NAPSNet Daily Report Wednesday, February 28, 2007

Recommended Citation

"NAPSNet Daily Report Wednesday, February 28, 2007", NAPSNet Daily Report, February 28, 2007, https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-daily-report/napsnet-daily-report-wednesday-february-28-2007/

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Preceding NAPSNet Report

1. US-DPRK Normalization Talks

Washington Times ("U.S., N. KOREA TO NORMALIZE TIES", 2007-02-28) reported that the DPRK's top nuclear negotiator was on his way to the United States yesterday for talks on issues that a State Department official said would include the first steps toward the normalization of diplomatic relations. The trip, which coincides with the first high-level talks between the Koreas in more than four months, reflects the rapid easing of tensions with President Kim Jong-il's regime since the DPRK agreed this month to freeze its nuclear program in exchange for heavy fuel oil and other concessions. Kim Kye-gwan, the DPRK's vice minister of foreign affairs, arrived in Beijing yesterday and was expected in San Francisco tomorrow, a State Department official told The Washington Times. He will continue to New York for talks with his U.S. negotiating counterpart, Christopher Hill, which will likely begin early next week.

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2. US on DPRK Uranium Program

Reuters ("U.S. LESS CONFIDENT OF N.KOREA COVERT PROGRAM", 2007-02-27) reported that the United States is somewhat less confident that the DPRK has a production-scale covert nuclear enrichment program as it had alleged as the basis for arresting the '94 Agreed Framework. Joseph DeTrani, DPRK mission manager in the office of the director of national intelligence said "we still have confidence that the program is in existence -- at the mid-confidence level," he told the Senate Armed Services Committee. He was the second senior U.S. official in recent days to publicly discuss U.S. uncertainties about the DPRK's enrichment program.

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3. IAEA Visit to DPRK

Kyodo ("UN NUCLEAR WATCHDOG CHIEF TIPPED TO VISIT NORTH KOREA 13-15 MARCH", 2007-02-28) reported that International Atomic Energy Agency Director General Mohamed ElBaradei is scheduled to visit Pyongyang on March 13-15 to discuss nuclear issues. ElBaradei's visit will be the first by the IAEA chief since Hans Blix, former head of the agency, visited the country in 1992. Earlier this month, ElBaradei said he had received an invitation from the DPRK to normalize relations with the IAEA and rejoin the organization.

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4. Banco Delta Asia Investigation

International Herald Tribune ("MACAO BANK SET TO LIFT ITS FREEZE ON NORTH KOREA", 2007-02-28) reported that a committee appointed to run Banco Delta Asia during an investigation into their practices has announced it is preparing to end a freeze on at least some accounts linked to the DPRK by the end of March. Daedong Credit, a majority foreign-owned bank based in Pyongyang, has about $7 million frozen in Banco Delta Asia. The largest part of that — about $2.6 million — belongs to British American Tobacco, which has a cigarette-manufacturing operation in the DPRK.

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5. Inter-Korean Ministerial Meeting

Associated Press ("N. KOREA PROPOSES RESUMING AID PROJECTS", 2007-02-28) reported that while the ROK pressed the DPRK to follow through on its pledge to start dismantling its atomic weapons program in the first high-level talks between the two Koreas since the October nuclear test, the DPRK proposed a full resumption of humanitarian projects, apparently referring to aid shipments the ROK has regularly given, as well as reunions of families separated since the 1950-53 Korean War.

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6. DPRK-Japan Relations

Kyodo ("JAPANESE PM WANTS "SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS" IN TALKS WITH N KOREA", 2007-0--28) reported that Japan and the DPRK have agreed to hold working-group talks March 7-8 in Hanoi on normalizing bilateral ties. At what will be the first bilateral meeting since February last year, Japan will be represented by Koichi Haraguchi and the DPRK by Song Il Ho, Japan's chief Cabinet secretary said at a news conference. Haraguchi and Song are the respective countries' ambassadors in charge of negotiations on normalizing bilateral ties. The two countries will hold an informal meeting March 6 in the Vietnamese capital before the bilateral talks, Shiozaki said.

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7. DPRK-Russia Relations

RIA Novosti ("RUSSIA, N. KOREA TO DISCUSS DEBT PAYMENT, OTHER ISSUES IN MOSCOW", 2007-02-27) reported that Russia and the DPRK will meet March 22-23 in Moscow to discuss debt repayment and other economic matters. Russia and the DPRK agreed today on a timeframe for the intergovernmental bilateral commission on economic, scientific and technical cooperation to hold its first session since 2000, Yevgeny Anoshin, press secretary of the Russian half of the commission, said. Konstantin Pulikovsky, the former presidential envoy in the Far Eastern federal district and now head of the Russian technical standards body, Rostekhnadzor, will lead the commission on behalf of Russia, Anoshin said. According to Russian experts, the DPRK owes more than $8 billion to Russia, including interest. In addition to the debt repayment, the commission is expected to focus on Korean labor in Russia, plans to continue building the trans-Korean railroad and connecting it to the Trans-Siberian rail, and the possibility of delivering and refining Russian crude in the DPRK.

