



Morning Alert - Monday, April 10, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning News

NHK gave top play to a report that the G7 foreign ministers' meeting will begin this evening in Italy, saying that the main item on the agenda will be how to stabilize the situation in Syria following the U.S. military strike. The network said Japan is also hoping to discuss the issue of North Korea. TV Asahi led with a report that President Trump and Prime Minister Abe spoke by phone on Sunday morning about North Korea. NTV and Fuji TV led with reports that 21 people were injured or became ill and had to be taken the hospital due to overcrowding at a rock concert on Saturday.

There were no papers published this morning due to a press holiday.

INTERNATIONAL

President Trump, Prime Minister Abe speak by phone on Syria, North Korea

NHK reported on Sunday that President Trump and Prime Minister Abe held a 45-minute teleconference on Sunday morning, during which the premier expressed support for the U.S. resolve to fulfill its obligation to prevent the use of chemical weapons and approval of the President's strong commitment to the peace and security of U.S. allies and the world. The network said the telephone conversation was held at the request of the U.S. side. The premier told reporters after the call that the two leaders agreed that it is important for the U.S. and Japan to work together closely on North Korea and for the U.S., Japan, and South Korea to unite.

U.S. launches missile attack against Syria

All Saturday morning papers gave extensive coverage to the U.S. missile attack against Syria on Thursday. Asahi wrote that the Syrian state media reported that nine civilians, including four children, were killed in the attack. The papers said while Prime Minister Abe expressed support on Friday for the USG's resolve never to allow the use or proliferation of chemical weapons, Russia, which backs the Assad regime, reacted sharply to the attack, calling it "an act of aggression against a sovereign state." Asahi said the move is bound to create a rift between the U.S. and Russia, which had recently been moving toward rapprochement, adding that it will bring further confusion to the Syrian situation. Nikkei said the USG has returned to "power politics" and will not rule out hardline measures to pursue national interests. Sankei wrote that the attack served as the ultimate warning to the North Korean regime, which is also developing chemical weapons. The paper said if President Trump comes to the conclusion that North Korea has crossed a red line, the U.S. might consider launching a preemptive attack against the country, adding that President Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, both of whom are unlikely to budge an inch, are exacerbating tensions on the Korean Peninsula.

GOJ takes "desperate measure" in expressing support for USG's "resolve"

Saturday morning's Asahi, Nikkei, and Mainichi reported that Japan's expression of "support" for the USG's resolve and understanding for the attack was a "desperate measure" to demonstrate Japan's maximum cooperation with its ally in view of the imminent threat posed by North Korea's nuclear and missile programs. Asahi wrote that since the U.S.'s unilateral action was not backed by a UNSC resolution, Japan highlighted the humanitarian implications of chemical weapons and expressed support for the USG's political stance instead of the military action itself. Asahi quoted a senior GOJ official as saying that the GOJ had no proof that the Syrian military used chemical weapons and there was no clear evidence to justify the U.S. missile strike. Asahi said a senior Kantei official told the paper that Japan is not supporting the U.S. action blindly, adding that the GOJ is concerned about the possible impact on the Japan-Russia territorial talks given that tension between the U.S. and Russia is bound to increase.

GOJ to call on U.S. to provide legal justification for Syria attack

Sunday morning's Nikkei reported that the GOJ plans to ask the U.S. to provide justification under international law for the military strike on Syria. The paper said that although Prime Minister Abe expressed support on Friday for the USG's "resolve" never to allow the proliferation of chemical weapons, the USG has yet to provide legal justification for the attack. The daily said Tokyo is hoping to align with the G7 nations after calling for an explanation from the U.S. at such venues as the U.S.-Japan foreign ministerial to be held on the sidelines of the G7 foreign ministers' meeting in Italy on April 10-11.

Suga says U.S. attack aimed at deterring proliferation of chemical weapons

Sunday morning's Sankei and Yomiuri reported that Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga said in a speech delivered at a meeting of the LDP's Ibaraki chapter in Mito on Saturday that the U.S. missile strike on Syria was meant to prevent and deter further proliferation of chemical weapons and sought understanding for the GOJ's support for the Trump administration's resolve.

UNSC holds emergency meeting over Syria

All Sunday morning papers reported that the UN Security Council held an emergency meeting on Friday following the U.S. military strike on Syria, saying that U.S. Ambassador to UN Haley hinted at additional strikes and sent a warning to Russia by saying: "We are preparing to do more. But we hope that will not be necessary." Sankei said Treasury Secretary Mnuchin announced on the same day that the U.S. will soon announce additional economic sanctions against Syria. Asahi wrote, however, that questions were raised about the legal justification for the U.S. attack and evidence that the Assad regime used chemical weapons. Mainichi wrote that out of the 15 UNSC members, only five nations besides the U.S. clearly expressed support for the U.S. military action due to the lack of legal justification for the attack. The paper said concerns are likely to grow over U.S. "unilateralism."

NSC proposes reintroduction of nuclear weapons to South Korea

Saturday evening's Asahi reported on a NBC report on Friday that the National Security Council proposed to President Trump a plan to redeploy nuclear weapons to U.S. military bases in South Korea to counter the threat of North Korea's nuclear and missile development. According to the report, the move was part of a review of the Trump administration's North Korea policy. The paper said the deployment of U.S. nuclear weapons in South Korea would almost certainly draw strong opposition from China, which is calling for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. The daily added that some people think the proposal was intended to urge China to put more pressure on North Korea during the summit between President Trump and President Xi. Sunday morning's Nikkei, Sankei, and Mainichi carried similar reports.

