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I. NAPSNet

1. DPRK Defectors

Chosun Ilbo ("N.KOREAN DEFECTORS 'LIKELY FROM PYONGYANG ELITE' ", 2006-03-28) reported that a group of DPR Koreans who sought asylum in the Korean Embassy in Budapest on Monday consisted of employees of state-run DPRK enterprises with quasi-diplomatic duties and their families, ROK officials said Tuesday. Earlier reports said they were diplomats based in Eastern Europe. They have already safely arrived in the ROK, officials said. Seoul says the fact that they were able to reach the embassy and take their families with them suggests they belong to the DPRK elite. Fuelled by Seoul's refusal to reveal any further details, there is speculation that the group could have connections with the Pyongyang regime or some involvement in the DPRK's counterfeiting of US dollars.

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2. DPRK on ROK-US Military Exercises

Yonhap News ("N. KOREA THREATENS TO HALT EXCHANGES WITH SEOUL OVER U.S. EXERCISES", 2006-03-28) reported that the DPRK on Tuesday warned inter-Korean relations will worsen, or even come to a complete stop, unless the ROK government immediately stops its joint military exercises with US forces stationed in the country. "To stage joint military exercises with foreign forces is a treacherous act of hampering national reconciliation and unity and bedeviling the North-South relations," Rodong Sinmun, an official organ of the DPRK Workers' Party, said in a commentary carried by the KCNA.

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3. Inter-Korean Financial Aid

Chosun Ilbo ("SEOUL PLEDGES US$20 MILLION FOR BABIES IN N.KOREA ", 2006-03-28) reported that the ROK government will give US$20.05 million over the next two years to a WHO project to help newborns and infants in the DPRK. Unification Minister Lee Jong-seok concluded the agreement with WHO Director-General Lee Jong-wook on Tuesday. Seoul will provide $5.05 million in cash plus materials worth $5.63 million in total to the project by the end of this year.

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4. Inter-Korean Industrial Cooperation

Yonhap News ("S. KOREAN COMPANY HOPES TO DIG FOR IRON IN N. KOREAN MINE", 2006-0--28) reported that the ROK's state-run mine developer said Tuesday it plans to dig iron ore from a DPRK mine from May, the first time for a ROK company to do so in the DPRK. Korea Resources Corp. plans to dig the iron from a mine named "Deokhyeon" on the northeastern tip of the DPRK by forming a joint venture with Heilongjiang Province Nationality Economic Development Co., the ROK company said.

(return to top) Yonhap News ("GROUND BROKEN FOR JOINT WATER PURIFICATION FACILITY IN KAESONG", 2006-03-28) reported that in another meaningful joint effort for cooperation, the ROK and the DPRK began building a major water treatment facility in the DPRK industrial complex Tuesday. (return to top)

5. Inter-Korean Cultural Cooperation

Korea Times ("EXHIBITION TO FEATURE CULTURAL TREASURES FROM NORTH KOREA", 2006-03-28) reported that a special exhibition will present some 90 significant cultural treasures preserved in the DPRK at the National Museum of Korea in Seoul in June. Yi Kun-moo, director of the museum, said Tuesday in a press conference that the exhibition has been arranged in accordance with an agreement signed last week to promote exchanges with the Korean Central History Museum in Pyongyang.

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6. DPRK-PRC Relations

Chosun Ilbo ("KEY N.KOREAN OFFICIAL MEETS CHINESE PARTY CHIEF ", 2006-03-28) reported that Jang Song-thaek, a brother-in-law of DPRK leader Kim Jong-il, has met with Liu Qi, a member of the Politbureau of the Communist Party of the PRC Central Committee. The PRC's official Xinhua News Agency reported an inspection group headed by Jang visited central Hubei Province and southern Guangdong Province since March 18 at the invitation of the PRC Communist Party.

