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I. NAPSNet

- 1. Analysts on Six Party Talks
2. US on DPRK Military Intentions
3. Inter-Korean Agricultural Aid
4. DPRK Food Rations
5. DPRK-Japan Marine Relations
6. DPRK-PRC Travel
7. DPRK-Catholic Church Relations
8. PRC Money Laundering Law
9. PRC-Russia Relations
10. Yasukuni Shrine Issue
11. Japan-ROK Territorial Dispute
12. Taiwan Military
13. Taiwan-US Relations
14. Cross Strait Relations
15. Solomon Islands

Preceding NAPSNet Report

I. NAPSNet

1. Analysts on Six Party Talks

Financial Times ("SIX PARTY TALKS ON NORTH KOREA IN 'TERMINAL DECLINE'", 2006-04-25) reported that the six-party talks aimed at convincing the DPRK to relinquish its nuclear ambitions appear to be in terminal decline, analysts say after several diplomatic meetings this month failed to break an impasse in the talks. "I don't think anything is going to come out of the six-party talks," says Joel Wit, a DPRK specialist at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, a US think-tank. "At best it will become something where people meet every seven or eight months and nothing happens. At worst, they won't meet again." The stand-off is essentially due to the "mutual distrust" between the US and the DPRK, analysts say. While Washington doubts Pyongyang's sincerity in negotiating an end to its nuclear weapons programme, Pyongyang in turn doubts Washington's commitment to normalising relations.

(return to top)

2. US on DPRK Military Intentions

Associated Press ("NORTH KOREA MODERNIZING, PROLIFERATING MISSILES, COMMANDER OF U.S. FORCES IN SOUTH", 2006-04-25) reported that the DPRK is modernizing its missiles and aggressively conducting tests to bolster their capabilities, the top US military commander in the ROK said in an interview published Tuesday. US Army Gen. B.B. Bell also said allies Seoul and Washington need better defenses against the threat of missiles from the DPRK, in his remarks to the military newspaper Stars and Stripes. The DPR Koreans "are dangerous ... and they are modernizing their offensive strike-missile capability through a fairly aggressive testing program," he said, without elaborating. "The North Koreans also proliferate missiles and missile technology," Bell said. "They're continuing to develop longer-range missiles" that could threaten other parts of the world - including Japan and even the continental US - the general said in the interview.

(return to top) Yonhap ("N.K., IRAN 'FIT THE BILL' OF DECEPTIVE NATIONS: NEGROPONTE", 2006-04-25) reported that the DPRK and Iran have exactly the kind of intentions and aspirations the US has to stop, the top US spy director said Monday. National Intelligence Director John Negroponte, speaking at the Anti-Defamation League annual conference in Washington, warned that terrorist groups don't want the Sept. 11 attack on the US to be the last. Calling Pyongyang and Tehran "rogue" states by reference, Negroponte emphasized the US must stop terrorists that aspire to take over or destabilize entire nations, or aspire to acquire weapons of mass destruction. "We cannot permit that. Nor can we permit efforts by rogue nation-states to evade international law and threaten international stability through deceptive programs in weapons of mass destruction development," the director said. "Iran and North Korea fit that bill." (return to top)

3. Inter-Korean Agricultural Aid

Mainichi Daily News ("NORTH KOREA ASKS SOUTH FOR RICE, FERTILIZER AID", 2006-04-24) reported that the ROK is considering a request from the DPRK for 300,000 tons of fertilizer, but the nation's demand for 500,000 tons of rice aid has been put aside, a ROK official said Monday. The appeal for aid came as officials from the two Koreas worked on the wording of a joint statement to be issued later Monday at the close of four days of Cabinet-level talks in Pyongyang. "We are reviewing the North's request for fertilizer assistance but rice aid is not an issue that we should agree in this round of talks," pool reports quoted the ROK official as saying.

(return to top)

4. DPRK Food Rations

Associated Press ("NORTH KOREA TO SUSPEND FOOD RATIONS FOR PYONGYANG RESIDENTS AID GROUP", 2006-04-25) reported that the DPRK will suspend food rations for regular citizens in its capital beginning next month amid declines in food stockpiles, a ROK group concerned with DPRK affairs said Tuesday. Citing an unnamed DPRK official handling food distribution, the Seoul-based Good Friends group said residents in Pyongyang were given only 10 days of food in April and that rations for citizens would be totally suspended from May. "Pyongyang is no longer a safe zone for food rations," the group said in a statement.

(return to top)

5. DPRK-Japan Marine Relations

Associated Press ("NORTH KOREAN FERRY ENTERS NORTHERN JAPAN PORT AMID PROTEST ", 2006-04-25) reported that a DPRK ferry entered a port in northern Japan for the first time in more than six months amid tight security Tuesday as protesters demanded the release of Japanese abductees they believe are held by the DPRK. The vessel, which was to depart from Niigata on Wednesday, is scheduled to make 18 more visits through October, according to Transport Ministry official Hajime Nakamura. Supporters of the abduction victims have demanded that the government bar the ferry and impose economic sanctions on the DPRK to force it to provide more information on the missing Japanese.

(return to top)

6. DPRK-PRC Travel

AFX News ("CHINA SOUTHERN AIRLINES OFFERS SERVICES TO PYONGYANG, RESUMES MOSCOW FLIGHTS ", 2006-04-25) reported that China Southern Airlines said it is expanding its international network and will offer a new service to Pyongyang from Henan. Li Jian, general manager of China Southern Airlines' Xinjiang branch, said this new service will operate Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. He said that, according to official data, some 240,000 Chinese visited the DPRK last year.

