

MONTHLY RECAP: MAY

DPRK NUCLEAR NEGOTIATIONS

May opened with optimistic statements from U.S. envoy to six-party talks Christopher Hill and his newly appointed counterpart from South Korea, Kim Sook, after meeting in Washington,. Hill stated that after the DPRK completes its requirements, “[the United States] will certainly complete ours.” A Washington spokesperson also reaffirmed at the beginning of May U.S. commitment to remove North Korea from its list of terrorism-sponsoring states, although at the end of the month, this had not yet occurred.

In addition, South Korean Foreign Minister Yu Myung-hwan announced that the United States and North Korea were expected to set up government offices in their counterpart’s capital, however, there was no timeline mentioned or any confirmation on the status of such a plan by either U.S. or DPRK officials.

On May 1, it was also reported that the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee had passed legislation that waives the Glenn Amendment, which restricts the Department of Energy’s funding regarding countries that have conducted a nuclear test. This will allow the energy department to “provide material, direct, and necessary assistance” to North Korea’s denuclearization activities. On the same day, the committee also passed a bill that would restrict the government’s ability to remove the North from the list of terrorist-sponsoring states, requiring, if approved by Congress, the Bush administration to “certify that the DPRK has provided a complete and correct declaration” of all its nuclear programs first.

North Korea has announced that it would be willing to blow up the cooling tower at the Yongbyon nuclear facility within a day after Washington removes it from the terrorist-sponsor state list.

On May 6, it was reported that Australian Foreign Minister Stephen Smith announced that there would be no more development assistance for North Korea unless it makes “substantial progress towards denuclearization,” although he added that Australia will continue to provide unconditional humanitarian aid.

On May 8, North Korea provided U.S. Department of State envoy Sung Kim with 18,822 pages of documents on the DPRK plutonium program, some dating back as far as 1986. This windfall resulting from meetings between Sung Kim and DPRK government officials includes the technical logs from the North’s reactor, and are hoped to be helpful in determining the amount of plutonium North Korea has produced. Washington has agreed to share the documents with the UN IAEA, with China playing the role of diplomatic middleman.

On May 27, Christopher Hill and North Korean counterpart Kim Kye-gwan met in Beijing to continue talks on DPRK denuclearization. After two days of talks, Hill stated that “completing [denuclearization] by the end of the year will be a challenge.”

DPRK UN REPRESENTATION

It was reported on May 8 that the new DPRK envoy to the UN, Ambassador Sin Son-ho,

presented his credentials to U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, officially replacing Pak Gil-
yon. Pak had held the post since 2001.

DPRK-SINGAPORE COOPERATION

On May 12, it was announced by the North Korean media that DPRK Foreign Minister Park Ui-
cheon and Singapore's Foreign Minister George Yeo had signed an agreement for further
cooperation between the two countries.

DPRK-VIETNAM COOPERATION

On May 10 it was announced that DPRK Deputy Foreign Minister Kim Yong-il and Vietnamese
Deputy Foreign Minister Vu Dung had signed an agreement to increase trade and investment as
well as sports and cultural exchanges.

DPRK BIRD FLU PREVENTION

North Korean television announced the formation of the Emergency State Quarantine
Committee to oversee efforts to block the spread of avian flu, while it reported a widespread
bird flu epidemic in the South. The committee is overseeing provincial sanitation, livestock
quarantine, and other preventative measures. These include having set up more than 1,600
watch posts along the eastern and western coasts to keep track of migratory birds.

DPRK ALTERNATIVE ENERGY

The North Korean media reported that tens of thousands of hectares of Tetradiim trees have been planted on several tree farms throughout the North. The berries of the Tetradium tree provide oil that can ease the oil shortages faced by the DPRK.

U.S. ON DPRK HUMAN RIGHTS

President Bush marked “North Korea Freedom Week” by stating that he was “deeply concerned” about the DPRK human rights situation, and Senator Sam Brownback stated that he opposes the nomination of Kathleen Stephens to the post of U.S. ambassador to South Korea because he was not satisfied with her response to questions regarding the U.S. role in the DPRK human rights issue, and vowed not to support her “until we can get some human rights movement taking place in the six-party talks, or get some clear commitments to deal with the human rights issues which are not being addressed.”

INTER-KOREAN JOINT CELEBRATION

Seoul agreed to host a joint, North-South event to celebrate the eighth anniversary of the inter-Korean summit on June 15.

DPRK TOURISM FROM THE SOUTH

It was reported on May 4 that the number of South Koreans visiting the inter-Korean tourism project at North Korea’s Mount Kumgang was almost double the numbers seen last year.

During the first four months of the year, 100,300 South Koreans took the trip to the North, up from 58,000 in 2007. In addition, 40,090 South Koreans visited Kaesong between January and April, and the daily quota for ROK visitors has now been raised from 300 to 500.

Despite growing numbers of tourists heading North, Hyundai Asan, the South Korean company in charge of tours to Kaesong and Mount Kumgang, reported a net loss of over nine million USD in the first quarter of 2008, on top of the more than three million in losses during the last quarter of 2007. The company blames the losses on the weakening of the ROK won against the U.S. dollar, as North Korea will only accept U.S. dollars as payment for use of the land and facilities.

INTER-KOREAN GOLF COOPERATION

The first golf course built by an ROK company in the North opened on May 28 at Mount Kumgang Ananti Golf and Spa Resort. The course is accompanied by the spa, a hotel, and restaurants on 1.7 square meters of land. The course was built by Emerson Pacific Group, based in Seoul, and is expected to employ approximately 200 North Korean workers.

ROK AID TO THE NORTH

South Korea is planning to donate more than one million USD in anti-malaria medicine and equipment through the UN World Health Organization.

On May 16, it was reported that the ROK Unification Ministry has earmarked 9.5 million USD

to be available to South Korean NGOs. The money is part of a fund designed to promote inter-Korean exchanges.

On May 29, a ship left South Korea on its way to deliver 1,000 tons of copper to the North. The shipment is worth 8.5 million USD, and is part of the six-party agreement to provide energy aid to the North in exchange for denuclearization. The copper is slated to be used in power station upgrading and repair projects.

U.S. AID TO THE NORTH

On May 13 it was reported that Washington had agreed to provide 500,000 tons of food aid to the North, 400,000 through the UN World Food Bank and 100,000 through U.S. NGOs, following several rounds of talks in Pyongyang between U.S. and DPRK officials that resulted in a deal that would allow monitors “unprecedented access to oversee distribution.” North Korea welcomed the aid, with the (North) Korean Central News Agency reporting the aid domestically, stating that it would help solve the North’s food shortages and “contribute to promoting the understanding and confidence between the peoples of the two countries.”

PRC-DPRK TRADE

The Hangzhou national animation game public service platform and the cities of Dandong and Kuandia have agreed to cooperate on PRC-DPRK animation gaming. This outsourcing project was designed to bring DPRK animation game talent to Dandong City.

It was reported on May 2 that Kim Jong-il's brother-in-law, Jang Song-taek, was sent to Beijing and Dandong in February, as he has now been put in charge of Pyongyang's anti-corruption campaign. Jang reportedly visited DPRK corporations operating in China to put an end to the practice by some North Korean businesses of skimming profits meant for Pyongyang.