

Comparative Connections

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North Korea-South Korea Relations: **Squally but Steady**

Aidan Foster-Carter
Leeds University, UK

The first quarter of 2006 saw inter-Korean relations brisk, in more senses than one. As the chronology illustrates, both the variety and density of interactions testify to ever-growing ties between North and South across a range of activities and on many levels: political and security, economic and business, social and cultural, and more. Rightly or wrongly, no one in Seoul (or at least in the ROK government) appears inclined to let the continuing impasse over the six-party nuclear talks – which have not met since November and show no sign of doing so any time soon – derail or even decelerate burgeoning North-South links.

However, it is not all plain sailing. From the Southern viewpoint, the North is not only reluctant to make concessions, but continues to stall on implementing matters to which it had agreed in outline. There are also quarrels: the past quarter saw several tiffs, and one major row that could have easily proved damaging. In the past any of these might have escalated out of hand, putting all ties on ice for months. That this did not happen is mainly due to the South's vast reserves of patience, which to critics risks shading into appeasement.

Yet defenders of the Sunshine Policy can point to subtle changes in North Korea's stance, too. Pyongyang's noisily extreme rhetoric continues unabated, but its deeds talk louder. At least twice in the past quarter the North showed its displeasure with the South by actions which, if regrettable and uncalled for, were noticeably less extreme than in the past. This more careful calibration suggests a deepening commitment to the relationship as such. A more cynical view is that Kim Jong-il knows not to push the goose too far lest it stop laying golden eggs, in what remains financially and otherwise a very one-sided process.

Military talks get nowhere

South Korea has long set great store by military talks with the North, partly because there is much to discuss, and also out of resentment that Pyongyang continues to view Washington as its sole worthy interlocutor on security matters – the boss, as it were. Rare talks between generals in 2004 made progress on two fronts: establishing naval radio contact to prevent fatal firefights like those in 1999 and 2002, and dismantling

propaganda loudspeakers and other structures along the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), the border between the two Koreas.

Since then the North had been reluctant to reconvene this channel, but finally agreed to do so at Panmunjom in early March. South Korea hoped to flesh out details of a planned joint fishing area in the West (Yellow) Sea, the scene of past clashes, which the North agreed to in principle last year. Also on Seoul's agenda was installing a direct hotline between the two sides' West Sea fleet commands, and a second round of defense ministers' talks, which only happened once so far – soon after the June 2000 breakthrough Pyongyang summit.

The South also sought an agreement on land border security, pursuant to relinking railways in the Kyongui (west) and Donghae (east) cross-border corridors. Both are now open to road traffic, but no trains operate. At the latest in a series of lower-level practical meetings on railway matters, held just before the military talks, the North yet again prevaricated on test runs – originally due last October – and no date to meet again was set.

The opening day found the South optimistic. The atmosphere was good: for the first time the Northern team included a Korean People's Army (KPA) naval officer. The North had proposed, and the South readily accepted, raising the level of the talks from one-star to two-star generals. Yet hope turned to disappointment. The North not only predictably berated upcoming joint U.S.-ROK war games (on which more below), but also insisted that fisheries could only be discussed in the context of redrawing the inter-Korean maritime boundary, the Northern Limit Line (NLL). The NLL was unilaterally drawn up by the U.S.-led UN Command on the basis of actual control at the time of the 1953 Armistice. It has done the job for over half a century, but North Korea never formally accepted it and in recent years has proposed a line further south, putting several ROK islands in DPRK waters – an obvious non-starter.

So there was no agreement, joint statement, or even a date set for another meeting. Several possible interpretations arise. North Korea's maximalism may mean it does not really want to talk – or that internal (perhaps intra-KPA) politics make it hard to yield and accept the NLL, even *de facto*. Or this may reflect a longstanding contrast in approach between a pragmatic South that prefers to start small and easy before tackling the tough stuff, and a North that sets great store by fundamentals – or claims to. In practice Pyongyang is slowly becoming more flexible, so the hope in Seoul is that patience will deliver the desired result.

