

NAPSNet Daily Report Tuesday, March 13, 2007

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I. NAPSNet

1. IAEA Visit to DPRK

Associated Press ("U.N. NUCLEAR CHIEF ARRIVES IN N. KOREA", 2007-03-15) reported that the chief U.N. nuclear inspector Mohamed ElBaradei expressed hope for progress in relations with the DPRK as he arrived in Pyongyang for talks on implementing a landmark nuclear disarmament agreement.

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2. DPRK Working Groups Schedule

Chosun Ilbo ("NUKE ISSUE MAY SEE WATERSHED IN ONE WEEK", 2007-03-13) reported the upcoming schedule for Six Party Working Groups: First, Mohamed ElBaradei, head of the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency, will arrive in Pyongyang on Tuesday. Then a series of meetings between representatives from the six concerned parties will be held in Beijing from Thursday to next Wednesday. On Thursday, a working-group meeting on energy and economic cooperation will be held in Beijing under the ROK chairmanship. A working-group meeting on peace and security in Northeast Asia is scheduled for Friday, to be followed by a working-group meeting on the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula on Saturday. The highlight of the series of meetings will be a working group on normalizing relations between the U.S. and DPRK on Sunday, a follow-up to similar talks held in New York on March 6 and 7. The following Monday, the six participating countries will hold a plenary session, also in Beijing, to discuss in detail how to shut down DPRK nuclear facilities.

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3. US Treasury on DPRK Financial Sanctions

Wall Street Journal ("U.S. TO CUT OFF MACAU BANK; MOVE FOLLOWS PROBE OF NORTH KOREAN TIES, COULD HINDER NUCLEAR TALKS", 2007-03-13) reported that the Treasury Department plans this week to order all U.S. banks to sever ties with a Macau bank alleged to have laundered money for the DPRK government, despite the outcome of the investigation by a San-Francisco based law firm which cleared the bank of any wrongdoing "other than lax bookkeeping." This move could seriously rattle ongoing Six Party efforts to resolve the Korean crisis.

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4. DPRK on Suspension of UNDP Program

Associated Press ("NORTH KOREA SLAMS U.N. DECISION TO SUSPEND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM", 2007-03-13) reported that the DPRK criticized the U.N. on Tuesday for suspending its development program in the country. A Foreign Ministry statement carried by the official Korean Central News Agency said the decision by the U.N. Development Program to halt its DPRK program was discriminatory. The UNDP suspended its DPRK program last week after the United States alleged that U.N. aid money was being diverted to "illicit purposes," including developing nuclear weapons.

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5. Inter-Korean Summit

Donga Ilbo ("LEE HAE-CHAN RETURNS FROM PYONGYANG", 2007-03-13) reported that former ROK Prime Minister Lee Hae-chan returned to Seoul after a four-day visit to Pyongyang. Lee said in a press interview held at Incheon International Airport that although he did not visit Pyongyang to arrange a summit, "If the first step of North Korea's implementation plan based on the six-party talks is carried out smoothly, I think we can review holding an inter-Korean summit in April."

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6. Japan-Australia Defense Pact

BBC ("AUSTRALIA IN JAPAN SECURITY DEAL", 2007-03-13) reported that the prime ministers of Japan and Australia have signed a security pact designed to enhance military co-operation between the two nations. Japan's PM Shinzo Abe said the pact would help to stabilise the region. The defence deal - Japan's first with a country other than the US - includes co-operation on border security, counter-terrorism and disaster relief. It is the result of closer co-operation on security matters in Asia that Japan and Australia have been pursuing. The four part agreement Mr Abe signed with Australian PM John Howard in Tokyo sets out priorities for co-operation on counter-terrorism activities, maritime security, border protection and disaster relief.

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7. PRC on Japan-Australia Pact

Associated Press ("CHINA 'NOT BOTHERED BY JAPAN-AUSTRALIA PACT'", 2007-03-13) reported that the PRC and ROK have raised concerns at the secrecy with which the pact was negotiated amid fears it is aimed at containing the PRC's power in the region. Australian army chief Peter Leahy says a security pact to be signed with Japan today is aimed at peaceful co-operation. Lt-Gen Leahy said while the pact would eventually lead to intelligence-sharing, initial operations would involve peacekeeping training.

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8. Japan on Comfort Women Issue

Xinhua ("ABE: APOLOGETIC SENTIMENTS TOWARD "COMFORT WOMEN" NECESSARY", 2007-0-13) reported that Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said here that it is necessary to maintain apologetic sentiments toward war-time "comfort women" who have endured severe mental and physical suffering. Abe made the remarks at a press conference when asked about his apology for war-time sex slavery. The prime minister also reiterated his cabinet's unchanged stance of honoring the Kono statement on the sex slavery issue in World War II, according to NHK TV station. Former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and Ryutaro Hashimoto have both sent letters of apology to past "comfort women," and he himself shares the same sentiment, Abe said.