(return to top)

7. DPRK-Catholic Church Relations

Chosun Ilbo ("SEOUL DIOCESE TO SEND DELEGATION TO N. KOREA ", 2006-04-25) reported that the Archdiocese of Seoul is soon to send the first-ever Catholic delegation to the DPRK. The diocese said Tuesday 61 people led by Mgr. Thomas Aquinas Choi Chang-hwa, the director of the National Reconciliation Committee, will fly to the DPRK aboard the DPRK's state-run carrier Air Koryo and stay from April 26 to 29. The committee was established on March 1, 1995 with the aim to "deliver God's love to our starving North Korean brethren."

(return to top)

8. PRC Money Laundering Law

Xinhua ("CHINA MULLS ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING LAW ", 2006-04-25) reported that the PRC is widening the net to monitor flows of illicit money in a bill drawn up to combat rampant money laundering and its upstream crimes, such as smuggling, drug trafficking, and bribery. The draft law of anti-money laundering was submitted to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, or the top legislature, for first deliberation on Tuesday and it is expected to be passed into law after at least three rounds of hearings, according to PRC's law-making procedure.

(return to top)

9. PRC-Russia Relations

Xinhua ("CHINA, RUSSIA PLEDGE TO ENHANCE COOPERATION IN DEFENSE FIELD", 2006-0--25) reported that the PRC and Russia agreed on Tuesday to further boost cooperation in the defense field. PRC Defense Minister Cao Gangchuan said in a meeting with his Russian counterpart Sergei Ivanov that promotion of mutual trust and cooperation in the defense field meets the fundamental interests of the two peoples, and benefits peace and stability of the region and the world at large.

(return to top)

10. Yasukuni Shrine Issue

Kyodo News ("KOIZUMI SAYS CHINA, S. KOREA WILL REGRET NOT HOLDING SUMMIT TALKS", 2006-04-25) reported that Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi said Tuesday he thinks the PRC and ROK will come to regret their refusal to hold summit talks with Japan, as a result of his visits to the war-linked Yasukuni Shrine. ''There must come a time when they will regret they have said they do not want to hold summit talks due to this issue,'' Koizumi told reporters, reiterating that he ''cannot understand'' the positions of Beijing and Seoul.

(return to top)

11. Japan-ROK Territorial Dispute

Chosun Ilbo ("ROH VOWS TO DEFEND SOVEREIGNTY AGAINST JAPAN", 2006-04-25) reported that ROK President Roh Moo-hyun said Tuesday the government will conduct "a complete review of its policies" in responding to Japanese attempts to claim the ROK's Dokdo islets for itself. In a televised address to the nation, the president said his government "will deal with the issue head-on along with Japan's distortions in its history textbooks and its prime minister's visits to the Yasukuni Shrine that honors war criminals among Japan's fallen."

(return to top) The Asahi Shimbun ("ROH BLASTS JAPAN OVER TAKESHIMA; KOIZUMI URGES CALM IN TERRITORIAL DISPUTE", 2006-04-25) reported that just days after tensions were eased concerning the Takeshima islets, ROK President Roh Moo Hyun on Tuesday lashed out at Japan's claim of sovereignty over the disputed territory. Japanese government officials responded calmly, with some suggesting Roh's words were intended to appease the ROK public rather than to reignite the debate with Tokyo. But Foreign Ministry officials were not taking the ROK president's statements lightly. (return to top)

12. Taiwan Military

Taipei Times ("WAR SIMULATIONS GET UNDERWAY", 2006-04-25) reported that the Ministry of National Defense announced that the computer simulations that form part of the annual Han Kuang military exercises began yesterday. The purpose of the simulations is mainly to test the military's ground combat abilities. "This year's Han Kuang computer exercise will simulate a cross-strait war breaking out in 2008, with the PRC military successfully landing [troops] in Taiwan after launching full-scale missile and air attacks on the country, and an intense ground battle breaking out," ministry spokesman Rear Admiral Wu Chi-fang said yesterday.

(return to top)

13. Taiwan-US Relations

Taipei Times ("MOFA PLANS US TANSIT STOPS FOR CHEN AND SU", 2006-04-25) reported that Transit stops in the US are being arranged for President Chen Shui-bian and Premier Su Tseng-chang when they travel to and from Latin America next month, officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said yesterday. Meanwhile, Chen was asked by Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) legislators yesterday to declare his advocacy of the "one side, one country" concept when he makes his stopovers in the US.

(return to top)

14. Cross Strait Relations

China Post ("PRESIDENT ACCUSES KMT OF 'FORCING EVERYONE TO TAKE POISON'", 2006-0--25) reported that President Chen Shui-bian yesterday accused the opposition Kuomintang (KMT) of "forcing everyone to swallow sugar-coated poison" by demanding the government accept agreements reached between the KMT and Beijing. Chen said the KMT is demanding the government accept agreements on cross-strait issues recently reached between the KMT and CCP.

(return to top) Xinhua ("CHINA, US CLARIFY PRINCIPLED STANCES ON TAIWAN: FM", 2006-0--25) reported that the PRC and the US have further clarified their principled stances on the Taiwan issue, which helps to safeguard peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, PRC Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang said Tuesday. Such a move will also "promote development, prosperity and stability of the Asia-Pacific region," the spokesman told a regular press briefing. (return to top)

15. Solomon Islands

China Post ("GOV'T PREPARING TO EVACUATE DIPLOMATS FROM SOLOMON ISLANDS", 2006-04-25) reported that Taiwan is preparing for an emergency evacuation of its Solomon Islands ambassador and around ten diplomatic staff but believes the situation in the strife-ridden Pacific nation is likely to stabilize, a foreign affairs official said yesterday. Foreign affairs spokesman Michel Lu said Taipei had made plans to evacuate its diplomatic staff April 28 but stressed that Australian and New Zealand troops in the Solomons were maintaining law and order.

(return to top)

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