Ministerial meeting postponed

South Korea was relatively unfazed by this deadlock, expecting to be able to press the issue again soon enough at the next round of Cabinet-level talks, due in Pyongyang at the end of March. Since the June 2000 summit this has become a regular quarterly forum, alternating between the two capitals – with occasional excursions, such as to the ROK resort island of Cheju last December. On March 11, however, the North unilaterally

postponed the next meeting, saying that “hostile war exercises and peaceful dialogue cannot go together.” The timing was unfortunate, coinciding with two joint U.S.-ROK military exercises, *Foal Eagle*, and *Reception, Staging, Onward Movement and Integration (RSOI)*. Both are routine: *Foal Eagle* dates back to 1961. Pyongyang’s protests are routine too, but their vehemence varies. In the past, the North cited the *Team Spirit* annual war games as an excuse to break off dialogue entirely. So a month’s postponement, this time, is a mere slap on the wrist.

That said, as of April 3 no new date had yet been set. The South has proposed April 20, but the North has yet to reply. April is a busy month in Pyongyang, both with events marking the birthday on April 15 of the DPRK’s founder and “eternal president” Kim Il-sung, and the Supreme People’s Assembly (SPA), the rubber-stamp Parliament that is due to meet April 11 – a single day suffices – to review the economy and this year’s budget.

Any further delay would disappoint the ROK’s new-ish Unification Minister Lee Jong-seok. Nominated by President Roh Moo-hyun Jan. 2 and finally confirmed Feb. 10, this meeting will be Lee’s first chance to meet his DPRK counterpart, “Cabinet counsellor” Kwon Ho-ung (quite what that obscure title connotes is unclear). Otherwise, dare one say, this channel’s temporary suspension is in practical terms by no means so serious as the abeyance of the Six-Party Talks; inasmuch as a plethora of other lower-level inter-Korean contacts in specific areas carries on.

Exchange or charity?

Some of these other channels have their own problems. When inter-Korean talks resumed in mid-2005 after almost a year’s hiatus, the North seemed unprecedentedly eager for wide-ranging economic cooperation. Except the Kaesong Industrial Zone, on which more below, little of this has come to fruition. Working-level economic talks in Kaesong in January failed to narrow differences evident at the 11th session of the Inter-Korean Economic Cooperation Promotion Committee (ECPC) last October. Like the Cabinet-level talks the ECPC is supposed to meet quarterly, but it has now gone nearly half a year with no new date fixed.

As discussed in the last issue of *Comparative Connections*, last fall the North demanded large quantities of raw materials for light industries ranging from soap to shoes. The South agreed in principle, but in exchange would like joint ventures in Northern minerals like coal, zinc, magnetite, and phosphoric concentrate. But despite having earlier reportedly accepted such reciprocity, North Korea now wants the two projects to be separate – with a strong implication that the South’s supply of basic necessities should be on a charitable rather than a commercial basis.

Yet here again formal deadlock seems not to prevent progress on the ground (in the ground, in this case). Korea Resources Corp (KoRes), the relevant ROK parastatal, is cutting its own deals. Having announced plans to invest in gold, silver, and zinc, on a joint venture or consortium basis, with Chinese firms in China, Mongolia, and North

Korea, on March 22, KoRes President Park Yang-soo signed an agreement in Beijing with China Minmetals, whose projects include coal mines in the DPRK. A week later KoRes reported another deal with a Chinese firm in Heilongjiang to jointly mine North Korean iron ore. Hoping to dig 144,000 tons over three years, it expects the first shipments in May, along with graphite from a mine just north of the DMZ where it is already invested; it is also eyeing DPRK magnesite (as distinct from magnetite). KoRes further reported that North Korea plans to invite over 100 interested parties from the South, including state banks, to an investor relations meeting in Pyongyang on April 28, to encourage further investment in mining. All in all, the DPRK's decrepit but extensive and varied mines look about to receive the fresh investment and upgrading that they have long needed.

