DPRK to help end nuclear standoffs, administration officials said Monday. "We will also be urging China to help us get the North Koreans to return to the six-party talks ... so that the people on the Korean peninsula have a future that's free from nuclear weapons," said Dennis Wilder, a National Security Council official who overseas Asian affairs. Separately, Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick said PRC officials "need to be more than a mediator" in the negotiations, which had been held in Beijing until the current 6-month-long deadlock began. "They need to be a participant that recognizes that they have an interest in trying to solve this problem," Zoellick told a foreign policy forum.

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3. PRC on Six Party Talks

Associated Press ("CHINA DEFENDS ROLE IN NORTH KOREA NUCLEAR TALKS AMID U.S. CRITICISM", 2006-04-18) reported that the PRC defended its role in international talks on the DPRK's nuclear ambitions on Tuesday, a day after a top US official said the PRC needed to make stronger efforts to restart the stalled negotiations. "We are making positive efforts to push forward the process," PRC Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang said at a regular briefing. "Our positive efforts have been recognized by all parties concerned." He did not elaborate on what the efforts were. "Now there are new complicated factors and problems," Qin said. "The principle parties concerned should show their flexibility and sincerity so as to strive for new progress."

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4. ROK Ministerial Nominee on DPRK

JoongAng Ilbo ("HAN OFFERS HINTS TO HER THOUGHTS ON NORTH KOREA", 2006-04-18)

reported that the National Assembly confirmation hearing on prime minister nominee Han Myeong-sook concluded yesterday with a glimpse of Ms. Han's philosophy toward the DPRK. When asked by Grand National Party lawmakers whether she would ask the DPRK for the return of an alleged ROK abductee, Ms. Han said she would, if an investigation could prove the person was kidnapped by the DPRK. When pressed by opposition party lawmakers about her earlier comments that dealing with DPRK human rights recklessly could jeopardize inter-Korean relations, Ms. Han said Seoul's peaceful policy toward the DPRK has been internationally acknowledged. She said economic cooperation with Pyongyang and encouraging the DPRK to open up to outsiders was the quickest way to resolve the human rights issues.

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5. DPRK on Japanese Island Claim

Kyodo News ("N. KOREA TERMS DISPUTED ISLES 'INALIENABLE PART OF KOREA'S TERRITORY' ", 2006-04-18) reported that the DPRK said Tuesday disputed islands called Dokdo in the DPRK and the ROK, and Takeshima in Japan are ''an inalienable part of Korea's territory.'' ''It is an undeniable stark fact that Dokdo islets are an inalienable part of Korea's territory from times immemorial in the light of historical facts and from the international legal point of view,'' the DPRK's Jurists' Committee said in a statement carried by the KCNA.

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6. ROK on Japanese Island Claim

Chosun Ilbo ("TWO KOREAS MAY DISCUSS JAPAN'S DOKDO INCURSION ", 2006-04-18) reported that the DPRK and the ROK may discuss the threatened incursion of a Japanese research vessel into the ROK's exclusive economic zone during the inter-Korean ministerial talks starting in Pyongyang this Friday. Foreign Minister Ban Ki-moon said Tuesday he would "talk to the unification minister" about the matter. Ban was answering a question from Uri Party lawmaker Choi Sung in the National Assembly. Asked if the ROK will seize the Japanese research vessel if it violates the EEZ in the course of what Japan claims is a hydrographic survey near Dokdo, Ban said, "Concrete steps will be determined depending on how the situation progresses."

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7. DPRK-PRC Cooperation

Xinhua ("CHINA SENDS HYDROLOGICAL INSTRUMENTS TO NORTH KOREA ", 2006-04-17) reported that the PRC Ministry of Water Resources (MWR) sent hydrological instruments valued at US$63,000 to the Bureau of Weather and Hydrology of the DPRK. Kao Il-hym, director of the weather and hydrology bureau, held talks with the PRC MWR delegation before the presentation ceremony, expressing thanks to the PRC for the presentation of hydrological instruments which included water level equipment and short wave broadcasting stations. "These instruments will play an important role in preventing flood disaster and improving hydrological survey levels in the DPRK, and also further deepen mutual understanding and promote the traditional friendship between the DPRK and China," he said.

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8. UNICEF on DPRK Misconceptions

Korea Times ("CHILDREN DON'T MAKE POLITICS IN N. KOREA", 2006-04-17) reported that responding to the stereotypical notion that the DPRK is a closed state where people are subjugated and starving and where infrastructure is crumbling, Vu Thi, head of UNICEF there, responds by saying there are misconceptions about the DPRK that do not help. Of the misconceptions Vu Thi said "it's a country with a government that's like any other government, with technical people and political people. And there are children that have the same needs as children in other countries and the children are not responsible for any of the politics." At a suggestion that the DPRK is a country locked in starvation amid a framework of crumbling infrastructure, you get a short, immediate response, "No!" She prefers "degraded" and says it's something the DPRK government acknowledges.

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9. USFJ Realignment

Agence France-Presse ("JAPANESE CITY COULD ACCEPT US NUCLEAR SHIP ", 2006-04-18) reported that a Japanese mayor says he may drop objections to his city hosting the first US nuclear-powered warship to be based in Japan after Washington offered safety assurances. Yokosuka Mayor Ryoichi Kabaya, whose city on Tokyo Bay hosts the country's largest US Navy base, said he was impressed by a 10-page fact sheet on safety drafted by the US at the request of the community.

