



Morning Alert - Wednesday, March 22, 2017

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## HEADLINES

### Morning News

NHK, NTV, and Fuji TV led with Seoul prosecutors' questioning of ousted South Korean President Park regarding graft and other charges. TBS and TV Asahi gave top coverage to a scandal involving the false labeling of Brazilian poultry products.

Top stories in national dailies included the GOJ's submission of an "anti-conspiracy" bill to the Diet (Asahi, Mainichi, Sankei) and the Land Ministry's announcement of official land prices in Japan, showing a rise in residential land values for the first time in nine years (Yomiuri, Nikkei).

## INTERNATIONAL

### Japanese, EU leaders agree to seek EPA at an early date

All papers reported on Prime Minister Abe's meeting with European Council President Tusk and European Commission President Juncker at the EU headquarters in Brussels on Tuesday, during which the three leaders confirmed their intention to seek a broad agreement on an EPA at an early date. Abe stressed during a joint press conference that it is important for Japan and Europe to advocate free trade amid the growing trend of protectionism and to deliver a strong message to the world. Juncker stated that he is confident that an agreement with Japan will be reached by the end of the year.

### Japan, France confirm nuclear and security cooperation

All Tuesday evening papers reported on Prime Minister Abe's meeting with French President Hollande on Monday in Paris. The two leaders confirmed bilateral cooperation in maritime security

and research on the commercial use of nuclear power. Economy Minister Seko, who is accompanying Abe, and French Environment Minister Royal signed an agreement on their nations' joint research on the nuclear fuel cycle, including the French-led fast reactor development project called Advanced Sodium Technological Reactor for Industrial Demonstration (ASTRID).

Abe and Hollande also agreed to strengthen maritime security cooperation between their nations, including the MSDF's joint naval exercises with the French navy to be conducted in waters near Guam in late April, in which the U.S. and British navies will also participate.

### **North Korean banks to be banned from SWIFT global messaging network**

Mainichi ran a Kyodo report from Geneva saying that the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT), a global messaging network based in Belgium that connects financial institutions around the world, told Kyodo on Monday that it has decided to cut off the four North Korean banks remaining in the system. SWIFT made the move in response to the Belgian government's request that the organization fully comply with the UN Security Council's sanctions resolutions on North Korea. Following the removal of three North Korean banks subject to UN sanctions earlier this month, the latest action will effectively bar all North Korean financial institutions from the international system. The UN Security Council said in a report released last month that seven North Korean banks continued to have access to the global banking communication service for international transactions.

### **USG official hints at reviewing Obama's goal of "world without nuclear weapons"**

Sankei wrote that NSC Senior Director for Weapons of Mass Destruction and Counter-Proliferation Ford stated during an international conference held in Washington on Tuesday that as part of its review of nuclear policy, the Trump administration will review whether President Obama's goal of pursuing a "world without nuclear weapons" is realistic. While saying that it is too early to say whether the Trump administration will actually review Obama's goal, Ford said that the security environment has drastically changed. Mainichi ran a similar Kyodo report saying that concern may emerge in the international community that the momentum for nuclear disarmament will wane if the Trump administration actually reviews the goal of eliminating nuclear weapons.

## **POLITICS**

### **GOJ submits anti-conspiracy bill to Diet**

All papers reported on the Abe administration's submission to the Diet on Tuesday of a bill to amend the organized crime law to punish acts of preparation to commit terrorism and other serious crimes. Although the GOJ is hoping to enact the bill by the end of the current Diet session on June 18, the opposition bloc is set to resist it strongly to prevent the bill from being passed. The GOJ claims that the bill is necessary to thwart terrorism ahead of the Tokyo Olympics in 2020 and to ratify the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, which Japan signed in 2000. However, the

opposition parties plan to argue against the bill in Diet deliberations out of concern that the revised law could allow the government to conduct surveillance and arbitrary investigations of citizens. Asahi, Mainichi, and Tokyo Shimbun expressed caution about the bill, but Yomiuri urged the GOJ to swiftly enact the bill to prevent acts of terrorism and other serious crimes while they are still in the preparatory phase. [Kyodo News](#) filed a similar report.

### **Ruling coalition concerned about declining cabinet support**

Yomiuri wrote that the ruling LDP and its junior partner Komeito are becoming increasingly concerned about the recent decline in cabinet support. According to Yomiuri's nationwide public opinion poll conducted on March 18-19, the approval rating for the Abe cabinet dropped by 10 points to 56%. The public's dissatisfaction with the Abe cabinet's handling of the Morimoto Gakuen scandal is probably behind the drop in support. The ruling coalition is concerned that in addition to the Morimoto scandal, the cabinet's handling of Diet deliberations on the conspiracy bill may affect cabinet support in the future.

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