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I. NAPSNet

1. Inter-Korean Immigration Checkpoints

Associated Press ("SOUTH KOREA OFFICIALLY OPENS IMMIGRATION CHECKPOINTS AT NORTH KOREAN BORDER", 2006-03-15) reported that the ROK formally opened new immigration checkpoints Wednesday for travelers crossing the heavily fortified border with the DPRK. A checkpoint at Paju is a gateway to one of the two roads and adjacent railways that the divided Koreas have reconnected since their leaders held their first-and-only summit in 2000. A second immigration point to the east connects with a tourist spot in the DPRK. Permanent buildings formally opened at both sites Wednesday replace temporary structures previously used at the crossings. "We have already entered the process of becoming a unified community by geographically connecting the South and the North through the roads of peace," ROK Unification Minister Lee Jong-seok said at the Paju checkpoint. "The immigration offices are no longer 'inspectors' that restrict, check and control, but 'helpers' for comfortable and safe trips between the South and the North," he said.

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2. Inter-Korean Cooperation

Associated Press ("S KOREA SENDS HELICOPTERS TO DEMILITARIZED ZONE ", 2006-03-15) reported that the ROK sent three helicopters on a rare flight Wednesday inside the Demilitarized Zone to try to contain forest fires spreading from the DPRK. Kim Il-sook, an official at the Forest Aviation Office, said the ROK military approved the flights and that the DPRK had been informed of the helicopters' entry inside the world's most heavily fortified border. The fire started from the DPRK earlier Wednesday and spread across the DMZ into Goseong area, 466 kilometers east of Seoul, according to the office.

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3. ROK on DPRK Human Rights

JoongAng Ilbo ("RIGHTS BODY STAYS MUM ON NORTH", 2006-03-15) reported that despite its promise to make public a position statement on human rights abuses in the DPRK by the end of last year, the ROK's National Human Rights Commission had not made up its mind as of January, an internal commission document showed. It handed over to Representative Chang Yoon-seok of the Grand National Party the minutes of a Jan. 23 meeting of the commission. The minutes showed that the commission had decided to say nothing about the human rights abuses that DPRK defectors have testified to. "The National Human Rights Commission decided that it will not make recommendations or state positions toward the North Korean government," the minutes quoted Cho Young-whang, the commission's chairman, as saying.

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4. US on DPRK Worker's Conditions

Yonhap News ("U.S. LABOR GROUP SHOWS CONCERN OVER KAESONG WORKERS' CONDITIONS", 2006-03-14) reported that a leading US labor organization expressed concerns Tuesday about DPRK workers' conditions at an ambitious inter-Korean industrial zone, especially ahead of free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations. Thea Lee, assistant director of the AFL-CIO, said the concerns have arisen recently following press accounts of the zone, known as the Kaesong

Industrial Complex. Lee said that the working conditions of the DPRK workers "seem to us a little bit worrisome," especially in terms of protection and the conditions that they work under. "Certainly, the wages are extremely low by South Korean standards, and we expect that the workers there have very few rights to organize independent unions, to exercise any rights at all," she said at a hearing on an FTA between the US and the ROK.

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5. US Ambassador to Visit Abduction Site

Kyodo News ("U.S. AMBASSADOR TO VISIT MEGUMI YOKOTA'S ABDUCTION SITE ", 2006-03-15) reported that US Ambassador to Japan Thomas Schieffer will visit on Thursday the site where 13-year-old junior high school student Megumi Yokota was abducted by DPRK agents in 1977, the US Embassy in Tokyo said Wednesday. Yokota was snatched by DPRK agents on Nov. 15, 1977, near her home after participating in an extracurricular activity at her junior high school. According to former DPRK agents, she was taken to the DPRK aboard a ship which had been waiting at the beach near her home.

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6. DPRK Asylum Seekers

Korea Times ("NORTH KOREAN ASYLUM SEEKERS FAVOR UNITED KINGDOM MOST ", 2006-0-15) reported that Britain has emerged as the country that received the highest number of asylum seeking applications from DPR Koreans in 2004, beating Germany, which has topped the list since 1999. The Washington-based Radio Free Asia (RFA), quoting data it obtained from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), reported that 27 DPR Koreans lodged applications for asylum in the UK in 2004, an increase from 15 in the previous year.

