



Morning Alert - Wednesday, March 7, 2018

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HEADLINES

Morning news

Most broadcasters and all papers gave prominent top play to reports that South Korea and North Korea are planning to hold a summit at the end of April for the first time in 11 years. Fuji TV led with a report on the allegations that Japanese wrestler Kaori Icho was harassed by her coach.

INTERNATIONAL

Inter-Korean summit to be held in late April

All national dailies reported heavily from Seoul on a press briefing given on Tuesday by one of the two senior South Korean officials who met with DPRK leader Kim Jong Un in Pyongyang on Monday. The official reportedly disclosed that Kim will travel to the "Peace House" on the South Korean side of Panmunjom in late April for a summit with President Moon. It will be the first inter-Korean summit in 11 years, with the two previous meetings having been held in the DPRK capital. According to the official, Kim expressed readiness to hold dialogue with the United States to discuss denuclearization and the normalization of diplomatic relations. He also reportedly promised not to carry out any nuclear tests, missile launches, or other provocations while the dialogue is underway.

As for denuclearization, Kim reportedly told the ROK emissaries that his country would have no reason to possess nuclear weapons if the military threat were removed and his regime received a security guarantee. He also reportedly showed understanding for the U.S. and South Korea's plan to hold their annual joint military exercises in April. The two South Korean envoys will visit Washington soon to brief Trump administration officials on their meeting with Kim Jong Un, and will travel to China, Russia, and Japan afterward to provide similar briefings.

U.S. cautious about inter-Korean accord

All national dailies took up a tweet by President Trump on the two Koreas' plan to hold a summit, quoting him as saying: "Possible progress being made in talks with North Korea. For the first time in many years, a serious effort is being made by all parties concerned. The World is watching and waiting! May be false hope, but the U.S. is ready to go hard in either direction!" The papers conjectured that Washington appears to be determined not to offer "rewards" to North Korea for its willingness to start dialogue, projecting that the maximum pressure campaign will continue for the foreseeable future. Yomiuri quoted an unnamed State Department official as saying: "We will coordinate closely with South Korea so that we can take a concerted approach toward North Korea, including the need to keep applying maximum pressure, in order to realize the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula." Before entering dialogue the Trump administration is reportedly set to carefully examine the planned inter-Korean summit. While noting that Washington's goal of achieving the complete and verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula remains unchanged, Asahi claimed that it is apparently making moves to hold preliminary contact with the Kim regime.

Japan skeptical of inter-Korean rapprochement

All national dailies wrote that the GOJ reacted cautiously to Kim Jong Un's alleged openness to denuclearization and the planned inter-Korean summit, with Defense Minister Onodera telling the press last night: "While hinting at denuclearization several times in the past, North Korea did not give up on its nuclear development in the end. It is necessary to carefully assess the situation to see whether this will lead to the relinquishment of its nuclear and missile programs." The GOJ reportedly suspects that North Korea may be simply trying to buy time to pursue nuclear and missile development while holding dialogue with the international community as it has in the past. The Abe administration is set to deepen coordination with the United States based on the assessment that North Korea has grown conciliatory on account of the maximum pressure campaign.

However, according to Yomiuri, the nation's largest paper, Tokyo is alarmed by the possibility of the Trump administration being tempted to cut a deal with North Korea. The paper said the GOJ is worried that the issue of North Korea's short- and medium-range missiles that are capable of reaching Japan will not be addressed in U.S.-DPRK dialogue. Nikkei wrote that the GOJ is concerned that the abduction issue may be left unaddressed if the U.S. chooses to give top priority to resolving the nuclear and missile standoff. The Abe administration is reportedly hoping that when Foreign Minister Kono visits Washington later this month, he will confirm with Secretary of State Tillerson and Defense Secretary Mattis that any meaningful dialogue must be premised upon a pledge by North Korea to denuclearize. According to the paper, the GOJ also plans to urge South Korea not to be taken in by North Korea's "smile diplomacy."

DPRK desperate to ensure regime survival

On the North Korean leader's renewed peace overtures, Sankei wrote that the Kim regime is desperate to ensure its survival by using inter-Korean reconciliation as a "shield" to protect it from the Trump administration's pressure campaign. Yomiuri said North Korea is stepping up its charm

offensive with the goal of ending its diplomatic and economic isolation in the international community. Nikkei said that Kim Jong Un has brought up denuclearization “out of desperation.”

Senior U.S. Navy official comments on China, North Korea

Asahi took up a press conference by U.S. Pacific Fleet Commander Swift in Tokyo on Tuesday, during which he criticized the “absence of transparency” in China’s defense budget. He urged Beijing to maintain “full transparency” when investing in defense hardware to avoid arousing suspicions among its neighbors. The admiral commented on the North Korean situation by saying that while diplomacy is the primary tool to defuse the tension, the U.S. military is “fully ready” in the event that the Trump administration decides to take military action. Nikkei also reported on the press event, highlighting Adm. Swift’s comment calling China’s economic activities in the Asia-Pacific region “coercive.” The admiral explained that Beijing tends to seek “returns” from recipients of its economic aid by citing their debt to China.

SECURITY

Part falls off a U.S. military plane

Mainichi, Nikkei, Sankei and the regional Tokyo Shimbun took up the disclosure by a GOJ source that an antenna-shaped component weighing about 1.4 kg fell off a Kadena-based F-15 in an unknown location in the morning of Feb. 27. Base mechanics reportedly discovered that the part was missing after the fighter returned to the installation. The dailies pointed out that the U.S. military did not notify the GOJ of the incident until March 5.

ECONOMY

Abe discusses U.S. metal tariffs with Australian, Canadian counterparts

All national dailies wrote that Prime Minister Abe held teleconferences with Australian Prime Minister Turnbull and Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau on Tuesday to discuss the proposed U.S. tariffs on metal imports. They also reportedly agreed on mutual cooperation to expand the regional free trade zone following the planned official signing in Santiago on Thursday of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership. Abe and Trudeau also discussed measures to crack down on illicit ship-to-ship transfers at sea involving DPRK vessels.