



Morning Alert - Tuesday, March 7, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK and Fuji TV gave led with reports that President Trump signed a new executive order banning people from six Muslim-majority countries from entering the U.S. for 90 days if they do not possess valid visas. NTV led with a report that the North Korean ambassador to Malaysia was deported on Monday amid the escalating conflict between Malaysia and North Korea over Kim Jong Nam's murder. TV Asahi reported that Moritomo Gakuen is likely to postpone opening its new elementary school in Osaka in April. TBS led with a report that Prime Minister Abe was questioned again in the Diet on Monday on the issue of Moritomo Gakuen.

NHK reported later in its news program that North Korea's state media announced this morning that the DPRK successfully test-fired four ballistic missiles "aimed at attacking U.S. forces in Japan" The network added that an unnamed USG official said there is a possibility that the launched missiles included a Scud-ER with a range of 1,000 km, and that although a total of five missiles were fired, one of them exploded immediately after the launch.

Top stories in national dailies included North Korea's launch of four ballistic missiles (Asahi, Yomiuri, Sankei); tax breaks to two TEPCO-related firms for damage from the Fukushima nuclear accident (Mainichi); and a plan by Yamato Transport to raise its shipping rates for the first time in 27 years apart from tax adjustments (Nikkei).

INTERNATIONAL

North Korea launches four ballistic missiles

All papers ran extensive front- or inside-page reports on North Korea's launch of four ballistic missiles on Monday, speculating that Pyongyang launched the missiles in response to the ongoing U.S.-ROK joint military exercise. Asahi wrote that the Kim Jong Un regime, which is deepening its isolation from the international community, demonstrated its confrontational stance toward the Trump administration, adding that there is the possibility that the DPRK will carry out additional provocations, including launching an ICBM. Nikkei wrote that relations between Washington and Pyongyang will become extremely tense if the DPRK test fires an ICBM capable of reaching the U.S. mainland.

U.S. to apply additional pressure on DPRK

The papers quoted State Department Acting Spokesperson Toner as saying in a statement on Sunday that the United States is prepared to use the full range of its capabilities against this growing threat and that U.S. commitment to the defense of its allies, including the ROK and Japan, remains ironclad. Asahi wrote that the Trump administration, which has begun reviewing Washington's policy toward Pyongyang, will likely take a tougher approach to the DPRK. Yomiuri wrote that the Trump administration will send Secretary of State Tillerson to Japan, South Korea, and China next week to discuss how to respond to North Korea. Noting that the Trump administration is currently discussing such possible options as a preemptive strike, cyberattack, or deployment of tactical nuclear weapons to South Korea under its policy review on North Korea, the paper speculated that the Secretary will convey the outline of the reviewed policy to Japan and South Korea during his visits to these nations. The paper added that calls are growing in the U.S. to put the DPRK back on the list of state sponsors of terrorism. According to Nikkei, Prime Minister Abe welcomed these growing calls during his remarks at an Upper House Budget Committee session on Monday.

Japan to step up ballistic missile defense capabilities

The papers wrote that the fact that the Abe administration held three National Security Council meetings on Monday reflects its strong sense of crisis about the advancement in missile development by the DPRK. Asahi wrote that the Abe administration is becoming increasingly concerned about the growing threat posed by North Korea, speculating that the DPRK's provocations may give impetus to LDP lawmakers' moves to seek to step up Japan's ballistic missile defense capabilities, including THAAD and Aegis Ashore, and acquire the capability to attack enemy bases. Mainichi wrote that the GOJ has decided to strengthen Japan's missile defense systems in response to the apparent technological improvement in missile development by the DPRK. However, Yomiuri wrote that the issue is still under discussion due to cost-benefit concerns.

Japan, India to hold 2+2 vice-ministerial talks

Yomiuri wrote that MOFA announced on Monday that Japan and India will hold a 2+2 meeting of foreign and defense vice ministers in Tokyo on Wednesday. Nikkei wrote that the Ministry of Defense made a similar announcement on Monday. The papers speculated that the two nations will

discuss such issues as China's maritime advancement and North Korea's nuclear and missile development during the meeting. According to Nikkei, the vice defense ministers will hold a meeting today and the vice foreign ministers will hold a separate meeting on Thursday.

ECONOMY

METI minister to visit U.S. for talks with Commerce Secretary Ross

Asahi wrote that Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Seko spoke by phone with Secretary of Commerce Ross on Monday and confirmed his plan to visit the U.S. for talks with the secretary ahead of the first meeting of the new U.S.-Japan economic dialogue slated for mid-April. The two officials reportedly did not discuss bilateral trade in detail. Seko told reporters afterward that they discussed the importance of bilateral economic relations and agreed to meet in the United States at an early date.

NTC Director Navarro expresses readiness for bilateral trade negotiations with Japan

Asahi wrote that in a speech delivered on Monday, National Trade Council Director Navarro expressed his readiness to move forward with bilateral trade negotiations with Japan and the UK in addition to renegotiating NAFTA. The paper wrote that the U.S. is likely to take up the issue at the U.S.-Japan economic dialogue to be led by Vice President Pence and Deputy Prime Minister Aso.

Keidanren sets up new taskforce to study Trump administration's economic policy

Nikkei wrote that Keidanren established a new taskforce to collect information about the Trump administration's economic policy and analyze it in late February. Some 15 companies from a wide range of industries, including auto manufacturers, trading houses, and financial institutions, are participating in the working group. Keidanren plans to send a mission to the U.S. in May, and Chairman Sakakibara plans to visit the U.S. in the fall to participate in a meeting of the U.S.-Japan Business Council.

SOCIETY

Ceremonies held to commemorate 3/11 victims in New York, Los Angeles

Monday evening's Asahi wrote that a ceremony to commemorate the victims of the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011 was held at a New York church on Sunday ahead of the sixth anniversary of the disaster on March 11. Some 420 people participated in the ceremony, which has been held annually for the past five years to convey the message that the people of New York have not forgotten about the victims. Students from the Futaba Mirai Gakuen High School in Fukushima, who were visiting New York for a training program, were among the guests.

Monday evening's Mainichi reported on a similar ceremony held in Los Angeles on Sunday. The Japanese consul general in Los Angeles expressed Japan's appreciation by saying that the people of Japan will never forget the support extended by the American people following the disaster.

