



Morning Alert - Tuesday, March 20, 2018

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK led with a report on the finding that MEXT placed an inquiry with a middle school about the purpose and content of a lecture delivered there by former Vice Minister Maekawa last month. Maekawa accused Prime Minister Abe of favoritism last year in connection with the approval of a veterinary school. TBS and TV Asahi gave top play to reports on Diet deliberations held Monday on the Moritomo Gakuen scandal, with TV Asahi reporting that Finance Minister Aso stressed the responsibility of former Finance Bureau chief Sagawa. NTV and Fuji TV led with reports that Takayoshitoshi, a juryo-division sumo wrestler from the Takanohana stable, was pulled out of the ongoing Spring Grand Sumo Tournament after it was discovered that he assaulted a lower-ranked wrestler.

Top stories in national dailies included the document falsification scandal involving the Finance Ministry (Asahi, Yomiuri); the Education Ministry's inquiry about a lecture delivered by former Vice Minister Maekawa (Mainichi); the increasing power of Russian President Putin and Chinese President Xi (Nikkei); and Putin's overwhelming victory in the presidential election for a fourth term (Sankei).

INTERNATIONAL

Prime Minister Abe likely to visit U.S. in mid-April

Asahi wrote that it has learned from multiple GOJ sources that Prime Minister Abe's visit to the U.S. for talks with President Trump planned for early April will likely be delayed to accommodate the schedule of the U.S. side. Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga reportedly told the ruling coalition on Monday that the GOJ is making arrangements for the prime minister to visit the U.S. in mid-April. The paper quoted a senior Kantei official as saying that Abe's trip will take place later than originally

planned because of President Trump's schedule. Yomiuri and Sankei ran similar reports.

Prime Minister Abe welcomes Putin's reelection

Yomiuri, Nikkei, and Sankei wrote that Prime Minister Abe spoke by phone for 20 minutes with Russian President Putin on Monday, congratulating him on his reelection and calling for his cooperation in resolving the Northern Territories issue. The two leaders also agreed to cooperate on implementing joint economic activities in the Northern Territories and denuclearizing North Korea. Yomiuri wrote that the GOJ welcomes Putin's reelection to a fourth term in the hope that this will make it easier for the Russian leader to make a "political decision" on the Northern Territories because his political base has been strengthened.

Security advisers of U.S., Japan, ROK confirm close coordination against DPRK

Monday evening's Yomiuri and Mainichi wrote that the Office of the President of South Korea announced on Monday that National Security Advisor McMaster, Secretary General of the National Security Secretariat Yachi, and Director of the National Security Office of South Korea Chung held trilateral talks in San Francisco on March 17 and 18 and confirmed their nations' close coordination toward the denuclearization of North Korea. The papers wrote that the three officials agreed that it is important not to repeat "past failures" in dealing with the DPRK and that they will work closely in the run-up to the inter-Korean and U.S.-North Korean summits planned for the coming months.

SECURITY

Defense Minister Onodera holds talks with senior U.S. military officers

Yomiuri reported on Defense Minister Onodera's talks with Lt. Gen. Berger, Commander of the U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Pacific, and Gen. Brown, Commander of U.S. Army Pacific, at the Defense Ministry on Monday. The paper quoted Lt. Gen. Berger as saying that if diplomacy toward North Korea fails, there is a possibility that the military will have to respond. Mainichi ran a similar report.

Japan to deploy F-35Bs

Nikkei front-paged a report saying that the GOJ and the ruling coalition have decided to deploy F-35B stealth fighters. According to the paper, the GOJ will include the plan in the National Defense Program Outline, will be revised this year, and in the Mid-Term Defense Program. The GOJ will also study the idea of converting the Izumo helicopter carrier to an aircraft carrier to accommodate the F-35B and other fighters. But the paper wrote that whether the plan is consistent with Japan's exclusively defense-oriented policy will be a topic of debate.

MSDF patrol plane makes precautionary landing at Kadena

Sankei and Tokyo Shimbun wrote that a Maritime Self-Defense Force P-3C patrol plane made a precautionary landing at the Kadena AB at around 2:55 p.m. on Monday due to a possible oil leak in its hydraulic system. The plane was patrolling in the East China Sea after departing from the MSDF's Naha air base. No injuries were reported.

Americans file suit against TEPCO over radiation exposure from Fukushima plant

Asahi wrote that Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings (TEPCO) announced on Monday that 198 Americans who participated in the U.S. forces' Operation Tomodachi and claim to have been exposed to radiation from the nuclear accident at TEPCO's Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant recently filed a suit with two U.S. federal courts to seek the establishment of a compensation fund of at least \$1 billion. According to the paper, a similar suit was rejected by a federal court in California in January. Mainichi and Tokyo Shimbun ran similar stories.