Multifaceted aid

Northern demands for aid are brazen, given how much they get already. As the year began, the ROK Unification Ministry (MOU) revealed that since early December it had supplied 60,000 tons of coal to help Kaesong workers through the bitter winter. The 6 billion won (\$5.9 million) cost will come from MOU's 1 trillion won budget for inter-Korean cooperation.

Larger-scale seasonal aid followed, as is now routine. On Feb. 1, North Korea asked for 150,000 tons of fertilizer immediately with a further 300,000 tons to follow. Three weeks later the South agreed to the former, and shipments began Feb. 28 in both ROK and DPRK vessels. On past form, half a million tons of rice will also be demanded and offered ere long – despite North Korea's announcing last fall that it no longer needs humanitarian (as distinct from developmental) aid, to the consternation of international aid agencies.

In a new if overdue initiative, South Korea is to give a modest \$20 million over two years via the World Health Organization (WHO) for maternal and infant health care in the North. Specifically, this should cover vaccinating some 2.5 million under-5s and almost a million mothers. Seoul is also talking to Unicef and other UN bodies about further ways to help Northern women and children. This is all the more urgent in view of North Korea's ordering many foreign NGOs to leave. It is doubtful that food is so plentiful as to warrant such insouciance – the UN World Food Program (WFP) still hopes to negotiate a reduced role under the new policy – and the health situation certainly does not. Infant mortality in the DPRK is said to be nine times greater than in the ROK. South Korea, humanitarianism aside, should surely regard today's undernourished Northern children as part of the human capital of a future reunified Korea; as such, their health is vital. The memorandum of understanding also noted that this project helps to improve aid transparency; the ROK government smarts at criticisms that its generous and barely monitored food aid is what enables the DPRK to spurn the WFP.

Foreign press visits Kaesong zone

Many hopes in Seoul are pinned on the Kaesong Industrial Zone, just an hour's drive north of the Southern capital across the DMZ, where 15 (so far) ROK firms employ 6,000 DPRK workers making goods for export. On Feb. 27, Seoul-based foreign journalists were allowed their first glimpse of this flagship of North-South cooperation; a stream of articles followed in early March. Most were broadly positive: at \$57.50 per month, wages are low, but these are shiny new plants, not sweatshops. Yet, all remarked on constraints and contrasts. They were not allowed to speak to the mainly female Northern workforce, though some did try. The \$57.50 is paid to the government; no one would say how much the workers actually received. The zone's gleaming new buildings and brisk construction seemed worlds apart from the surrounding dusty brown treeless plains and decrepit hovels with plastic sheeting for windows. The Northern workers who commute between the two daily must notice too.

Trade tops \$1 billion

Thanks to Kaesong, inter-Korean trade last year topped \$1 billion for the first time, according to the South's Korea International Trade Association (KITA). Up 51.5 percent over 2004, this breaks down as \$340 million in DPRK exports and \$710 million sent by the ROK. While nearly all the former was true trade, much of what Seoul sent was really aid rather than commerce. The Kaesong zone's contribution – on both sides of the ledger: it imports machinery and raw materials to export finished goods like garments, watches, and kitchenware – more than quadrupled from 2004's \$42 million to \$177 million, or 17 percent of total trade. This will go far higher if the zone's ambitious growth plans are fulfilled: the 15 ROK firms there so far are due to jump to 2,000 by 2012. One billion dollars suffices to make South Korea the North's second trade partner, after China; by contrast, this is a minuscule 0.2 percent of the ROK's total trade. Trade has continued to grow in early 2006: January's \$63 million and February's \$66 million were up 27 percent and 42 percent, respectively, on 2005 figures.

Southern visitor numbers to North Korea also multiplied last year, more than tripling from 26,213 in 2004 to 87,028. In addition, 298,247 tourists visited the North's Mt. Kumgang resort, up 11 percent. No figures were publicized for flows in the other direction, which are tiny: mainly a handful of officials attending meetings. Sunshine is a largely one-way process, thus far.

