



Morning Alert - Thursday, March 1, 2018

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HEADLINES

Morning news

All broadcasters led with reports on the heavy rain and strong winds mainly in eastern and northern Japan that disrupted some transportation services this morning.

All national dailies other than Sankei led with reports on Prime Minister Abe's decision to remove a proposal in the draft legislation to expand the application of the so-called discretionary labor system in which employees are paid based on a fixed number of hours instead of the actual hours worked. Sankei gave top coverage to the announcement by JR-West that a crack found in the undercarriage of an operating Shinkansen bullet train last December is believed to have been caused by the steel component being excessively ground down by Kawasaki Heavy Industries.

INTERNATIONAL

Ambassador Sasae comments on U.S.-Japan relations

Wednesday evening's Asahi reported on remarks made to the press in Washington on Tuesday by Japanese Ambassador to the U.S. Sasae, who will be leaving his current post this month. Looking back on his five years in office, Ambassador Sasae reportedly stated that the U.S.-Japan alliance has deepened and expanded and that major progress has been made in security cooperation between the two nations following Japan's enactment of new security legislation in 2015. The Japanese envoy reportedly added that the issue of the TPP, from which the United States has withdrawn, remains a challenge.

North Korea suspected of supplying materials for Syria's chemical weapons program

Asahi wrote that it has learned from a report written by a panel of experts who looked into North Korea's compliance with UN sanctions that the DPRK has shipped to Syria a large volume of supplies that could be used in the production of chemical weapons. The paper wrote that the UN report, which has not yet been publicly released, says that the experts investigated at least 40 shipments from North Korea to Syria between 2012 and 2017 and found that the shipped items included acid-resistant tiles, valves, thermometers, and stainless pipes. The paper also wrote that such trade may be providing Pyongyang with cash for its nuclear and missile programs.

In a related development, Yomiuri wrote that concerning the U.S. media's reports on North Korea's suspected link to Syria's chemical weapons program, State Department Spokesperson Nauert told a press briefing on Tuesday that this is something that the United States has had concerns about for some time and that North Korea will look for more "creative and horrific" ways to try to make money to fund the regime.

U.S., Japan, South Korea, Australia to discuss ship-to-ship transfers by DPRK

Mainichi and Tokyo Shimbun wrote that the governments of the United States, Japan, South Korea, and Australia are planning to hold a working-level meeting in Washington as early as the end of this week to discuss strengthened measures to monitor ship-to-ship transfers of goods involving North Korea. The papers wrote that the four nations have apparently invited Singapore and other nations to take part in the meeting.

U.S. Embassy Seoul Chargé Knapper comments on DPRK

Nikkei wrote from Seoul that Chargé d'Affaires Marc Knapper at the U.S. Embassy in Seoul reportedly told the South Korean media on Wednesday that there is no possibility of the United States further delaying its joint military exercises with South Korea that have been postponed until after the PyeongChang Paralympics. Nikkei quoted the Chargé as saying that it is necessary for the United States to take the necessary steps to maintain deterrence as an ally of South Korea.

Defense chiefs of Japan, Latvia agree to continue pressure on DPRK

Nikkei and Sankei wrote that Defense Minister Onodera held talks with visiting Latvian Defense Minister Bergmanis on Wednesday. The papers wrote that the two defense ministers confirmed the importance of continued international pressure on North Korea.

Japan sounds out China, South Korea on trilateral summit in Tokyo in May

Yomiuri wrote that the Japanese government has sounded out China and South Korea on the idea of holding a trilateral summit in Tokyo during the first half of May. The paper wrote that according to a GOJ source, although South Korea has expressed its intention to accept the proposal, China has not yet responded.

SCIENCE

New international guidelines for space exploration to be established

Yomiuri reported on the outline of the new international guidelines on space exploration that will be agreed upon at the 2nd International Space Exploration Forum to be held in Tokyo on March 3. Cabinet ministers and high-level representatives of space exploration organizations from about 50 nations, including the United States, Russia, China, and European nations, plan to participate in the event and issue a joint statement. According to Yomiuri, the guidelines include items on protecting space, promoting data sharing, and contributing to economic development.

SOCIETY

American man served with new warrant for disposing of woman's body

All national dailies wrote that the Hyogo prefectural police on Wednesday served a second warrant on an American man who is being held in custody in connection with the disappearance last month of a Japanese woman from Sanda, Hyogo Prefecture. The police suspect that the man dismembered and disposed of the woman's body parts. He was arrested previously for confining her in a vacation rental apartment in Osaka. The Hyogo prefectural police on Wednesday identified the severed body parts found at several locations in Osaka and Kyoto as those of the woman. According to the police, the suspect has said he will remain silent.

