



Morning Alert - Tuesday, March 27, 2018

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## HEADLINES

NHK, NTV, and TV Asahi led with reports saying that a train believed to be carrying North Korean leader Kim Jong Un or his sister arrived in Beijing on Monday. TBS and Fuji TV gave top play to reports that today former Financial Bureau chief Sagawa will give sworn testimony at the Diet over the Moritomo Gakuen scandal.

Major front-page items in national papers included the sworn testimony to be given today at the Diet by former Financial Bureau chief Sagawa, the Trump administration's decision to expel 60 Russian diplomats in response to the poisoning of a former Russian spy in the UK, and the approval by an Education Ministry-affiliated organization of several commercial English proficiency tests for colleges to use in screening applicants' English skills.

## INTERNATIONAL

### **PM Abe comments on summit with President Trump**

Yomiuri and Asahi highlighted remarks made at the Diet on Monday by Prime Minister Abe, who commented on his meeting with President Trump scheduled for next month by saying: "One of the major purposes of my U.S. trip is to convey that the abduction issue is extremely important for Japan.... Convincing North Korea to relinquish its medium-range missiles is also critically important for Japan. I would like to discuss this point as well." He went on to say that the U.S. and Japan will continue to closely align their policies toward the DPRK in the run-up to the inter-Korean and U.S.-DPRK summits. As for the U.S. decision to impose steep tariffs on metal imports, including Japanese products, the premier said: "I will decide whether or not to raise the issue while taking into account the progress made by relevant cabinet ministers.... As we take this matter very seriously, we will continue to make efforts to maximize Japan's national interests."

In a related story, Asahi reported on the disclosure by a MOFA source that in a meeting with Secretary of Defense Mattis in Washington on March 16, Foreign Minister Kono said that Tokyo attaches importance to the abduction issue and is willing to cover the initial costs for the IAEA to conduct onsite inspections of North Korean nuclear facilities if the Kim regime allows them.

### **Kim Jong Un might be visiting Beijing**

All dailies reported from Beijing on heavy security measures imposed around a major diplomatic conference facility and a government guesthouse in the Chinese capital on Monday, attributing it to the arrival on the same day from North Korea of a special train perhaps carrying either Kim Jong Un or his sister Kim Yo Jong. If the passenger in question turns out to be the DPRK leader, this will be his first foreign trip since he effectively assumed office in December 2011. The papers conjectured that the Kim regime may have decided to try to improve ties with the Chinese government ahead of the envisaged inter-Korean and U.S.-DPRK summits.

### **Russian Air Force uses Etorofu airport for training**

Asahi wrote that two Russian Su-35 fighters conducted a drill on Monday using the airport on Etorofu Island in the Northern Territories as a platform. This was apparently the first use of the airport by the Russian Air Force since the dual use of the airport, built in 2014, was announced in February.

## **ECONOMY**

### **Japanese business executives voice qualms about U.S. metal tariffs**

All national dailies reported on press remarks made on Monday by several leading Japanese businessmen on the Trump administration's adoption of new tariffs on steel and aluminum imports from selected countries including Japan. Keidanren Chairman Sakakibara said: "This will have a huge impact on steel trade around the world. If other nations choose to take countermeasures, the adverse effects may involve other industries. It could have an impact on the global economy." Japan Iron and Steel Federation Chairman Shindo said: "Nations that have responded positively to the conditions for exemptions set forth by the USG have been granted waivers. The metal tariffs are being used as an instrument for trade negotiations." Asahi wrote that Japanese business leaders will be paying close attention to the forthcoming negotiations between the GOJ and the USG since South Korea was exempted from the duties after it agreed to reduce steel exports to the American market.

### **U.S., South Korea agree to update bilateral FTA**

All dailies reported on a basic agreement reached between the USG and the ROK government on updating the KORUS FTA, noting that South Korea agreed to allow double the number of U.S.-made autos to be imported without being subject to local safety regulations at 50,000 per year. South Korea will also be subject to a quota of about 2.7 million tons of steel products a year, or about 74% of its exports in 2017.

Yomiuri speculated that the Trump administration may put more pressure on Japan by capitalizing on its success in obtaining trade concessions from Seoul. Sankei wrote that Japan may be drawn into bilateral FTA talks as a result of the Trump administration's policy of applying pressure by using the steel tariffs as a quid pro quo. A Kyodo article claimed that the GOJ was alarmed by the U.S.-ROK agreement as it signifies that U.S. trade partners are on the defensive in the face of the Trump administration's high-handed trade policies. While quoting a Japanese trade source as saying that Tokyo was surprised by the "quick" conclusion of the FTA review talks between Washington and Seoul, the news agency projected that USTR may now be able to shift its resources to focus on launching FTA talks with Japan.

### **Vietnamese leader voices hope for U.S. return to TPP**

Nikkei front-paged an interview with Vietnamese Prime Minister Phuc, who expressed hope that the U.S. will rejoin the TPP by saying: "The global economy would gain a great deal of momentum if the U.S. were to rejoin the TPP." Underscoring that free trade is a key engine for economic growth, the Vietnamese leader noted that the U.S.'s return to the regional trade liberalization framework would help stem rising protectionist sentiments around the world.

## **SECURITY**

### **GSDF Ospreys to be deployed in Kisarazu**

All national papers except Sankei wrote that the Defense Ministry is likely to station the five GSDF Ospreys to be delivered in FY2018 at Camp Kisarazu in Chiba Prefecture on a temporary basis given that the original plan to deploy them at Saga Airport has run into difficulties due to strong local opposition. Although the Kisarazu deployment is a stopgap measure, Mainichi expressed concern that the Ospreys will be remain there indefinitely.

## **EDUCATION**

### **Multiple private English exams approved for screening college applicants**

All papers reported that the National Center for University Entrance Examinations approved multiple English proficiency tests to be used by public universities to judge applicants' command of the language. The approved exams include TOEFL iBT; TOEIC L&R, S&W; GTEC; GTEC CBT; TEAP; TEAP CBT; STEP; IELTS, and Cambridge Assessment English. Although the Japan Association of National Universities has decided to replace the current standardized nationwide English test for college entrance with the approved exams administered by the private-sector service operators starting in FY2024, Yomiuri said the University of Tokyo has already indicated that it probably will not use the commercial exams to screen its applicants' English competence. The dailies added that since the private test administrators charge relatively high fees, some educators are worried that students from less affluent families may be put at a disadvantage.

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