GOJ extends unilateral sanctions against North Korea

Saturday morning's Sankei reported that the GOJ has decided to extend for two years its unilateral economic sanctions against North Korea, including a ban on all imports from and exports to North Korea.

ECONOMY

Vice President Pence to visit Japan on April 18

Saturday morning's Yomiuri reported on the White House announcement that Vice President Pence will visit South Korea, Japan, Indonesia, Australia, and Hawaii from April 15 to 25. The paper wrote that this will be the Vice President's first visit to the region since the launch of the Trump administration. The paper said the Vice President will arrive in Tokyo on April 18 and attend the

inaugural meeting of the U.S.-Japan Economic Dialogue with Deputy Prime Minister Aso after meeting with Prime Minister Abe. Sankei carried a similar report, saying that Aso announced on Friday that Vice President Pence will visit Japan on April 18 and 19. While noting that the two governments agreed to discuss macroeconomic policies, bilateral cooperation on infrastructure and energy, and a bilateral trade framework at the upcoming economic dialogue, the paper quoted Aso as telling reporters on Friday: "We need to discuss not only trade and currency exchange, but a wide range of issues." He also reportedly said: "I hope that U.S.-Japan relations will deepen further in the economic and security sectors."

Keidanren calls for transparency in Trump administration's policies

Saturday morning's Nikkei reported that the Japan Federation of Economic Organizations, or Keidanren, drafted a proposal for the Japanese and U.S. governments ahead of the U.S.-Japan Economic Dialogue slated to begin on April 18. Keidanren claimed in the proposal that it is "essential" for the Trump administration to ensure "transparency in policies" and "predictability" in order to further enhance companies' willingness to invest in the U.S. It also issued a warning against the Trump administration's tendency to advocate protectionism and limiting immigration by stressing that technology and human resources from foreign countries are "the source of the U.S. economy's strength."

"Japanese consortium" being considered for Toshiba's semiconductor unit

Saturday morning's Nikkei front-paged a report saying that it learned on Friday that a Japanese public-private consortium is being assembled to bid for a stake in Toshiba's semiconductor unit, which the company is planning to sell off. The paper said Toshiba and the business community, with the support of METI, are calling on major Japanese firms to invest about 10 billion yen each in the chip unit in an effort to prevent the transfer of Toshiba's semiconductor technology to other countries. All Sunday morning papers carried similar reports.

U.S., Japan discussing ways to prevent Chinese firms from buying Westinghouse

Saturday morning's Yomiuri carried a report from New York on a Reuters story saying that the governments of the U.S. and Japan are discussing ways to prevent Chinese companies from purchasing Toshiba's nuclear arm, Westinghouse Electric, which filed for bankruptcy protection in March. According to the Reuters' report, a USG official said this is "worrisome" because China has been trying to acquire electricity transmission facilities and nuclear power infrastructure. Minister of Economy, Trade, and Industry Seko told reporters on Friday that although the two governments have been exchanging information on Westinghouse, there have been no government-to-government discussions on the issue since it concerns a private firm.

Japan-ASEAN nations release statement aiming for swift conclusion of RCEP

All Sunday morning papers reported that the trade ministers of Japan and ASEAN members met in Osaka on Saturday and released a joint statement aiming for the swift conclusion of a high-level

Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement. The nations also reportedly agreed to consider forming a Japan-ASEAN initiative in which the nations would promote economic cooperation by fostering human resources and improving infrastructure. Sankei wrote that the GOJ agreed with the 10 ASEAN nations to include high-level trade liberalization in the RCEP, adding that Japan was able to get a step ahead of China in the race to create trade rules in Asia. Nikkei wrote, however, that the level of trade liberalization will be far lower than that of the TPP and there are no prospects in sight for the conclusion of Japan's EPA with EU, adding that Japan's trade policy is stalled and the Trump administration's policy remains unpredictable.

Japan, China, and South Korea to hold FTA talks

Saturday morning's Mainichi reported that the GOJ announced on Friday that it will host the 12th trilateral FTA talks between Japan, China, and South Korea from April 10 to 13 in Tokyo. The paper said the three nations are expected to discuss trade and investment. The daily said the three nations are hoping to promote free trade in the Asia Pacific region by making progress in the trilateral talks amid the growing trend toward protectionism.

POLITICS

Nagashima to quit Democratic Party

All Saturday morning papers reported that former Senior Vice Defense Minister Akihisa Nagashima announced on Friday that he will soon leave the Democratic Party. Nagashima is planning to hold a press conference on Monday. Sankei said this is the first time for an incumbent Diet member to leave the Democratic Party. Nagashima reportedly decided to leave the party because he is opposed to the party leadership's decision to cooperate in elections with the Japanese Communist Party.

SECURITY

LDP's Okinawa chapter shifts to approving Henoko relocation plan

Sunday morning's Nikkei, Yomiuri, and Sankei reported that the Okinawa chapter of the LDP held a meeting on Saturday in Naha and agreed to accept the existing plan to relocate the Futenma base to Henoko. Nikkei said the move is aimed at clarifying the difference between the LDP chapter and Okinawa Governor Onaga, who is opposed to the existing plan.