Planning for the long-term, on March 15 the ROK officially opened large new combined customs, immigration, and quarantine (CIQ) offices on its side of both the Kyongui and Donghae trans-DMZ corridors. Costing \$43 million and \$56 million respectively, these can process 1.7 million and 2.6 million travellers annually. Last year's total was 402,485, with over 58,000 vehicle trips across the once impermeable border.

Don't mention abductions

Potentially the most serious inter-Korean row of the past quarter erupted at family reunions in the North's Mt. Kumgang resort on March 22. The 13th event of its kind since the 2000 summit, these follow a predictable and constrained format. Every few months, a fortunate few elderly Koreans get to meet relatives whom they have not seen for over half a century. They have just three days, in the glare of media publicity, and that is all. No further contact is allowed, even by telephone, letter, or email, much less the visits to ancestral homes and graves that Korean custom demands. Since last year there are now also even more tenuous videolink reunions: again one-time, for just two hours per family. During the past five years some 12,000 persons in total have participated; but in South Korea alone, almost twice as many (about 20,000) of the 120,000 who originally applied for reunions have died waiting.

South Korea would like to expand and expedite such meetings. Recently, not before time, it has also tried to raise in Red Cross talks the fate of about 1,000 ROK citizens believed to be held in the DPRK. (The figure would be far higher if the thousands of civilians taken North during the Korean War are included.) The ROK National Intelligence Service (NIS) tallies 538 prisoners of war (POWs) who ought to have been returned in 1953, plus a further 486 abducted since then, mostly fishermen. Pyongyang, naturally, denies detaining anyone and claims all are there of their own free will. In a vaguely worded concession whose worth remains to be tested, North Korea agreed at the latest Red Cross talks in February to work toward confirming the fate of persons missing during and after the Korean War.

However, the North has allowed a few individuals in this category to take part in family reunions. This latest round included two such: the son of an old POW, and Chon Mon-sook, a Southern fisherman kidnapped in 1969 who was briefly reunited with his wife. But when an ROK reporter tried to file copy which used the word "abductees," DPRK officials barged into the press room, seized tapes, and demanded that the offender leave on the bus with the families (rather than stay for the second half, when 100 more North Koreans were due to meet another batch of ROK relatives). This standoff held up the elderly South Koreans' departure by 11 hours until almost midnight. In the end the entire Southern press corps left the next day, in solidarity with their colleague. The second reunions thus passed unreported – giving participants more privacy than they usually get – but without further incident. It is not yet clear whether this contretemps may jeopardize an earlier agreement to hold a reunion twice as large as usual in June, involving 200 rather than 100 families from each side and their relatives, to mark the sixth anniversary of the June 2000 Pyongyang Summit.

Deplorable as this episode is, in the past Pyongyang might have cancelled the whole event on the spot, and not restored it for months. Hence the fact that the quarrel was controlled is progress, to some degree. The peacemaking included an expression of regret by Seoul (but not, it was emphasized, an apology). Southern conservatives were cross, but surely a case can be made for damage control. The North's behavior had already shown its true colors.

There is less excuse for Chung Il-yong, president of the Journalists' Association of Korea, who in a TV discussion on April 1 claimed (not for the first time) that some South Koreans went North voluntarily, and that it was often impossible to determine if someone had been abducted. He also contrived not to mention the censorship at Mt. Kumgang. Pro-abductee and defector civic groups, not a powerful force in Seoul, demanded his resignation. There were indeed defections to the North in the early heady days soon after partition in 1945, and a few of those under DPRK occupation in 1950 were voluntary, but all sources suggest that the vast majority were forcibly abducted or detained.

POWs: varied fates

More hopefully, Koreans hurt or unhelped by their governments are now better placed than before to secure their own salvation. A striking case in point, and a standing reproach to the likes of Chung Il-yong, is Lee Ki-chun. An ROK soldier captured during the Korean War, Lee (now 75) escaped via China half a century later in 2004 at his third attempt. Last June his wife escaped too, only to die in a traffic accident in the South. Lee's two daughters, the husband of one, and a grandson have followed, the last two as recently as March 31. This is only the second case where a POW has managed to bring out his family, doubtless paying one of a new breed of daring go-betweens to slip into North Korea and effect this.

