



Morning Alert - Thursday, March 8, 2018

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK gave top play to the forecast for heavy rain in most parts of Japan today and tomorrow. NTV led with reports on a press conference on Wednesday by Ichiro Suzuki on his return to the Seattle Mariners. TV Asahi led with a report that South Korea will send a special envoy to the U.S. today to brief officials on the meeting between the two Koreas. TBS reported on allegations that documents on the sale of state-owned land to Moritomo Gakuen were falsified by the Finance Ministry. Fuji TV led with a report that popular singer Saburo Kitajima's son has passed away at the age of 51.

Major front-page items in national papers included the ruling LDP's plan to make the existence of the SDF explicit by amending Article 9 of the Constitution, follow-up reports on the alleged tampering by the Finance Ministry of documents related to the sale of a state-owned land to Moritomo Gakuen, and the Financial Services Agency's plan to reprimand several cryptocurrency exchanges for inadequate consumer protection and anti-money laundering systems.

INTERNATIONAL

U.S. reportedly positive about communicating with North Korea

Yomiuri took up President Trump's remarks on Tuesday concerning the inter-Korean agreement to hold a summit between DPRK leader Kim Jong Un and ROK President Moon. During a joint press availability with the prime minister of Sweden, the President said: "The statements coming out of South Korea and North Korea have been very positive.... I think we're having very good dialogue." The paper speculated that Washington will examine how to proceed with dialogue with Pyongyang after receiving a briefing from the two South Korean envoys who met with Kim in the North Korean capital on Monday. Although distrust of the defiant regime runs deep in the Trump administration, it is reportedly now open to holding communications with the DPRK. The paper speculated that the

President might tap Secretary of State Tillerson or former U.S. Ambassador to the UN Bolton as his special envoy in charge of dialogue with North Korea.

Nikkei filed a similar story, projecting that instead of offering “carrots” to North Korea such as easing sanctions, the USG will press it to take concrete actions toward denuclearization. The paper quoted Vice President Pence as saying in a released statement: “The United States and our allies remain committed to applying maximum pressure on the Kim regime.... Our posture toward the regime will not change until we see credible, verifiable, and concrete steps toward denuclearization.” Mainichi claimed that many Trump administration officials are extremely skeptical of the Kim regime’s peace overtures in view of North Korea’s record of trampling on past nuclear agreements.

Japan to ask U.S. to proceed with caution on dialogue with DPRK

Yomiuri and Mainichi wrote that the GOJ is expected to ask the Trump administration not to rush into dialogue with North Korea based on the judgment that Pyongyang has not yet taken any concrete steps toward denuclearization. According to the papers, Foreign Minister Kono is likely to hold a teleconference with Secretary Tillerson today to call for a cautious approach.

Meanwhile, Nikkei highlighted remarks made on a TV show last night by Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Nishimura, who stressed that there will be “no dialogue or negotiations” unless North Korea first takes concrete actions, such as allowing the IAEA to inspect its nuclear facilities in Yongbyon.

In a related item, Sankei wrote that Prime Minister Abe on Tuesday night instructed his LDP diplomatic advisor Kawai, who is currently visiting Washington, to convey to USG officials Japan’s stance that North Korea must make clear a commitment on complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearization before entering dialogue with the United States. The daily said Tokyo is concerned that the Moon administration is being too hasty and conciliatory in establishing relations with the Kim regime.

U.S. helps South Korea draw up denuclearization roadmap for North Korea

Asahi claimed that the Trump administration has been involved in South Korea’s preparation of a denuclearization roadmap for North Korea, saying that the draft roadmap calls for Pyongyang to convey to Washington its intent to suspend nuclear and missile development as a condition for launching dialogue with the U.S. National Security Advisor McMaster has reportedly been holding discussions with Blue House officials to finalize the roadmap, including how to ensure the suspension and termination of North Korea’s ICBM development program.

Vast majority of Americans have favorable view of Japan

Sankei published the results of a Gallup poll pointing to American people’s strong affinity for Japan. Some 87% of Americans say they have a favorable view of Japan, slightly above last year’s previous

record-high rating of 85%. The pollster reportedly attributed the rise in Japan's popularity to Americans no longer being afraid of Japan's economy threatening their prosperity and recognizing Japan as a key ally of America.

Foreign Minister Kono to visit Southeast Asia

Yomiuri reported that arrangements are being made for Foreign Minister Kono to travel to Laos and Cambodia in early April, predicting that he is hoping to call for the two nations' understanding for Prime Minister Abe's diplomatic initiative of creating a "free and open Indo-Pacific." Kono is also expected to ask the nations to strictly enforce UN sanctions resolutions on North Korea.

SECURITY

GOJ takes issue with delayed notification of incident involving U.S. military plane

All national dailies except Nikkei reported today on an incident in which an antenna fell off a Kadena-based F-15 in an unknown location on Feb. 27, focusing on the fact that six days had elapsed before the U.S. military notified the GOJ. The dailies said the GOJ was displeased with the delay, with Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga saying yesterday that it was regrettable and that the government has asked the U.S. side to provide prompter notification, investigate the cause of the incident, and take measures to prevent a recurrence.

Mainichi quoted a USFJ public affairs officer as reportedly saying on Wednesday that it is highly likely that the antenna fell into the sea and posed no danger to people on land. The daily claimed that the USFJ explained to the Defense Ministry yesterday that it learned of the incident late because the Futenma mechanics who discovered that the part was missing did not promptly inform their unit. The USFJ reportedly learned of the incident on March 5 and notified MOFA on the same day via the U.S. Embassy.

USMC clarifies efforts to avoid flying over Futenma schools to the "greatest extent possible"

All papers except Sankei and Mainichi took up a press briefing held at MCAS Futenma on Wednesday concerning Osprey operations, during which base officials reportedly explained the U.S. military's policy of avoiding flying over educational institutions around the Marine installation "to the greatest extent possible." According to Asahi, Lt. Col. Garth Burnett, Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 262 Commanding Officer, said: "We will make efforts, but we cannot guarantee that there will be absolutely no flights.... The most important thing is safety. There are cases in which we have to fly over schools due to weather conditions or instructions from the airport control tower."

Nikkei said some 20 Japanese reporters were given a ride on two Ospreys on the same day, noting that they flew from MCAS Futenma to Iejima and back, a flight of about 30 minutes. The paper suspected that the press event was intended to underscore the safety of the tilt-rotor aircraft in view of lingering criticism that has been compounded by multiple mishaps and incidents.

ECONOMY

All dailies share concern on Cohn's planned departure

All of today's national papers gave prominent coverage to National Economic Council Director Gary Cohn's plan to step down in the near future, expressing concern about a potential rise of what they referred to as "protectionist sentiment" in the U.S. Nikkei claimed that Cohn decided to resign in protest of the President's steel tariff proposal, speculating that as a result of the departure of a "realist," the U.S. administration may be further inclined to embrace a protectionist approach. Yomiuri claimed that the President chose not to prioritize his "America First" doctrine in the run-up to the November midterm elections. While calling Cohn a "bulwark" against protectionism, Mainichi projected that his resignation may affect a possible decision by the U.S. to return to the TPP.

