



Morning Alert - Thursday, February 1, 2018

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK, NTV, and Fuji TV gave top play to reports on a fire that broke out at a facility for welfare recipients in Sapporo on Wednesday evening, claiming 11 lives and injuring three. TV Asahi led with a report on a press conference by sumo wrestler Takayoshitoshi after his achieving the rank of “sekitori.” TBS reported on the upcoming election for the board of directors of the Japan Sumo Association.

Major front-page stories in national papers included updates on the theft of virtual money on the Coincheck cryptocurrency exchange, Fuji Film’s announcement of a plan to buy out Xerox, and President Trump’s State of the Union address.

INTERNATIONAL

President Trump calls for reconciliation, unity in key speech

All papers reported extensively on President Trump’s State of the Union address on Tuesday night, spotlighting his pledge to create a “safe, strong, and proud America.” Asahi and Yomiuri wrote that the 80-minute speech was not divisive and the President repeatedly used such conciliatory words as “unity” and “together,” perhaps to seek reconciliation and bipartisanship with the Democrats with the midterm election in November in mind.

Japanese dailies paid special attention to the President’s message on North Korea, quoting him as saying: “North Korea’s reckless pursuit of nuclear missiles could very soon threaten our homeland. We are waging a campaign of maximum pressure to prevent that from ever happening.... I will not

repeat the mistakes of past administrations that got us into this very dangerous position.” They also highlighted the U.S. leader’s references to Otto Warmbier and a DPRK defector, with Yomiuri suspecting that he addressed Pyongyang’s abominable human rights record to warn the American public and the international community of the paramount danger of North Korea’s nuclear ambitions. Mainichi speculated that the fact that the President spoke at length on North Korea showed that dealing with the defiant regime is one of the Trump administration’s top policy priorities.

According to Nikkei and Mainichi, Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga responded positively to the President’s reference to putting “maximum pressure” on North Korea. The government spokesman said: “Japan highly appreciates the powerful message.” An unnamed senior MOFA official said the fact that the President mentioned “maximum pressure” is significant, while another diplomat took up the President’s characterization of North Korea’s nuclear threats as “depraved,” commenting that the wording points to Washington’s increasingly critical tone toward Pyongyang.

On the economic front, Yomiuri pointed out that the President underscored the economic achievements of his first year, such as increased job opportunities and major tax reform, as well as his plan to invest \$1.5 trillion in infrastructure development. The paper speculated that the President was eager to play up his economic policies with the goals of seeking greater public support and ensuring stable policy management.

Nikkei said the President spent only about a minute talking about trade, noting that although he vowed to seek “fair and reciprocal” trade with foreign partners, the he did not mention the TPP.

GOJ confirms Singaporean ownership of ship that transferred goods to DPRK vessel

Yomiuri reported that the GOJ has determined that the Dominican-flagged tanker that was spotted by an MSDF patrol plane transferring goods to a sanctioned DPRK ship in international waters in the East China Sea last month is owned by a Singaporean firm. Pointing out that Tokyo has already conveyed this finding to the Singaporean government in the belief that some local companies there may be involved in smuggling prohibited items to North Korea, the paper said Foreign Minister Kono is likely to visit the Southeast Asian nation later this month to call for the thorough enforcement of UN sanctions resolutions on the Kim regime.

Mainichi said Kono will travel to Singapore and Brunei from Feb. 10 through 12 to confirm the need to apply greater pressure on North Korea. Meanwhile, Nikkei wrote that the GOJ convened the Asia Senior-Level Talks on Non-Proliferation in Tokyo on Wednesday to discuss North Korea’s nuclear and missile development and the status of each nation’s implementation of UN Security Council resolutions on the reclusive state. During the regional nonproliferation conference, Japan asked the participants from 18 Asian countries, including India, to share information and enhance coordination so as to prevent North Korea from circumventing the international noose around it.

Chinese premier expresses hope to hold trilateral summit after mid-March

NHK reported this morning on the finding that during his meeting with Foreign Minister Kono on Jan. 28, Chinese Premier Li expressed hope to arrange a trilateral summit between Japan, China, and South Korea as soon as possible after the National People's Congress closes in mid-March. The network said MOFA is planning to accelerate coordination to hold the trilateral summit at an early date, adding that it is also planning to work out the details of the defense communication mechanism between Japan and China so that Prime Minister Abe and Chinese Premier Li will be able to reach an agreement when they meet on the sidelines of the summit.

Japan, China to discuss global challenges

Asahi wrote that the Japanese and Chinese governments are planning to resume a bilateral consultative body tasked with discussing global challenges, such as nuclear nonproliferation, climate change, and international terrorism.

ECONOMY

Abe expresses hope for U.S. return to TPP

Yomiuri and Nikkei took up remarks at the parliament on Wednesday by Prime Minister Abe, who commented on President Trump's recent statements suggesting the possibility of the U.S. rejoining the TPP if it were a better deal by saying: "I urge President Trump to join hands with Japan in spearheading the TPP, which is free and open.... However, priority will be given to the early signing and effectuation [of the accord reached by the 11 members]."

SECURITY

Defense Ministry to establish guidelines for integrated SDF operations in contingencies

Sankei led with a report on a Defense Ministry plan to draw up this year a "combined defense strategy," a set of operational guidelines for the three branches of the SDF in the event of a regional contingency. The document will reportedly become one of three security strategy documents, along with the National Security Strategy and the National Defense Program Guidelines. In the envisaged document, the ministry is expected to outline how the SDF will mobilize in an integrated manner during such crises as a North Korean ballistic missile launch or Chinese aggression against the Senkakus or other remote islands near Okinawa.