



Morning Alert - Friday, March 2, 2018

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK gave top play to a report that severe blizzards are forecast for the Sea of Japan coast of Hokkaido. Fuji TV and TV Asahi reported on the heavy rain and strong wind that hit many parts of Japan yesterday. NTV led with reports that the GOJ is making final arrangements to present two-time Olympic gold medalist figure skater Yuzuru Hanyu with the People's Honor Award. TBS reported that Olympic wrestling champion Kaori Icho was allegedly harassed by her coach.

Top stories in national dailies included the Finance Ministry's suspected rewriting of a document related to a land deal involving the school operator Moritomo Gakuen (Asahi); a plan by the Labor Ministry to recommence discussions on the discretionary labor system at the Labor Policy Council (Mainichi); the GOJ plan to present figure skater Yuzuru Hanyu with the People's Honor Award (Yomiuri); a GOJ plan to support private firms' efforts to develop simultaneous interpretation systems using artificial intelligence (Nikkei); and South Korean President Moon's speech criticizing Japan over the comfort women and Takeshima issues (Sankei).

INTERNATIONAL

South Korea tells U.S. it will send envoy to North Korea

All national dailies reported on an announcement by the office of the president of South Korea that President Moon spoke by phone with President Trump on Thursday evening and indicated he plans to send a special envoy to North Korea in the near future in return for the DPRK having dispatched Kim Jong Un's sister Kim Yo Jong as part of Pyongyang's high-level delegation to the PyeongChang Olympics.

Yomiuri wrote that President Moon probably briefed President Trump on his meeting with Kim Yo Jong and told the U.S. leader that he is planning to send an envoy to North Korea to confirm Kim Jong Un's intention to invite President Moon to visit North Korea at an early date. Asahi and Nikkei speculated that the South Korean envoy will try to ascertain Kim Jong Un's intentions. Asahi also conjectured that the envoy will discuss the possibility of dialogue between the United States and the DPRK.

Yomiuri and Asahi, the nation's two largest papers, speculated that the U.S. and ROK leaders agreed to pursue the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula by taking advantage of the momentum for inter-Korean talks that was created through exchanges for the Olympics.

South Korean leader criticizes Japan over comfort women, Takeshima

All national dailies reported extensively on a speech delivered on Thursday by South Korean President Moon, in which he reportedly criticized Japan's position on the comfort women issue and the Liancourt Rocks, known as Takeshima in Japan and Dokdo in Korea. Asahi wrote that Moon is intensifying his criticism of Japan despite Prime Minister Abe's attendance at the Olympics opening ceremony. The paper wrote that disappointment is spreading within the GOJ over South Korea's repeated criticism of Japan.

U.S., Japan, others discuss ship-to-ship transfers by DPRK

Yomiuri wrote that it learned from a GOJ source on Thursday that the United States, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and other nations held a working-level meeting in Washington at the end of February to discuss strengthened measures to monitor North Korea's ship-to-ship transfers of petroleum and other products with other nations on the high seas. The paper speculated that the United States and Japan called for cooperation from the other participants in monitoring illicit trade involving the DPRK.

In a related development, Sankei wrote that Prime Minister Abe expressed Japan's intention to cooperate with the international community in preventing North Korea from engaging in ship-to-ship transfers in violation of UN sanctions resolutions.

U.S. diplomat in charge of North Korea to retire

Sankei reported on the planned retirement today of Special Representative for North Korean Policy Joseph Yun. The paper wrote that according to the State Department, Assistant Secretary-nominee Susan Thornton will temporarily take on Yun's duties. The paper also wrote that NSC Director for Korea Allison Hooker, who was included in the U.S. delegation to the closing ceremony for the PyeongChang Olympics, is a potential replacement for Yun. The paper wrote that the GOJ is taking a wait-and-see stance on Yun's retirement, quoting Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga as saying that the GOJ does not comment on the internal affairs of foreign governments. However, Sankei speculated

that Tokyo is watching for developments in the view that the retirement of Yun may have an impact on Washington's policy toward Pyongyang.

ECONOMY

President Trump says U.S. to impose tariffs on steel, aluminum imports

NHK reported this morning that President Trump announced on Thursday that he will formally decide as early as next week to impose tariffs of 25% on steel and 10% on aluminum based on Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act, invoking his presidential authority on the grounds that China's steel products have become a security threat to the U.S. The President reportedly said the tariffs will be in effect "for a long period of time." An NHK reporter opined that if a nation is allowed to invoke import restrictions for security reasons, it could provoke other nations to follow suit, adding that this could pose the risk of paralyzing the global economy.

USTR calls for Japan to open its market to American products

All national papers in their Thursday evening editions highlighted the 2018 Trade Policy Agenda report submitted to Congress by the USTR on Wednesday, with Yomiuri focusing on its reference to Japan. According to the world's largest paper, the USTR document underscored that the Trump administration is committed to achieving a fair and reciprocal trading relationship with Japan. It quoted the report as saying: "We will seek equal and reliable access for American exports to Japan's markets in order to address chronic trade barriers, imbalances, and deficits with Japan." Mainichi took up a reference to the TPP, quoting the report as saying that the Trump administration is hoping to engage with the five TPP countries with which the U.S. has not forged free trade agreements, including Japan.

SOCIETY

Abe announces GOJ plan to help increase number of female corporate executives

Nikkei wrote that Prime Minister Abe announced at an Upper House Budget Committee session on Thursday that the GOJ will state in its "corporate governance code" to be updated this spring a plan to help increase the number of female corporate executives. The premier reportedly said that the GOJ will urge listed companies to appoint at least one woman to their boards. Abe reportedly added that it is important to ensure the diversity of corporate boards.