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9. PRC Legal Reform

Voice of America ("CHINA'S TOP LEGAL OFFICIALS CALL FOR REDUCTION IN EXECUTIONS",

2007-03-13) reported that the PRC's top law-enforcement agencies are calling for a reduction in executions. Human-rights groups say the PRC executes more prisoners than the rest of the world combined, but exactly how many die each year is not known. In a joint statement released Sunday, the Supreme Peoples' Court, the Ministry of Public Security and the Ministry of Justice have called for a decrease in the number of people sentenced to death. According to the official New China News Agency, the statement says the PRC cannot abolish the death penalty, but should "gradually reduce its application." The news agency says the statement calls for the courts to pay more attention to evidence instead of confessions, and reminds law enforcement officials that the use of confessions made under torture is banned. It also calls for authorities to stop the practice of publicly parading people sentenced to death before their execution.

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10. PRC Space Program

Associated Press ("CHINA BUILDING ASTRONOMY SATELLITE", 2007-03-13) reported that the PRC has announced plans to launch its first astronomy satellite and participate in joint projects with Russia and France. The satellite to be launched in 2010 will carry a "hard X-ray modulation telescope" being developed by Chinese scientists for the study of black holes and other space phenomena, the official China Daily newspaper said, citing a government Space Science Development Plan released over the weekend. China will also take part in Russia's project to send an unmanned probe to Mars' moon, Phobos, to collect soil samples, the paper said.

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11. PRC Rural Unrest

International Herald Tribune ("THOUSANDS REPORTEDLY RIOT IN CHINA", 2007-03-13) reported that an estimated 20,000 people clashed with the police in Hunan Province late last week, as a protest over rising transportation costs escalated into a riot. According to witnesses, truckloads of armed police officers descended on an area of rural Hunan near the village of Zhushan to restore order. Several protesters and police officers were injured, Reuters reported. The South China Morning Post in Hong Kong reported that one protester had been killed in a skirmish. Mainland Chinese news media did not carry reports about the unrest, which occurred during the annual two-week session of the Communist Party's legislative body. The protests were said to have been set off by concern about the inflated prices charged for public transportation during the Lunar New Year holiday in February.

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12. Flooding/Accident in PRC Mine

People's Daily (PRC) ("COLLIERY FLOODING PROMPTS MASS MINE SHUTDOWN IN NORTHEAST CHINA PROVINCE", 2007-03-13) reported that the Northeast China's Liaoning Province has ordered an immediate shutdown of all its coal mines for a safety overhaul following Saturday's flooding that killed at least 22 miners. A pit of the state-owned Fushun Mining Group was flooded on Saturday night, leaving 22 miners dead and seven missing. The State Administration of Work Safety said a lack of preventative measures and carelessness were to blame for the accident, and called for a thorough investigation of major state-owned collieries to locate hidden safety risks and prevent fatal accidents.

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13. PRC Unemployment

Associated Press ("CHINA SETS TARGET FOR JOBLESS RATE", 2007-03-13) reported that the PRC Labor Minister Tian Chengping said they will seek to create 9 million urban jobs this year, but shortfalls and a "grim" employment situation will still boost its target urban unemployment rate to 4.6 percent. Tian said the urban unemployment rate was at 4.1 percent last year, but experts say that taking into account the underemployed and others without formal jobs the real rate is over 20 percent. The PRC's growing population and the migration of farmers to cities are mainly responsible for the job pressure. However, a major spike in the number of university graduates this year to 4.95 million and the need to find jobs for 5 million people laid-off from moribund state industries were creating additional pressures. Job creation is a key concern for the government, which has faced protests by laid-off state industry workers and widespread complaints from rural migrants over unpaid wages.

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14. Cross Strait Relations

Associated Press ("TAIWAN LEADER CALLS FOR JOINT MANAGEMENT OF PEACE IN TAIWAN STRAIT", 2007-03-13) reported that Taiwan President Chen Shui-bian called for three-party management of peace in the Cross-Straits to avert possible conflict in the potentially risky area. "Taiwan, the United States and China should jointly manage peace, security and stability in the Taiwan Strait," said Chen on the eve of the second anniversary of Beijing's enactment of an anti-secession law against the island. Chen made the comments during a meeting with John Hamre, president and CEO of the US think tank the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, who was visiting Taiwan.

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