Most are less fortunate. Another old Southern POW, Han Man-taek (72), who escaped to China last year, was arrested and repatriated to North Korea despite a plea from Seoul to Beijing not to do so. He is now thought to be in a prison camp.

***Les Miserables* out-miseried**

South Korean tendencies not to dwell on North Korean human rights abuses were jolted in March, at least temporarily. The DPRK gulag must be the least likely subject for a musical since Mel Brooks' fictional *Springtime for Hitler*. That did not deter Jeong Song-san. A DPRK defector once imprisoned for listening to ROK radio, Jeong devised *Yoduk Story*, a 3-hour song and dance extravaganza set in one of the North's most notorious concentration camps. Despite many obstacles – the original backers dropped out, possibly under official pressure (bad for Sunshine); Jeong even had to pledge a kidney as collateral for a loan, and received anonymous threats – the show opened in Seoul on March 15. Remarkably, this tale of everyday murder, torture, hunger, and rape became a hit, and soon sold out: it closed on April 2 but may now tour elsewhere in South Korea, or even travel overseas. The show was patronized (in every sense) by the rightwing opposition Grand National Party (GNP), somewhat to Jeong's discomfort. But his aim – to arouse South Koreans' awareness of atrocities being committed on their doorstep – succeeded beyond his expectations.

Yet some in Seoul have hearts of stone. Even as *Yoduk Story* played to packed houses, 90 ROK leftists paid \$1,300 each to fly to Brussels to picket a U.S.-funded hearing on DPRK human rights at the European Parliament. As defectors recounted their sufferings within, these worthies unfurled a banner which read "Stop attacking North Korea on the

pretext of human rights which blocks peace of Korea.” Others chanted “No war, no Bush.” Most passers-by appeared bemused; the Seoul daily *Chosun Ilbo*’s headline read: “Korean Protests Baffle Belgians.” And not only Belgians.

Billions for suffering spies: they cannot be serious

Earlier, North Korea began the year with its own implausible bid to play the human rights card. In a complaint filed with South Korea’s Human Rights Commission on Jan. 6, Pyongyang demanded “several billions of dollars” in compensation for the sufferings of its former agents who served long jail terms in the South, or had died there. It is true that these veterans, like many more innocent, were dreadfully tortured by the ROK’s former military rulers. Yet with blatant if typical asymmetry, whereas Seoul repatriated 63 such ex-spies to the North in 2000 as a unilateral goodwill gesture, Pyongyang has refused to yield an inch on the thousand-plus South Koreans it is reckoned to be illegally holding. This new demand could be a warning to Seoul not to raise human rights issues, or a pretext to extract ransom money, much as West Germany used to pay the former GDR to release political prisoners.

Four abducted Southern fishermen who had escaped from the North promptly countersued the DPRK for \$1 billion each. Little has been heard since of either suit, nor of another filed in Seoul on Jan. 17 by arguably the most neglected category of all. Families of senior civil servants and others, taken North when the DPRK briefly overran most of the South in 1950, sued the ROK government for negligence in failing to locate these victims. Unlike both POWs and post-war abductees, members of this much larger group have become non-persons. No one is fighting in their corner except their families – who in the past often suffered themselves from guilt by association (still practiced in the North) under former ROK military regimes.

KEDO, adieu

The new year also saw the sad closing of an important chapter in inter-Korean relations. On Jan. 6 the last 57 South Korean caretaker staff were evacuated from the now-terminated light-water reactor (LWR) project site at Sinpo, North Korea, on the *Hankyoreh*, a vessel that has shuttled fortnightly between the east coast ports of Kumho (DPRK) and Sokcho (ROK) for the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO). The Northern authorities made them leave behind materiel worth \$45 million, including some 190 buses and jeeps plus 93 pieces of heavy equipment (cranes, excavators, concrete-mixers, and so on).

