

MONTHLY RECAP: APRIL

DPRK NUCLEAR ISSUE

Christopher Hill and Kim Kye-gwan met for talks in Singapore on April 8. The outcome of the discussions was not officially released, but Kim called the talks “successful”, and stated, “differences have been narrowed a lot.” Sources familiar with the talks stated that the United States would publish in detail its concerns of a DPRK uranium enrichment program and nuclear proliferation with Syria, and North Korea would acknowledge these concerns in exchange for removal from the U.S. terror-sponsor state list and list of countries subject to the trading-with-the-enemy act.

On April 9, negotiators from all six parties involved in talks on DPRK nuclear programs met in Beijing for a series of bilateral discussions on the progress of North Korea’s declaration of nuclear programs. Hill described the meetings as “good discussions” making “definite progress”.

On April 15, it was reported that President Bush and Secretary of State Rice “displayed strong dissatisfaction” over the agreement reached between Hill and Kim in Singapore.

A U.S. interagency delegation arrived in South Korea on April 21, then traveled by car to North Korea, where it spent several days working toward verifying the extent of the North’s nuclear programs. North Korea has claimed to have produced 30 kg of plutonium, while the United States estimates are closer to 50kg.

ROK SWITCHES 6-PARTY NEGOTIATORS

On April 15, South Korea replaced Chun Yung-woo with Kim Sook, former director general of the foreign ministry's U.S. Affairs bureau, as the chief negotiator in six-party talks.

INTER-KOREAN RELATIONS

April opened with North Korean media launching a tirade of insults against South Korean President Lee Myung-bak, the first mention in DPRK press of President Lee since he won the election last December. He has been labeled a traitor to his nation and a U.S. sycophant in response to his travels to Washington and Tokyo and his "Denuclearize-Open-3000" policy toward the North, as Pyongyang warned that his policies could lead to "catastrophic consequences" and the end of inter-Korean relations.

On April 2, a 6-member ROK delegation traveled to North Korea for talks regarding joint celebrations of the eighth anniversary of the first inter-Korean summit and the first anniversary of the second. The delegation, an unofficial civilian delegation, held "a broad range of talks on the future path of the pro-reunification movement," and the "fast changing situation on the Korean Peninsula."

On April 4, North Korea announced that it was suspending all dialogue with South Korea and that the border would be closed to ROK officials. The visit to North Korea by a group of South Koreans who planned to plant trees on Arbor Day was canceled, as North Korea refused entry to Kim Moon-su, a member of the leading Grand National Party. The North also canceled joint

May Day activities, which have been carried out annually since 2001.

On April 26, the Rodong Sinmun carried an article rejecting President Lee Myung-bak's proposal to establish liaison offices in Seoul and Pyongyang, calling it "a trick".

4,000 tons of DPRK coal was delivered to South Korea on April 14, the first of 12,000 tons to be delivered during April as part of an inter-Korean cooperative venture.

On April 22, North Korea requested that Seoul no longer ship poultry, bird meat, or eggs to the Kaesong Industrial Complex. Normally, South Korea sends 8.5 tons of chicken and 127,000 eggs to the complex each month, but with the recent outbreak of avian flu in the South, Pyongyang has banned related goods in an effort to prevent the spread of the bird flu to the North.

DPRK-PRC RELATIONS

A South Korean newspaper quoted a North Korean publication, Hankyoreh, stating that Pyongyang has requested Beijing provide it with 500,000 tons of rice. South Korea has stated that it would provide rice and fertilizer as it has in the past if requested, but North Korea has so far refused to ask the South's new administration for assistance.

Chinese customs figures released on April 23 show that PRC cereal exports to North Korea in the first quarter of 2008 were 85 percent higher than last year. Oil exports were up almost 300 percent.

DPRK-RUSSIAN ECONOMIC COOPERATION

It was reported on April 4 that the Priorsky regional government will issue 12,000 working visas for North Koreans during 2008, four times more permits than last year. The article also noted that Daedong River, Neungra, Baekdu, Goonpyo, and other DPRK businesses have recently opened offices in Russia, and that Russia-DPRK joint ventures have recently resumed business, following resolution of the Banco Delta Asia standoff.

JAPAN-DPRK RELATIONS

On April 11, Japan extended for six months sanctions imposed after the North's nuclear test in 2006, citing lack of a declaration on its nuclear programs and no concrete steps on kidnapping issues. The sanctions ban imports of DPRK goods and port visits by DPRK ships.

On April 14, the (North) Korean Central News Agency reported that two million USD was donated by the North Korean government to the pro-Pyongyang Korean residents' organization, "General Association of Korean Residents in Japan", to fund educational programs.

U.S. CONGRESS ON DPRK

A series of reports to the U.S. congress in May have set a negative tone for policies toward and relations with North Korea. On May 1, Air Force Lt. Gen. Henry Obering, head of the U.S. Department of Defense Missile Defense Agency, said in a congressional hearing, "Pyongyang

continues to press forward with the development of a nuclear-capable ICBM...North Korea's ballistic missile development and export activities remain especially troubling." U.S. Treasury Undersecretary Stuart Levey, while testifying before the Senate Finance Committee on the same day, reported that counterfeit U.S. dollars printed by North Korea continue to surface, and that the U.S. Secret Service is carrying out an investigation.

On April 24, CIA Director Michael Hayden, Director of National Intelligence Mike McConnell and National Security Advisor Stephen Hadly presented information to Congress suggesting North Korean assistance in the construction of a nuclear facility in Syria. President Bush said that he released the intelligence in order to pressure Pyongyang and send a message to Iran. He stated that the release was intended to "make clear to North Korea that we know more about you than you think."

DPRK UN AMBASSADOR

Pyongyang has named Sin Son-ho as the new DPRK ambassador to the United Nations. He has served as the deputy representative to the UN in the past.

DPRK FOOD

It was reported on May 3 that the DPRK government has suspended distribution of food rations in Pyongyang for six months. The UN has predicted that North Korea will be 1.66 million tons short of the minimum cereal amount necessary to avoid widespread famine.

DPRK EXPORTS TO U.S.

The first shipment of North Korean liquor to the United States arrived on April 22. Tang's Liquor Wholesale has imported nearly 40,000 bottles of Pyongyang Soju to New York.

OLYMPIC TORCH IN DPRK

On April 28, the Olympic torch traveled to North Korea for the first time in history. North Korea had prepared welcoming festivities for the torch's arrival, and 80 torchbearers carried the flame through the country.