



Morning Alert - Thursday, April 13, 2017

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## HEADLINES

### Morning News

NHK and TV Asahi gave top play to reports on a meeting between the U.S. and Russian foreign ministers in Moscow, saying that while they did not agree on the recent U.S. missile attack on Syria, they agreed on the need to improve U.S.-Russia relations. NTV, TBS, and Fuji TV led with reports on a press conference held yesterday by Japanese figure skater Mao Asada to explain her decision to retire from competition.

Top stories in national dailies included the U.S.'s request for holding bilateral trade talks with Japan (Asahi); the differences that emerged in talks between Secretary of State Tillerson and Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov over Syria (Mainichi, Yomiuri); retailers' reports that profits were up by 80% in Japan in February (Nikkei); and U.S. readiness to take military action against North Korea (Sankei).

## INTERNATIONAL

### U.S. applying pressure on China over North Korea

Most papers reported on a telephone conversation between President Trump and Chinese President Xi on Wednesday, speculating that President Trump pressed Beijing to exercise its influence over North Korea. Nikkei wrote that President Xi told the U.S. leader at their summit meeting in Florida that he will consider stepping up sanctions on the DPRK.

In a related development, [Nikkei](#) wrote that the United States has told Japan that it will first make diplomatic efforts in response to North Korea's nuclear and missile threat and then will consider

military action. The paper wrote that this shows Washington position of urging China to ratchet up sanctions on Pyongyang while preparing for the possibility of such diplomatic efforts failing.

### **Japan seeks prior consultations with U.S. in event of military attack on North Korea**

Yomiuri front-paged a report saying that it learned from a GOJ source on Wednesday that the GOJ has asked the U.S. to consult with it prior to any military action the U.S. military might take against North Korea even if it does not use its bases in Japan. The U.S. has reportedly indicated its intention to accept the request. The U.S. and Japan agreed in their security treaty that the two nations will hold prior consultations when the U.S. Forces Japan uses its bases in Japan for military action, but this would not apply to an attack from the USS Carl Vinson. Tokyo made the request out of concern that Japan could be a target of retaliation by North Korea if the U.S. attacks the DPRK. Nikkei ran a similar story on an inside page.

### **Abe says Japan to seek U.S. support for rescuing abductees in Korea contingency**

Wednesday evening's Nikkei took up remarks made to an LDP lawmaker earlier in the day by Prime Minister Abe, who stated that the GOJ has already asked the U.S. for assistance in rescuing Japanese abductees trapped in the DPRK in the event of a contingency on the Korean Peninsula. The premier underscored that his administration will do its utmost to resolve the abduction issue in cooperation with the U.S., South Korea, and the international community.

In a related development, Sankei front-paged a report saying that the GOJ is studying the idea of mobilizing the SDF to rescue the abductees. The paper wrote that the U.S. military's support would be necessary for the possible operation because the SDF's use of weapons is limited.

### **Japan, Sri Lanka agree on further cooperation**

Most papers wrote that Prime Minister Abe and his Sri Lankan counterpart Wickremesinghe agreed on Wednesday to further strengthen their nations' cooperation in areas including maritime security and port development to ensure freedom of navigation. The agreement is intended to keep China in check in view of Beijing's growing presence in the region. Abe told a joint press conference that it is essential for Sri Lanka to achieve sustainable growth and develop its ports so that the nation becomes a regional hub for the sake of keeping the Indian Ocean free and open.

### **Abe to visit UK, Norway**

Nikkei wrote that Prime Minister Abe is making arrangements to visit the UK and Norway following his planned trip to Russia on April 27-28. Abe plans to hold talks with his British counterpart May to discuss such issues as Syria and North Korea.

## **ECONOMY**

## **U.S. calls for bilateral trade negotiations**

Asahi gave top play to a report saying that during their prior consultations last week on the upcoming U.S.-Japan economic dialogue next week, the U.S. government strongly called for the Japanese government to hold bilateral trade negotiations for the purpose of reducing the U.S. trade deficit with Japan. The USG reportedly did not name the specific areas to be addressed in the bilateral talks, but the paper speculated that it probably has autos and agriculture in mind as the main targets. The paper also projected that the trade imbalance between the U.S. and Japan will no doubt become a major topic of discussion in the economic dialogue even though Tokyo has told Washington that it will not accept the idea of holding bilateral negotiations. The daily wrote that if Japan agrees to hold bilateral talks with the U.S., it may be urged to cut its tariffs on farm products, including beef, more than planned under the TPP agreement.

## **POLITICS**

### **Aso expresses intention to expand his political faction**

Most papers wrote that Deputy Prime Minister Aso stated at a reception of his political group on Wednesday that he would like to make his faction a larger group in which members actively exchange opinions on policy issues. The Aso faction, which has 44 members, is exploring the possibility of merging with other political groups. Yomiuri speculated that Aso, who has expressed his clear intention to support the Abe administration, may try to increase his influence within the LDP in view of the post-Abe leadership race. However, Sankei wrote that the idea of merging with other groups may not be feasible because former LDP Secretary General Tanigaki, who has about ten members in his group, has expressed reservations. Foreign Minister Kishida, who leads his group of 46 members, also expressed a cautious view about the idea.