If opinions remain divided on how far the October 1994 Agreed Framework (AF) served its avowed purpose of reining in North Korea’s nuclear threat, there is no doubt that the now moribund KEDO consortium, created under the AF, helped to bring the two Koreas closer – despite misgivings in both Seoul and Pyongyang – by forcing them to cooperate practically. Over the past decade thousands of Southern engineers and others have lived and worked at Sinpo alongside Northerners. The *Hankyoreh* and its ilk, followed by direct flights, were the first regular North-South transport links. Though inter-Korean ties

now have their own momentum, the pioneering role of this pre-Sunshine precursor should not be forgotten.

Chronology of North Korea-South Korea Relations January-March 2006

Jan. 1, 2006: Former ROK President Kim Dae-jung restates his hope to revisit Pyongyang in 2006, adding that he hopes to make the trip by train.

Jan. 2, 2006: ROK President Roh Moo-hyun nominates Lee Jong-seok, long influential as deputy chief of the National Security Council (NSC), as new unification minister.

Jan. 3, 2006: A ton of rice from a model farm in Ryongsong, Pyongyang, aided by the ROK's Kyonggi province, arrives at Incheon. This is the first Northern rice sent South since flood aid in 1984. During 2005 South Korea gave the North 500,000 tons of rice.

Jan. 3, 2006: The ROK Unification Ministry (MOU) says that since early December it has supplied some 60,000 tons of coal to residents of Kaesong, DPRK. Last winter South Korea provided 20,000 tons of coal briquettes and 10,000 stoves.

Jan. 5, 2006: A survey of ROK conscripts finds that 60 percent see little or no risk of war on the Peninsula. 37.5 percent take little pride in being a soldier, while 63.2 percent say North Korea should be viewed more as a partner than an enemy – although vigilance should be maintained.

Jan. 6, 2006: MOU reports that inter-Korean trade in 2005 reached a record \$1.05 billion.

Jan. 6, 2006: The North's *Korean Central News Agency (KCNA)* says that a petition from ex-DPRK spies who served long prison terms in the South, seeking billions of dollars compensation for suffering at the hands of ROK military regimes, was handed to Southern authorities that day at Panmunjom. Three days later, four ROK fishermen who escaped after years of abduction say they will counter-sue for \$1 billion each.

Jan. 7, 2006: Lee Sung-woo, an ROK missionary, says that construction of a new church for foreigners in Pyongyang, approved in 2004, is being delayed because DPRK authorities now want his group to renovate the capital's existing Chilgol church instead.

Jan. 8, 2006: The last 57 South Korean workers at the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO)'s light-water reactor project site are evacuated from Sinpo, DPRK to Sokcho, ROK. They have to leave behind equipment worth \$45 million.

Jan. 17, 2006: The Korean War Abductees' Family Union files two suits against the ROK government: for negligence in failing to find South Koreans taken to the North during the 1950-53 Korean War, and for refusing to enact a bill to restore the honor of those so abducted who were civil servants.

Jan. 19-20, 2006: Working-level talks held in Kaesong, the fourth since October, reach no agreement but narrow differences over mining and light industry projects.

Jan. 26, 2006: Yang Hyong-sop, presidium vice chairman of the DPRK Supreme People's Assembly (SPA), proposes a unification festival to mark the sixth anniversary of the June 2000 inter-Korean Summit.

Jan. 28, 2006: MOU reports that South Korean visitors to the North more than tripled from 26,213 in 2004 to 87,028 in 2005. This excludes 298,247 ROK tourists to the North's Mt. Kungang resort, up 11 percent.

Feb. 1, 2006: As usual at this season, North Korea asks the South to send fertilizer: 150,000 tons now, and 300,000 tons later on.

Feb. 3, 2006: The two Koreas agree to resume high-level military talks soon, after a 21-month hiatus.

Feb. 7-11, 2006: Four lawmakers of the ROK's ruling Uri party visit Pyongyang and meet senior officials. Their ostensible main purpose is to discuss academic exchanges between think-tanks. The group's leader, Rep. Lim Chae-jung, denies being an envoy for ex-President Kim Dae-jung, who has said he hopes to revisit the DPRK capital this year.