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8. DPRK Cargo Ship Stranded

Xinhua ("CREW OF DPRK-FLAGGED CARGO VESSEL RESCUED IN AEGEAN", 2007-02-26) reported that five crew members of a DPRK cargo vessel were rescued by Greek coast guards near Karpathos island in the Aegean on Sunday. According to Turkey's Anatolia news agency, the crew members of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)-flagged ship, the Nitalko, were brought to Karpathos, before it lost steering power and adrift off the island.

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9. Measles (Not Rubella) Outbreak in DPRK

International Red Cross ("DPR KOREA: MEASLES EPIDEMIC REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE", 2007-02-28) reported that since November 2006, some 3,000 people in 30 counties in ten provinces within the DPRK have been diagnosed with measles. Confirmation of the measles outbreak was announced on 16 February at a joint meeting organized by the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH), and attended by representatives from the Federation, the DPRK Red Cross Society, WHO, and UNICEF. Indications of the disease were first reported in Ryanggang Province's Pujon Ri, Kimhyongjik County in November 2006. The disease was initially diagnosed as rubella, based upon clinical symptoms of patients who were first identified as having the disease on 6 November in Pujon Ri, and in some northern areas including Ryanggang Province. A measles outbreak in a country like DPRK, where the overall health and nutritional status of the population has deteriorated in the recent past has serious consequences. The international guidelines in this situation requires a nationwide measles immunization campaign along-with Vitamin A supplements to decrease the morbidity and mortality rate of the illness.

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10. ROK Afghanistan Role

Korea Times ("SEOUL COMMITTED TO AFGHANISTAN MISSION", 2007-02-28) reported that the ROK denounced a suicide bomb attack in Afghanistan that killed at least 23 people, including a ROK soldier, calling it a "barbarous act of terror." The government pledged to increase efforts to support the US-led coalition forces in Afghanistan to help bring peace and stability to the war-torn nation.

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11. Japan-ROK Territorial Dispute

Yonhap ("S. KOREA, JAPAN TO RESUME TALKS TO DRAW EEZ BOUNDARIES", 2007-02-28) reported that ROK and Japan will discuss the boundary of their exclusive economic zone (EEZ) waters in the East Sea next week, resuming talks for the first time in five months, the Foreign Ministry said. The two neighbors have been at odds over drawing a clear line for their EEZ, as Japan has laid claim to the ROK's easternmost islet between the neighbors, Dokdo.

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12. Russo-Japanese Trade Relations

Agence France-Presse ("JAPAN, RUSSIA LOOK TO BOOST TRADE ", 2007-02-28) reported that Japan and Russia looked to expand trade despite rocky relations as they agreed to cooperate on nuclear energy and in preventing disasters in disputed islands. Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov was on a two-day visit to Tokyo in which he promised his country would be a stable supplier of gas to the energy-hungry Asian giant. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said after talks with Fradkov that the two countries would hold talks on a nuclear cooperation pact that could include Japan shipping spent nuclear fuel to Russia for uranium enrichment.

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13. Sino-Japanese Relations

Xinhua ("STATE LEADERS' VISIT PROMOTES STABLE CHINA-JAPAN TIES", 2007-02-28) reported that a senior Party official said the successful exchange of visits between leaders of the PRC and Japan would definitely promote bilateral friendship in a stable way. Wang Jiarui, head of the International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC), said this when meeting with a delegation from Japan's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), headed by chairman of the LDP General Council Niwa Yuya.

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14. US on PRC Military

Agence France-Presse ("CHINA MILITARY MODERNIZATION AIMED AT PARITY WITH US: INTEL CHIEF", 2007-02-28) reported that the PRC's military modernization is aimed at achieving parity with the US and not limited to its drive for reunification with Taiwan, the US intelligence chief said. Retired admiral Michael McConnell, the new director of national intelligence, said the PRC could be a threat to the US today because of its intercontinental nuclear missiles and will be an increasing threat as it modernizes its military. But he later retracted the remark. "It's a matter of their building their military, in my view, to reach some sort of state of parity with the United States," he said. "So in a threat sense it becomes intention."

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