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7. ROK on DPRK-PRC Trade

JoongAng Ilbo ("CHINA-NORTH KOREA TRADE EYED WARILY ", 2006-03-28) reported that Beijing is preparing a push to develop the northeastern part of the country, Manchuria, with particular efforts in Liaoning, Jilin and Heilongjiang, near the DPRK border. That puts Seoul on the horns of a dilemma, caught between its belief that a more prosperous DPRK will be a less threatening DPRK on the one hand, and concern about increased PRC influence in the DPRK on the other.

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8. Japan on DPRK Abduction Allegations

Kyodo News ("JAPAN RAPS N. KOREA FOR DEMANDING HANDOVER OF HUMANITARIAN ACTIVISTS ", 2006-03-28) reported that Japan on Tuesday lashed out at the DPRK for its demand the day before that Tokyo hand over four Japan-based activists who have helped DPR Koreans flee from the country. ''It is incomprehensive that (North Korea) treat those supporting people who seek freedom from a humanitarian viewpoint in the same way as abductors,'' Chief Cabinet Secretary Shinzo Abe said in a press conference.

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9. PRC-US Trade Relations

Xinhua ("CHINESE, US SENIOR OFFICIALS VOW TO IMPROVE TRADE TIES", 2006-03-28) reported that PRC and U.S. senior officials Tuesday vowed to improve trade ties in a bid to create a

"positive atmosphere" for the upcoming meeting between PRC President Hu Jintao and his U.S. counterpart George Walker Bush in Washington next month. "The two commerce ministries should work together to ensure the success of the 17th meeting of the Sino-U.S. Joint Commission on Commerce and Trade," PRC Vice Premier Wu Yi told visiting U.S. Secretary of Commerce Carlos Gutierrez.

(return to top) Xinhua ("CHINA, US TRADE PROBLEMS SHOULD NOT BE POLITICIZED ", 2006-0--28) reported that the PRC maintains the trade frictions and problems between the PRC and the U.S. should be properly handled through consultation and should not be politicized, said PRC Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang on Tuesday. Qin made the remarks when responding to a journalist's question on the visit by three U.S. senators to the PRC. He said bilateral trade problems should be properly handled according to the principle of common development and mutual benefit. (return to top)

10. US on PRC Economy

Los Angeles Times ("SENS. DELAY BILL AIMED AT CHINA CURRENCY", 2006-03-28) reported that two senators decided Tuesday to delay a vote on a bill that would punish the PRC for restricting its exchange rate, saying they had seen signs of currency reform during a recent trip to the PRC. The bill, sponsored by Sens. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., and Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., would impose 27.5 percent tariffs on PRC imports if the currency dispute is not settled.

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11. PRC-India Relations

Rediff India ("INDO-CHINA TIES AT A NEW HIGH", 2006-03-28) reported that the joining of hands by India and the PRC and their pursuit of cooperation and common development carried a "significant meaning" for peace, stability and development in Asia and the world at large, PRC Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing has said.

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12. Japan-PRC Relations

Kyodo News ("CHINA HOPES HIGH-LEVEL JAPANESE VISIT WILL HELP TIES", 2006-03-28) reported that the PRC hopes a visit this Friday by key Japanese figures, including former Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto, can help strengthen ties between people in the two countries whose governments disagree on a host of issues, a PRC government spokesman said Tuesday.

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13. Vatican-PRC Relations

Los Angeles Times ("REPORTS: POPE SAYS HE WILL VISIT CHINA", 2006-03-28) reported that Pope Benedict XVI told a delegation from Hong Kong he will visit the PRC in what would be an extraordinary papal visit to the communist nation, but he said the trip's timing depends on "God's wish," media reports said Tuesday. One of the Vatican's goals is to restart official relations with the PRC, which forced its Roman Catholics to cut ties with the Holy See in 1951 after the officially atheist Communists took power. People can worship only in government-controlled churches.

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14. PRC Military

Donga Ilbo ("CHINA TESTING MISSILE DEFENSE SYSTEM", 2006-03-28) reported that a People's Liberation Army's bulletin in the PRC reported Sunday that the PRC succeeded in test launching an interceptor missile similar to the U.S. Patriot missile. According to the paper, an air force base in Beijing recently test launched a new interceptor missile from a desert in northwestern PRC, successfully bringing down its target.