Feb. 9, 2006: ROK Vice Unification Minister Rhee Bong-jo reports that inter-Korean trade in January rose 27 percent year-on-year to \$63 million.

Feb. 10, 2006: For the sixth time in sporting events since 2000, both Koreas' athletes march together at the opening ceremony of the Turin Winter Olympics.

Feb. 10, 2006: Lee Jong-seok takes office as ROK minister of unification.

Feb. 17, 2006: The year's first meeting of the ROK National Security Council (NSC), adopts six key tasks for 2006, the foremost being to construct the basis for a peace mechanism on the peninsula.

Feb. 18, 2006: 99 ROK ambassadors visit the Kaesong industrial zone.

Feb. 20, 2006: North Korea sends a thank you on the completion of delivery of last year's provision of 500,000 tons of rice by South Korea.

Feb. 21-23, 2006: At the seventh Red Cross talks at Mt. Kungang, the DPRK for the first time agrees to work toward confirming the fate of persons missing during and since the Korean War. Both sides agree to a special (perhaps larger) family reunion in June, plus two more video reunions in June and August, with 60 families instead of the usual 40.

Feb. 22, 2006: South Korea agrees to send the North 150,000 tons of fertilizer. Shipments begin Feb. 28.

Feb. 26, 2006: After a meeting in Kaesong, officials from Kwangju say the ROK city will host a unification festival in June, with 1,100 participants from both Koreas.

Feb. 27, 2006: 124 Seoul-based foreign journalists visit the Kaesong industrial zone.

Feb. 27-28, 2006: 575 Koreans from 40 separated families on each side are temporarily reunited by videolink. Each family gets two hours.

Feb. 27-28, 2006: The 11th working-level contact on road and railway reconnection is held in Kaesong. Despite Southern hopes of test train runs in March, no progress is made.

March 1, 2006: In Kaesong, the ROK hands over war memorial *Bukgwandaechepbi*, erected in 1707, but seized by Japanese troops in 1905. Japan returned it to Seoul last October.

March 2-3, 2006: The first general-level military talks since 2004, held at Panmunjom in the DMZ, fail to agree on either maritime or land border security issues.

March 2-5, 2006: 37 DPRK ice hockey players and officials visit the ROK side of Kangwon province (bisected by the DMZ) for friendly matches, the first event of its kind.

March 5, 2006: South Korean farmers say they plan to set up a rice bank in May, to assist North Korea and Southern paupers. They hope to deliver via the new cross-border railway.

March 9, 2006: DPRK merchant ship *Kanpaeksan* starts loading 5,000 tons of fertilizer in the ROK port of Kunsan. It is the first Northern vessel to enter a Southern port since October.

March 11, 2006: North unilaterally postpones 18th round of ministerial talks set for March 28-31, protest routine U.S.-ROK military exercises due at the same time.

March 14, 2006: First inter-Korean trade union meeting in three years, held in Kaesong, reaches no concrete agreement but agrees that workers must promote reunification.

March 15, 2006: South Korea formally opens two new immigration and customs offices on its side of the DMZ, serving the Kyongui (west) and Donghae (east) road-rail corridors.

March 15, 2006: *Yoduk Story*, an unlikely musical written by a defector and set in the DPRK gulag, opens in Seoul. It becomes a surprise hit, and the run sells out.

March 19-23, 2006: UN High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres visits China, the first UNHCR head to do so in nine years. He calls for DPRK asylum seekers in China to be protected. China reiterates that they are illegal immigrants, not refugees.

March 20-25, 2006: The 13th round of reunions of separated families since 2000's inter-Korean summit is held at the North's Mt. Kumgang resort.

March 22, 2006: Northern officials physically prevent a ROK journalist at Mt. Kumgang from filing a dispatch referring to an "abductee," and demand that he leave. The row delays the return home of 99 elderly Southern family members. In protest, the entire ROK press corps leaves the next day. The second phase of reunions is held during March 23-25 without further incident

March 22, 2006: A Northern physician, who defected last year, tells a human rights forum in Seoul that the DPRK routinely kills babies with physical disabilities to "purify the masses." The New Right Union calls on the ROK government to actively protest such abuses.