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7. USFJ Realignment

Agence France-Presse ("OKINAWA GIVES GUARDED WELCOME TO BIGGER US PULLOUT", 2006-03-15) reported that Okinawa has given a guarded welcome to a US military agreement to withdraw 8,000 Marines from the southern Japanese island chain, 1,000 more than previously announced. Amid growing opposition to a US military realignment plan, the Pentagon said it would relocate the troops by 2012 to the US Pacific territory of Guam. It also said it would ask Japan to pick up about 75 percent of the estimated 10 billion dollar bill for the move.

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8. US-Japan Missile Defense Cooperation

United Press International ("JAPAN NOW TOP US BMD PARTNER", 2006-03-15) reported that Japan has emerged as the most significant international partner of the US in missile defense, a top US defense official said last week. In testimony before a House Armed Services Subcommittee March 9, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Policy Peter Flory said that with its commitment to spend around \$1 billion, Japan has become the US' largest international partner in missile defense.

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9. US, Japan, Australia on PRC Military

Agence France-Presse ("US, AUSTRALIA, JAPAN FOCUS ON CHINA'S GROWING MIGHT IN SECURITY TALKS ", 2006-03-15) reported that the PRC's growing power will top the agenda in unprecedented security talks between the US, Japan and Australia during a visit by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice this week. The top US diplomat, who will also hold separate talks with Prime Minister John Howard, has said Beijing's military and economic rise would be the focus of the trilateral meeting since it was the major force driving regional changes.

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10. PRC Military

The Associated Press ("CHINA PREMIER: BUDGET RISE FOR SELF-DEFENSE", 2006-03-15) reported that the PRC will never pose a military threat to others and its double-digit increases in defense spending are intended mainly to boost troops' living conditions, PRC Premier Wen Jiabao said Tuesday. "Even when one day China becomes stronger, China will not interfere in others' internal affairs or have any adverse impact on others," Wen said.

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11. Sino-Japanese Relations

Kyodo News ("JAPAN SAYS CHINA'S CONCILIATORY STEPS ACCEPTABLE IF TALKS RESUMED", 2006-03-15) reported that Japan showed positive reaction to PRC Premier Wen Jiabao's proposal Tuesday that the two countries take three steps to improve relations, but maintained that the PRC should first move to resume the stalled top-level dialogue. Wen proposed that the two countries continue strategic governmental dialogue to remove bilateral barriers, develop economic ties further, and increase person-to-person exchanges as a way to build trust.

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12. PRC-Japan East Sea Gas Dispute

Kyodo News ("ASO SUGGESTS COUNTERMEASURES AGAINST CHINA'S GAS DEVELOPMENT ", 2006-03-15) reported that Foreign Minister Taro Aso that Japan should take countermeasures when full-fledged production by a PRC consortium at two gas fields in the East China Sea is confirmed to have been launched. "When the drilling starts, we should reconsider what steps we can take. There are various options, but we cannot show Japan's cards right now," the foreign minister said.

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13. US and Cross Strait Relations

Reuters ("TAIWAN OPPOSITION CAN'T AGREE ON US ARMS DEAL ", 2006-03-15) reported that Taiwan's opposition lawmakers are divided over whether, or what, to buy from a package of advanced weaponry offered by Washington, dashing hopes for a resolution to end the deadlocked deal any time soon. The main opposition Kuomintang (KMT) is widely expected to come up with its own answer to the deal before its chairman Ma Ying-jeou leaves for the US on Sunday.

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14. US-PRC Trade Relations

The Associated Press ("SENATE CHINA CRITICS TO TRAVEL TO BEIJING ", 2006-03-15) reported that three US senators leading an effort to force trade and currency concessions from the PRC will go to that country next week to air their grievances directly, officials said Wednesday. Sens. Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., and Tom Coburn, R-Okla., will visit the PRC next week to discuss growing concerns in Congress about PRC trade practices, currency policy and intellectual property matters.

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15. PRC on Internet Censorship

Interfax-China ("PREMIER WEN JIABAO COMMENTS ON CHINA'S INTERNET CENSORSHIP", 2006-03-15) reported that Internet monitoring is an internationally common practice and the PRC attaches a great deal of importance to attracting international experience in Internet monitoring, PRC Premier Wen Jiabao said. Domestic Internet industry circles have the responsibility to be self-disciplined and carry out self-monitoring to ensure websites transmit accurate information and not mislead the people and should definitely not create a bad influence on society, said Wen.

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