



Morning Alert - Tuesday, February 28, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK gave top play to updates on the murder of Kim Jong Nam, saying that the two female suspects were apparently given the antidote to VX nerve gas. TBS and TV Asahi led with reports that Prime Minister Abe was grilled at the Diet yesterday in relation to a kindergarten operated by Moritomo Gakuen that made its preschoolers chant support for the security legislation and Prime Minister Abe and criticize China and South Korea during a sports event. NTV and Fuji TV gave top play to the Academy Awards ceremony held in Los Angeles on Sunday.

Major front-page items in national papers included China's underwater surveys in Japan's exclusive economic zone around the Senkakus, updates on the murder of Kim Jong Nam, a GOJ policy allowing some 32,000 residents near the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant to return home starting in April, and the establishment of guidelines by the central government for commercial enterprises regarding the purchase and sale of "big data," such as information on credit card use and vehicle mileage records.

INTERNATIONAL

China conducted numerous underwater surveys within Japan's EEZ without authorization

Yomiuri reported on a finding by the Japan Coast Guard that Chinese government ships conducted surveys of the ocean floor in Japan's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the East China Sea, particularly in the vicinity of the Senkaku Islands, on 63 different occasions during a five-year period through 2016 without Japan's prior permission. According to the daily, China apparently justified the

surveys by filing a claim with the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf that its continental shelf extends to Japan's EEZ. China has apparently stepped up its underwater operations in the pursuit of maritime interests.

MOFA submits position paper on comfort women lawsuit to U.S. Supreme Court

Several papers wrote that MOFA has submitted to the U.S. Supreme Court a written opinion arguing that the court should accept an appeal filed by a group of Japanese living in California calling for the dismissal of a lower federal court ruling upholding the decision by the City of Glendale to build a comfort woman statue at a public park. In an "amicus curiae brief," the Japanese ministry reportedly claimed that the comfort woman memorial "interferes with and disrupts U.S. foreign policy." The GOJ apparently submitted the document to prevent the installation of similar statues in the U.S. Asahi projected, however, that the GOJ document will have little impact on the case since the U.S. Supreme Court rarely grants appeals.

Japan, U.S., ROK discuss murder of Kim Jong Nam

Nikkei reported from Washington on a meeting on Monday of the chief representatives to the Six-Party Talks from the U.S., Japan, and South Korea at which they exchanged views on the latest developments related to North Korea, including the recent test launch of a ballistic missile and the assassination of Kim Jong Nam in Malaysia. They also apparently discussed the possibility of the U.S. reinstating North Korea on its list of state sponsors of terrorism.

POLITICS

FY2017 budget legislation clears Lower House

All papers reported that the Lower House on Monday approved the GOJ-sponsored FY2017 budget bills at its plenary session, noting that the legislation will be enacted by the end of March without fail even if the Upper House fails to take final action due to a constitutional clause. Pointing out that the House of Councillors will start deliberations on the legislation today and that it will be the first time in 18 years for the chamber to begin debate on the next fiscal year's budget in February, the dailies said the Abe administration and the ruling coalition have been successful in moving forward the budget legislation despite fierce debate on a number of thorny issues, such as the Moritomo Gakuen scandal involving Prime Minister Abe and his wife, the controversial conspiracy legislation, and the uproar over the discovery of daily reports filed by SDF peacekeepers in South Sudan. The papers predicted, however, that the opposition will grill the prime minister over these items during the Upper House deliberations.

As for the Moritomo scandal, Asahi and Mainichi reported on a video showing pupils of a kindergarten operated by Morimoto Gauken chanting nationalist slogans during a sports event in 2015. They shouted that China and South Korea should "repent and not treat Japan as a villain" and praised Prime Minister Abe for passing the security legislation, saying, "Go Prime Minister Abe! Go

Prime Minister Abe!” Asked by an opposition lawmaker to comment on the footage during yesterday’s Diet session, the premier said, “I don’t think it’s appropriate.”

Top opposition party gives up on goal of eliminating nuclear energy

Asahi reported on remarks made yesterday by Democratic Party President Renho that her party has abandoned its goal of breaking away from nuclear energy by 2030, speculating that the party leadership was forced to give up on the ambitious proposal out of deference to the Japanese Trade Union Confederation (Rengo), its most powerful supporter. The Federation of Electric Power Related Industry Workers’ Unions, a key member of Rengo, is vehemently opposed to the proposed idea.

ECONOMY

RCEP conference opens in Kobe

All papers reported on the opening of a Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) meeting in Kobe yesterday, projecting that Japan and China are likely to engage in a tug of war over who will take the lead in the proposed mega trade liberalization initiative based on the assessment that the RCEP may set a standard for regional trade in view of the apparent derailment of the TPP. By seizing the initiative in the negotiations, the Chinese are hoping to postpone reforms on such issues as state-owned enterprises and tariff elimination. On the other hand, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand are seeking “high quality” trade liberalization on a par with the TPP so as to help their domestic companies enjoy the benefits of free trade. Sankei conjectured that Japan is cautious about promoting RCEP talks ahead of the proposed start of the bilateral “economic dialogue” with the U.S.

