



Morning Alert - Thursday, March 22, 2018

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## HEADLINES

### Morning news

NHK, NTV, and Fuji TV gave top play to reports that 13 climbers who were unable to descend from Mount Mito in Okutama, Tokyo, due to heavy snowfall on Wednesday were rescued early this morning. TV Asahi reported on the snowfall in the Tokyo region on Wednesday. TBS led with a report on inquiries made by LDP lawmakers via MEXT with a middle school on the purpose and content of a lecture given to its students by former Vice Minister Maekawa last month.

Top stories in national dailies included survey results showing that 60% of local governments charge 6,000 yen or more per month for nursing-care insurance (Asahi); research results showing that at least 12 people with disabilities were forced to undergo sterilization without having legally mandated consultations to discuss its necessity (Mainichi); survey results showing that 24% of working parents in urban areas are unable to enroll their children in nursery schools due to a shortage of spaces (Yomiuri); a plan by six major life insurance firms to integrate their corporate pension businesses (Nikkei); and China's structural reform plans, including the idea of putting the coast guard under the control of the Navy (Sankei).

## INTERNATIONAL

### South Korean president indicates possibility of trilateral summit with U.S., DPRK

Thursday morning's Yomiuri wrote that South Korean President Moon reportedly expressed his intention to propose holding a trilateral summit with the United States and the DPRK if progress is made at separate talks to be held in the coming months between the North and South Korean leaders and between the U.S. and DPRK leaders. Mainichi, Nikkei, and Sankei also ran reports saying that Moon indicated the possibility of a three-way summit. Sankei quoted the ROK leader as saying that it is necessary to completely resolve the issues of denuclearizing and establishing peace

on the Korean Peninsula and that peace cannot be achieved through an inter-Korean agreement alone but requires the assurance of the United States.

### **Foreign Minister Kono discusses North Korea with Swedish counterpart**

Thursday morning's Nikkei wrote that Foreign Minister Kono spoke by phone with his Swedish counterpart Wallström on Wednesday to collect information about recent moves by North Korea. Wallström met with North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho in Stockholm last week.

### **Chinese, ROK leaders to visit Tokyo for trilateral summit in May**

Wednesday's Asahi asserted that the governments of Japan, China, and South Korea have reached a basic agreement to convene a trilateral summit in Tokyo in early May, saying that the Chinese premier and the ROK president will be visiting Japan for the first time since 2011. Chinese Premier Li told the press in Beijing on Tuesday that he is "proactively" considering making a formal visit to Japan in the first half of this year. Projecting that the North Korea issue will probably be the main item on the agenda, the daily said Li and South Korean President Moon are likely to also hold separate meetings with Prime Minister Abe. The paper added that the ROK president may visit Japan on a separate occasion in addition to the trip for the trilateral summit to play up bilateral coordination in dealing with the DPRK ahead of the proposed meeting between President Trump and DPRK leader Kim Jong Un.

In a related story, Wednesday's Mainichi wrote that Chinese Foreign Minister Wang will probably visit Japan in April and hold talks with Foreign Minister Kono and Secretary General Yachi of the National Security Secretariat to discuss bilateral relations and North Korea. The Abe administration was reportedly pleased that Wang was recently given the additional title of state counselor in charge of diplomatic affairs since the veteran diplomat is an expert on Japan.

### **Foreign Minister Kono holds talks with Russian counterpart**

All national dailies on Thursday morning reported on Foreign Minister Kono's meeting with his Russian counterpart Lavrov in Tokyo on Wednesday. Asahi and Yomiuri wrote that Lavrov stated at a joint news conference after the meeting that the United States' establishment of a missile defense system in Asia will have a direct impact on Russia's security, apparently referring to the Aegis Ashore system that Japan plans to procure from the United States. Yomiuri and Mainichi wrote that although the two officials agreed to expedite discussions on concrete ideas for joint economic activities in the Northern Territories, it remains to be seen whether the talks will make progress due to Moscow's security concerns. Sankei and Nikkei added that Japan and Russia confirmed they will work together toward their common goal of the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

### **Japan to request foreign vessels to report past visits to North Korea**

Thursday's Sankei front-paged a report claiming that the GOJ has decided to ask foreign vessels entering Japanese ports to report on whether they have visited North Korea in the past. The paper

wrote that the move is aimed at increasing the effectiveness of Japan's unilateral sanctions on the DPRK.

## **ECONOMY**

### **U.S. to decide on exemptions from steel tariffs by end of April**

Thursday morning's Yomiuri wrote that U.S. Trade Representative Lighthizer reportedly indicated at a hearing of the House Ways and Means Committee on Wednesday a plan to decide by the end of April which countries should be exempted from the steel and aluminum tariffs the Trump administration plans to impose on March 23. Sankei ran a similar report saying that although the U.S. official reportedly indicated the possibility of "several countries" being exempted, he did not specifically refer to Japan in his opening statement. In a related development, Nikkei wrote that USTR Lighthizer reportedly said during testimony to Congress on Wednesday that the U.S. government has expressed to Japan its hope to hold FTA negotiations with Tokyo.

### **Trade minister optimistic about exemption of Japanese metals from U.S. tariffs**

All Wednesday papers highlighted press remarks on Tuesday by Trade Minister Seko, who claimed that the chances are very high that Japanese steel and aluminum products will be spared from the tariffs that the Trump administration is set to impose. The GOJ official stressed that Japanese metals are "helpful for U.S. industry" and "cannot be readily replaced with alternative products." Nikkei, however, voiced concern that Tokyo may be pressed by Washington to make concessions on autos and agricultural trade in exchange for exemption from steel tariffs.

### **G20 finance ministers reconfirm need to combat protectionism**

All national dailies on Thursday morning reported on the meeting of G20 finance ministers and central bank governors that was held in Buenos Aires on Wednesday. According to the papers, the G20 nations adopted a joint communique in which they reconfirmed their commitment to "continue to combat protectionism" and recognized the need for "further dialogue and actions." They also agreed on the need for international regulation of operators of virtual currency trading platforms.

### **TPP11 to hold chief negotiators' meeting by summer**

Wednesday's Sankei front-paged a story claiming that the chief negotiators of the 11 member states of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership will hold a meeting in Tokyo by the summer with the goal of effectuating the regional free trade pact at an early date. The GOJ is willing to take on the secretariat function of the trade pact to work out the details for effectuation, such as a conflict settlement mechanism and rules for accepting new members.

### **Japan, China, ROK to begin FTA talks**

Wednesday's Mainichi took up a GOJ announcement on Tuesday that Japan, China, and South Korea will resume trilateral FTA talks in Seoul for two days beginning on Wednesday, saying that

attention is focused on whether the three partners will be able to deliver concrete progress amid what the daily referred to as the Trump administration's "inclination toward protectionism."

**SECURITY**

**Fishing resumed in lake near Misawa AB**

All Wednesday papers reported on the announcement of the resumption of clam fishing in a lake near Misawa AB where a USAF fighter jet jettisoned its fuel tanks last month since the Tohoku Defense Bureau has not identified any deterioration in water quality owing to the fuel leak. The local fishermen had suspended operations for about a month after the mishap occurred on Feb. 20.

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