March 22-23, 2006: A U.S.-funded meeting on DPRK human rights, held at the European Parliament in Brussels, hears testimony from defectors. It is picketed by 90 ROK leftists, protesting that human-rights agitation is a U.S. ploy to block peace on the Peninsula.

March 23, 2006: The semi-official *Yonhap News Agency* reports that the ROK will publish its biennial defense white paper in September. As in 2004, this will no longer label the DPRK as the "main enemy."

March 23, 2006: The ROK's human resources agency says it will open a \$16.4 million skill center in the Kaesong zone in June, to train 4,000 DPRK workers in 13 job areas.

March 23, 2006: ROK Foreign Minister Ban Ki-moon says the DPRK seems to be signalling a wish to return to Six-Party Talks and break the deadlock with the U.S.

March 24, 2006: ROK Unification Ministry admits expressing "regret" for the press row, so as not to jeopardize the family reunions, but insists it did not admit fault or apologize.

March 26, 2006: *Korea Times* reports that ever more Northern defectors are turning to crime, due to financial hardship and inability to adapt to life in South Korea.

March 26, 2006: After seeing the musical *Yoduk Story*, ex-ROK President Kim Young-sam (1993-98) denounces the DPRK as the world's most despotic country, and says there will be no true peace on the Peninsula as long as Kim Jong-il lives.

March 28, 2006: *JoongAng Ilbo* says South Korea is wary of China's rising influence in the North, even if it serves to reduce the threat from Pyongyang.

March 28, 2006: ROK's national museum announces an agreement with its DPRK counterpart to exhibit 90 of the latter's "significant cultural treasures" in Seoul in June.

March 28, 2006: ROK Trade Minister Kim Hyun-jong attends groundbreaking for a \$20 million water treatment facility in the Kaesong zone. Jointly built, it will supply 60,000 tons of water from a DPRK reservoir 17 km away to both the zone and Kaesong city.

March 28, 2006: ROK Unification Minister Lee Jong-seok signs an agreement with Lee Jong-wook, director general of the World Health Organization (WHO), to give WHO \$20 million over two years for maternal and infant health programs in North Korea.

March 28, 2006: A DPRK elite family, possibly diplomats or other state officials, arrive in Seoul after defecting via the ROK embassy in Budapest, Hungary on March 22.

March 28, 2006: *Rodong Sinmun* warns "South Korean warhawks" that the *RSOI-Foal Eagle* exercises, "collusion with foreign forces," could jeopardize Mt. Kumgang tourism.

March 28, 2006: KNTA, the ROK state tourism body, is running tour packages that include both Koreas from Beijing and Vladivostok. There is no travel across the DMZ.

March 29, 2006: ROK Korean Resources Corp (KoRes) says it will import its first DPRK iron ore in May, from a mine developed with a Chinese firm. It also announces an investor meeting April 28 in Pyongyang to raise Southern interest in Northern minerals.

March 29, 2006: ROK Unification Minister Lee Jong-seok deplores tacking other issues on to North Korea's nuclear problem. This is thought to refer to U.S. financial concerns.

March 30, 2006: ROK Vice Unification Minister Shin Un-sang says ROK proposed April 20 as a date for postponed ministerial talks, but the North has yet to respond.

March 30, 2006: ROK DM Yoon Kwang-ung warns that North Korea must give up nuclear weapons before a permanent peace treaty on the Peninsula can be discussed.

April 1, 2006: ROK President Roh Moo-hyun urges a meeting of Southern business bodies to invest more in the North. They ask for more certainty on the Kaesong project.

April 1, 2006: Chung Il-yong, president of the Journalists' Association of [South] Korea, says that some South Koreans went to the North voluntarily, and that it can be impossible to determine the truth about abductions. There are calls for him to apologize or resign.