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1. IAEA on Visit to DPRK

Reuters ("NORTH KOREA COMMITTED TO DISARMAMENT PACT - IAEA", 2007-03-15) reported that, upon his return from Pyongyang, International Atomic Energy Agency chief Mohamed ElBaradei said in Beijing that his visit had opened the way to a normal relationship with the DPRK. The DPRK is committed to a disarmament pact reached in February but wants sanctions lifted first, the head of the U.N. nuclear watchdog said.

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2. DPRK Working Groups: Energy

Yonhap ("SIX-PARTY WORKING GROUP ON ENERGY COOPERATION TO MEET THURSDAY", 2007-03-13) reported that the RO Korea's chief nuclear negotiator Chun Yung-woo has called a meeting of a working group on energy and economic cooperation for the DPRK this week. "The first meeting of the six-party working group on energy and economic cooperation will be held at the South Korean Embassy in Beijing at 3 p.m. Thursday," the ROK Foreign Ministry said in a press release.

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3. Investigation into BDA

New York Times ("TREASURY REPORTEDLY SET TO ACT TO FREE NORTH KOREAN MONEY", 2007-03-14) reported that the US Treasury Department is expected to move formally to bar American banks from engaging in transactions with a bank in Macao linked to the DPRK, clearing the way for the DPRK to regain possession of money frozen since 2005. American and Chinese authorities pored over more than 300,000 documents describing the transactions with the DPRK, including accounts of 20 DPRK banks, 11 trading companies, 9 citizens and 8 Macao-based companies that did business with the DPRK. The Treasury announcement would probably mean that the bank could do only a modest amount of business, without the benefit of dollar transactions. But also that the PRC would be in a position to return some of the funds to the DPRK that are not linked to counterfeiting, drugs, nuclear arms or other illicit activities. For example, some of the funds belong to a DPRK unit of British American Tobacco, and those funds are expected to be returned to the company, which is owned by British interests. When the DPRK nuclear deal was announced last month, no mention was made of returning funds from the bank, but American officials now say that the return of those funds was a major incentive for the DPRK to reach an accord.

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4. US on Removal of DPRK from Terror List

Chosun Ilbo ("NO QUICK REMOVAL FROM U.S. TERROR LIST FOR N.KOREA", 2007-03-14) reported that U.S. State Department spokesman Tom Casey said that taking the DPRK off the terrorism blacklist is a process that will require a lot of time and careful reviews. He also made it clear that the process to normalize diplomatic ties between the U.S. and DPRK can move forward only when it takes steps to make the Korean Peninsula nuclear-free. The six-nation agreement reached in Beijing on Feb. 13 requires the U.S. to start the process to remove the country from the terror list in the initial 60-day stage. The U.S. government must report to Congress 45 days before it removes a country from the list. A U.S. lawmaker said that the Bush administration could be flexible in implementing the Feb. 13 agreement, but removing North Korea from the list might take considerable time.

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5. UN on DPRK Measles Outbreak

United Nations Press ("UN AGENCIES TO VACCINATE MILLIONS AGAINST DEADLY MEASLES OUTBREAK", 2007-03-14) reported that the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the UN World Health Organization (WHO) today began a campaign to immunize 6 million DPRK children against measles, after the deadly disease broke out last November, affecting 3,500 people and killing two adults and two infants.

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6. Inter-Korean Relations

Hankyoreh ("MAIN OPPOSITION PARTY TO SOFTEN HARD-LINE N. KOREA POLICY", 2007-03-14) reported that the conservative main opposition in the ROK, the Grand National Party (GNP), is moving to soften its hard-line policy on the DPRK amid thawing inter-Korean relations following progress on the Six Party Talks. The GNP said that it plans to launch a task force to formulate a softer party platform on the DPRK within a month.

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7. ROK-US Free Trade Talks

Hankyoreh ("CRITICS SEE DOUBLE STANDARD IN KOREA, U.S. TRADE TALKS", 2007-03-14) reported that with the slated April 2 deadline for a free trade agreement (FTA) between the ROK and the US just a few weeks away, all eyes are now focused on how the governments of the two nations will persuade their citizens to accept a free trade deal which could affect many people's daily lives. US negotiators face critics in government and business at home whereas RO Korean workers and businesspeople in key industries that would be affected by the trade deal feel left out in the cold. In contrast to the US, the RO Korean government is remaining silent on the results of its negotiations.

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8. Japan on War Crimes Compensation

Reuters ("JAPAN COURT OVERTURNS KEY WW2 CHINESE LABOR RULING", 2007-03-14) reported that a Japanese court on Wednesday overturned a landmark ruling ordering the Japanese government and a company to compensate Chinese who were forced to work as slave laborers in Japan during World War Two. The Tokyo High Court acknowledged that the state and the firm had violated the human rights of the 11 Chinese, but rejected the plaintiffs' demand for compensation because a 20-year statute of limitation had expired, Kyodo news agency said.

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9. PRC Space Program

People's Daily ("CHINA'S SIX MAJOR GOALS FOR SPACE SCIENCE DEVELOPMENT", 2007-03-14) reported that the China Commission of Science Technology and Industry for National Defense recently released the Space Science Development Plan for the 11th Five-Year Plan, in which it outlined its blueprint for the development of China's space science program. It included a manned spaceflight and moon exploration; Independent development of HXMT; Launch recoverable space science experimental satellite; Participate in the Sino-Russia Mars space exploration program; Do more research into key technologies for space solar telescope; Begin key scientific and technical research into space science.

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10. PRC on Internet Freedom

Reuters ("CHINA LOOKS TO REIN IN BLOGGERS", 2007-03-14) reported that the PRC will intensify controls of the growing numbers of bloggers using the internet to lay bare their thoughts, politics and even bodies. The director of China's General Administration of Press and Publication, Long Xinmin, said the administration was forming rules to further regulate Internet publishing, including the country's legions of bloggers, the Beijing Morning Post reported on Tuesday.

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Nautilus Institute

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

nautilus@nautilus.org