



Morning Alert - Friday, February 23, 2018

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK gave led with a report that two men were arrested after firing several shots in the direction of the gate of the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan (Chongryon) in Chiyoda Ward, Tokyo, early this morning. No injuries were reported. NTV, Fuji TV, and TV Asahi led with reports on the PyeongChang Olympics.

Top stories in national dailies included Prime Minister Abe's apology at a Lower House Budget Committee session for presenting flawed survey data on Japanese employees' working hours (Asahi); a possible class action suit in Hokkaido over forced sterilization of people with disabilities (Mainichi); a WTO ruling that backs Japan's complaint against South Korea's import ban on marine products from Fukushima (Yomiuri); a surplus of hospital beds in 39 prefectures (Nikkei); and North Korea's plan to send a high-ranking delegation led by an official handling inter-Korean affairs to the closing ceremony of the Pyeongchang Olympics (Sankei).

INTERNATIONAL

Foreign Minister Kono holds talks with Mongolian counterpart

All national dailies reported on Foreign Minister Kono's meeting with his visiting Mongolian counterpart Tsogtbaatar in Tokyo on Thursday, during which they discussed North Korea. Tsogtbaatar held talks with Kim Yong Nam, the president of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly of North Korea, and North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho in Pyongyang earlier this month. Mainichi, Yomiuri, and Nikkei wrote that Kono asked for Mongolia's assistance in resolving the abduction issue and that the two officials agreed on the need to fully implement the UNSC's sanctions resolutions. Asahi and Sankei quoted Kono as telling Tsogtbaatar at the outset of the

meeting that it is important to increase the pressure on the DPRK to the maximum extent in every way possible and that Japan is hoping for continued cooperation with Mongolia.

Senior GOJ official attends “Takeshima Day” ceremony

Asahi, Yomiuri, Nikkei, and Sankei wrote that Cabinet Office Parliamentary Vice Minister Yuhei Yamashita attended the 13th annual “Takeshima Day” ceremony held on Thursday in Matsue, Shimane. The prefecture designated Feb. 22 as “Takeshima Day” to reiterate Japan’s claim to sovereignty over the Liancourt Rocks, known as Takeshima in Japan and Dokdo in Korea. This was the sixth year for the GOJ to send a representative of Yamashita’s rank to the ceremony. Yamashita stated at the ceremony that it is regrettable that the islands are illegally occupied by South Korea and that Japan will be persistent in addressing the issue.

Meanwhile, South Korea’s Foreign Ministry issued on Thursday a spokesman’s statement calling on Japan to stop holding the annual ceremony. Calling the islets South Korea’s “inherent territory from a historic and geographical perspective, as well as in the eyes of international law,” the ministry insisted that “Japan immediately stop making the unjustified claim and demonstrate the attitude of a responsible country by looking squarely at history in a humble manner.” The ministry also summoned a minister-counselor of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul to lodge a protest.

South Korean minister criticizes comfort women accord

Asahi wrote that South Korea’s Minister of Gender Equality and Family Chung Hyun-back criticized the 2015 comfort women agreement with Japan by saying that the accord does not pay sufficient attention to the victims as President Moon has stated. The ROK minister made the statement at a session of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women that was held in Geneva on Thursday. However, Chung did not mention the possibility of revising the accord or dissolving the foundation that was set up to support former comfort women.

WTO rules against South Korea over Japanese seafood import ban

NHK reported this morning that the WTO has ruled against South Korea’s import ban on Japanese fishery products that was imposed after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster. The network said that Japan filed a complaint with a WTO dispute panel saying that South Korea’s import ban on fishery products from Fukushima and seven other prefectures since 2013 violates international trade rules. The network said the panel concluded that the ban was “arbitrary, or unjustifiably discriminatory, and limits trade more than necessary” and urged Seoul to take corrective action. The network said that although the GOJ welcomes the WTO ruling that recognizes all of Japan’s claims on major points, the current ban will continue until a final decision is made by a higher body if Seoul decides to file an appeal.

Japan, Russia discuss economic cooperation plans

Nikkei wrote that the governments of Japan and Russia held a working-group meeting at the Kantei on Thursday to discuss economic cooperation between their nations. The two governments agreed to focus on such issues as the use of IT to increase productivity and continue to discuss the details ahead of the summit meeting to be held between Prime Minister Abe and President Putin in St. Petersburg in May.

Japan to provide \$3 million for antiterrorism efforts in Africa

Mainichi wrote that Japan will provide about \$3 million for efforts to prevent terrorism at the borders of nations in West and Central Africa. Through the World Customs Organization, Japan plans to support border control by providing local customs authorities with equipment to detect chemical agents and devices that could be used for producing explosives. The paper wrote that the GOJ is considering providing the assistance to such nations as Nigeria, Chad, and Cameroon, where Boko Haram is active across borders.

ECONOMY

Keidanren chief says “Japan’s auto market is open”

Mainichi wrote that concerning President Trump’s expression of concern over the closed nature of the Japanese auto market in this year’s Economic Report of the President, Keidanren Chairman Sakakibara said at a news conference held in Nagoya on Thursday that Japan’s auto market is open because it has zero import duties on cars.