(return to top) Kyodo ("JAPAN, U.S. PLAN TOP SECURITY TALKS MAY 2 TO FINALIZE REALIGNMENT", 2006-04-18) reported that Japan and the US are arranging to hold ministerial talks May 2 to finalize a broad set of plans to realign the US military presence in Japan, Japanese government sources said. Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Aso is already set to meet US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice during a visit to Washington from April 30 to May 3, and Japanese Defense Agency Director General Fukushiro Nukaga and US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld are likely to join them to realize the "two-plus-two" security meeting, the sources said. (return to top)

10. ROK-Japanese Territorial Dispute

Joongang Ilbo ("JAPAN PROPOSES EACH SIDE STEP BACK ON DOKDO", 2006-04-18) reported that the Japanese government has asked Seoul to drop its proposal to assign a new name to the sea floor in the southwestern part of the East Sea, according to sources in Tokyo. In return, said Shotaro Yachi, Japan's vice foreign minister, Tokyo would drop its plans to send a maritime research ship to an area near Dokdo, an islet claimed by both nations but occupied by the ROK.

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11. PRC-Japan East Sea Gas Dispute

Agence France-Presse ("JAPAN, CHINA RESOLVE SHIP BAN DISPUTE BUT REMAIN AT ODDS", 2006-04-18) reported that Japan said that the PRC had promised to revise a ban on ships in disputed gas-rich waters, ending the latest dispute between the Asian powers but triggering fresh criticism here of Beijing. But Japanese leaders renewed criticism of the PRC, saying Beijing should have directly informed Tokyo that it was imposing the ban in the first place and then given a better explanation after Japan filed a complaint.

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12. PRC-Japan Economic Relations

The Los Angeles Times ("CHINA-JAPAN ECONOMIC TIES GLOW AMID POLITICAL CHILL", 2006-04-18) reported that a year after about 20,000 anti-Japan protesters jammed the streets, Japanese and PRC officials are still wrangling over how to repair a damaged Japanese Consulate building — a reflection of the icy political relations that persist between the two nations. But it is a different story on the economic front. Not only are Japanese restaurants that were attacked during the April 16 demonstrations back in business, but more than 525 additional companies from Japan set up shop in Shanghai in 2005. That's about the same number as in the previous year, indicating that fears of a Japanese corporate pullback from the PRC were unfounded.

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13. PRC-US Summit

Agence France-Presse ("HU HEADS TO US, HOPING TO SHOW CHINA IS NO THREAT ", 2006-0--18) reported that President Hu Jintao left Beijing for a much-anticipated summit in the US, hoping to persuade his host George W. Bush that the PRC's fast-growing economy is no threat. Reflecting the growing focus on economic issues in bilateral relations, he was accompanied by Commerce Minister Bo Xilai and Ma Kai, the minister in charge of the State Development and Reform Commission.

(return to top) Reuters ("SNOW SAYS CHINA "TOO CAUTIOUS" ON CURRENCY", 2006-04-18) reported that the PRC is being "too cautious" in letting its currency trade more freely on world markets, US Treasury Secretary John Snow said on Tuesday. But Snow said the PRC is on a path to allow greater foreign exchange flexibility, and added that he expects PRC leaders to renew pledges to loosen currency trading and follow trade rules this week during PRC President Hu Jintao's visit to the US. (return to top)

14. Cross Strait Relations

Reuters ("CHINA ALLOWS TOUR GROUPS TO TAIWAN ", 2006-04-18) reported that the PRC issued new rules allowing mainland tourists to visit Taiwan, continuing Beijing's efforts to court the disputed island with economic overtures, but it was unclear when any PRC tourism to the island would start.

(return to top) Bloomberg ("TAIWAN SAYS BUSH CONCESSIONS TO CHINA WOULD HURT U.S. INTEGRITY ", 2006-04-18) reported that Taiwan has warned US President George W. Bush that any concessions to the PRC over the island would risk damaging his nation's foreign policy integrity. "If President Bush criticizes Taiwan when he meets Mr. Hu Jintao, I think it's going to lead to questioning by the international community of the integrity of US foreign policy," said Joseph Wu, head of Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council. (return to top)

15. PRC Dust Storm

The Associated Press ("CHINA USING ARTIFICIAL RAIN TO CLEAR DUST ", 2006-04-18) reported that Beijing will use artificial rainmaking to clear the air after a choking dust storm coated the PRC's capital and beyond with yellow grit, prompting a health warning to keep children indoors, state media said. The storm, reportedly the worst in at least five years, hit Beijing overnight Sunday, turning the sky yellow and forcing residents to dust off and hose down cars and buildings.

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16. PRC on Media Controls

Reuters ("CHINA DEFENDS LATEST CONTROLS ON MEDIA FREEDOM ", 2006-04-18) reported that the PRC defended its latest rules controlling foreign access to domestic media and television, saying the government was simply protecting intellectual property rights but was still committed to an open market. Senior officials also said Chinese people preferred reading foreign magazines on science and technology -- which are permitted by the government -- and that sensitive topics of religion and politics were unsuitable for local readers.

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