
 **JAPAN MEDIA
HIGHLIGHTS**

Morning Alert - Wednesday, November 22, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK and most national papers gave top play to reports that the GOJ has narrowed down the possible dates for the Emperor's abdication to either March 31 or April 30, 2019. NTV led with a report on the arrest of a popular manga artist on charges of possessing child pornography. Other networks continued to report on the alleged assault case involving sumo grand champion Harumafuji.

INTERNATIONAL

U.S. steps up pressure on DPRK by re-designating it as sponsor of terrorism

All papers reported extensively in front- and inside-page articles on President Trump's decision to put North Korea back on the State Department's list of state sponsors of terrorism, noting that the move represents Washington's determination to ratchet up international pressure on the DPRK with the goal of thwarting Kim Jong Un's relentless pursuit of nuclear and missile development. The assassination of Kim's half-brother in Kuala Lumpur in February was reportedly a decisive factor in prompting the USG to conclude that North Korea has abetted international terrorism.

Speculating that the President decided to re-designate North Korea after confirming that Chinese President Xi's special envoy failed to persuade the Kim regime to return to the negotiating table on his recent trip to Pyongyang, Yomiuri said it was also intended to press Beijing to make additional efforts to rein in its neighbor. The paper also asserted that the designation will provide the Trump administration with a legal justification to launch a preemptive strike against Pyongyang "in self-defense."

However, the papers also explained that the designation is a largely symbolic move designed to showcase Washington's resolve to isolate North Korea and derail its nuclear and missile ambitions, quoting Secretary of State Tillerson as saying: "The practical effects may be limited." While noting that the Trump administration is expected to announce additional punitive measures shortly, including sanctions on Chinese individuals and companies doing business with the Kim regime, Asahi said some of the targets of the additional U.S. sanctions have already been penalized by UN sanctions. The paper added that the announcement may be used as a diplomatic card to persuade Pyongyang to return to the negotiating table.

North Korea likely to resume provocations

All papers projected that North Korea is likely to respond sharply to the "hostility" displayed by the Trump administration in putting it back on the list of state sponsors of terrorism by staging a ballistic missile launch or other provocation. The Kim regime will probably regard the re-designation as an "insult" and take a hard line to demonstrate that it will never succumb to U.S. pressure. While speculating that the Kim regime has refrained from provocations for about two months to concentrate on rebuilding its moribund economy, Yomiuri projected that it may launch a ballistic missile by year's end with the goal of completing its development of ICBMs that can reach the U.S. mainland. Asahi projected that Pyongyang will accelerate its nuclear and missile programs to push the Trump administration to ease the pressure.

Japan pleased with re-designation of DPRK as sponsor of terrorism

All papers reported that the Abe administration welcomed Washington's re-designation of North Korea as a state sponsor of terrorism, noting that Tokyo viewed the U.S. move as a diplomatic victory given that it had repeatedly asked Washington to put the DPRK back on the list. Mainichi quoted an unnamed senior MOFA official as saying: "The designation will have a huge effect on tightening the noose around North Korea. The United States has raised the level of pressure considerably." The daily said Tokyo was strongly opposed to the Bush administration's decision in 2008 to remove North Korea from the list, adding that the issue of re-designation had been unresolved for Japan for almost a decade.

Nikkei claimed that Prime Minister Abe conveyed to the President his support for the re-designation during their summit in Tokyo on Nov. 6, adding that the GOJ had been concerned that Washington might be tempted to resume dialogue with the DPRK without consulting Japan first. Pointing out that removing North Korea from the list would be very difficult as the administration would have to provide Congress with documentation proving the absence of North Korea's support for international terrorism over the past six months, the daily also claimed that the USG might not be able to offer a quid pro quo to the Kim regime for a while.

In a related development, several dailies wrote that PM Abe's Special Advisor Sonoura met with Special Assistant to the President Kushner at the White House on Tuesday and relayed the Abe

administration's support for the re-designation. The President's son-in-law reportedly expressed "gratitude" in return.

All papers also highlighted the reactions of the abductees' families, noting that most of them were pleased with the designation and expressed hope for additional international pressure on the DPRK regime.

PM Abe comments on comfort women memorial in San Francisco

Asahi and Sankei took up Prime Minister Abe's remarks at the Diet on Tuesday, in which he voiced "extreme regret" over the recent unanimous adoption of a resolution by the San Francisco city assembly calling for the mayor to accept the donation of a set of comfort women statues built by a Chinese-American civic group. The premier disclosed that the GOJ has already asked the municipal leader to veto the motion.

Foreign Minister Kono to visit Moscow

Yomiuri and Sankei wrote that Foreign Minister Kono plans to visit Russia for three days starting tomorrow for talks with his Russian counterpart Lavrov on North Korea and "joint economic activities" in the Northern Territories.

POLITICS

Former Okinawa affairs minister dismisses allegation of bribery

Mainichi and Nikkei reported that former Okinawa Affairs Minister Tsuruho on Tuesday categorically denied an allegation made by a Japanese Communist Party organ that a Kagoshima-based quarry company offered a bribe of 10 million yen to the president of his support organization in the hope that the cabinet minister would help it obtain a contract for the FRF construction project off Camp Schwab. The company's president allegedly met with the LDP politician seven times when he was serving as Okinawa affairs minister to ask for his support. Tsuruho told the press yesterday that the allegation is false.