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15. Cross-Strait Relations

Taipei Times ("CHINA MAY AMEND `ANTI-SECESSION' LAW", 2006-03-28) reported that the PRC may be planning to use the "Anti-Secession" Law to arrest Taiwanese who have advocated independence for Taiwan, intelligence agencies have learned. The Chinese-language Liberty Times, the sister newspaper of the Taipei Times, learned from intelligence sources that the PRC, in an effort to curb the pro-independence movement, plans to add detailed clauses to the Anti-Secession Law which was enacted on March 14 last year.

(return to top) Taipei Times ("MAINLAND AFFAIRS COUNCIL SAYS IT'S WATCHING CHINA", 2006-03-28) reported that The Mainland Affairs Council said yesterday that it was keeping a close eye on the PRC to determine whether Beijing planned to expand the "Anti-Secession" Law and to strictly regulate exchanges between the PRC and Taiwan. Once the PRC formulates detailed guidelines for the implementation of the Anti-Secession Law, the state of cross-strait relations would become clearer, the Mainland Affairs Council said yesterday. (return to top)

16. Taiwan Military

Forbes ("TAIWAN STEPS UP DEFENSE CAPABILITIES WITH US-BUILT AMPHIBIOUS ASSAULT VEHICLES", 2006-03-28) reported that Taiwan's marine corps inaugurated 54 US-built amphibious assault vehicles as part of the island's efforts to boost its defense capabilities. Some of the AAPV7-A1 vehicles, built by FMC Corp, are to be deployed in the northern township of Linko to safeguard Taipei from any surprise attack by PRC forces, the navy said.

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17. Japan Military

The Age ("JAPAN TO PARTICIPATE IN WAR SIMULATION", 2006-03-28) reported Japan will take part in a simulation drill next month in Australia involving an aircraft hypothetically suspected of carrying materials related to weapons of mass destruction, the Foreign Ministry said.

(return to top) The Yomiuri Shimbun ("LDP SEEKS TO BROADEN MILITARY USES OF OUTER SPACE", 2006-03-28) reported that The Liberal Democratic Party has decided to submit a bill on the use of outer space for self-defense purposes to the next Diet session, a fundamental change from the government's long-held principle of only using space for nonmilitary purposes, it was learned Monday. (return to top)

18. USFJ Realignment

Kyodo News ("JAPAN, U.S. POSTPONE MARCH 31 ACCORD ON REALIGNMENT PLANS ", 2006-0--28) reported that Japan and the United States have postponed a meeting this week at which they aimed to finalize a package on U.S. military realignment in Japan, locking in a lag behind the initially agreed deadline of Friday, Japanese government sources said Tuesday. The development to put off the senior working-level talks scheduled for Thursday and Friday in Washington means a final agreement will be delayed until April.

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19. Japan PM Election

China Post, Reuters ("ABE LEADS JAPAN PM RACE, OPPOSITION FADES", 2006-03-28) reported that Chief Cabinet Secretary Shinzo Abe is far in front of ruling party rivals in the race to become Japan's next prime minister, a survey showed on Monday, though voters appear to like his style better than his policies. The 51-year-old Abe, a tall, soft-spoken political blueblood known for his elegant attire as well as his hawkish views towards the PRC and the DPRK, topped the list of politicians voters say they want to see succeed Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, who is set to step down in September.

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20. Japan in Southeast Asia

Japan Times ("JAPAN, ASEAN INK AGREEMENT ON INTEGRATION FUND", 2006-03-28) reported that Foreign Minister Taro Aso and Malaysian Ambassador to Japan Marzuki Mohammad Noor signed an agreement Monday for Japan to establish a fund to help promote the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' efforts toward integration. The fund will go toward fighting avian influenza -- including by helping ASEAN meet its goal of stockpiling enough of the antiviral drug Tamiflu to treat 500,000 people -- fighting terrorism, and narrowing the development gap among ASEAN members, the ministry said.

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Nautilus Institute
608 San Miguel Ave., Berkeley, CA 94707-1535 | Phone: (510) 423-0372 | Email: nautilus@nautilus.org