



Morning Alert - Thursday, March 29, 2018

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK led with a report on the ongoing Diet session, focusing on debate on the Moritomo Gakuen scandal and on the enactment of the fiscal 2018 budget that amounts to 97.71 trillion yen. Fuji TV and TV Asahi led with a report on North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's surprise visit to China. NTV and TBS gave top play to reports that on Wednesday sumo stable master Takanohana apologized for his confrontation with the Japan Sumo Association over Harumafuji's assault on a junior sumo wrestler.

All national dailies gave top play to reports on Kim Jong Un's visit to China and his summit meeting with President Xi.

INTERNATIONAL

Kim Jong Un expresses willingness to denuclearize in talks with Chinese leader

All national dailies gave extensive coverage to reports on North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's surprise visit to China on April 25-28. The papers wrote that Kim reportedly expressed willingness to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula in his talks with Chinese President Xi, saying: "The issue of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula can be resolved if South Korea and the United States respond to our efforts with goodwill and take progressive and synchronous measures to achieve peace."

Asahi interpreted this remark as a warning to the Trump administration, which is calling for an immediate halt to the DPRK's nuclear development, by setting conditions for denuclearization. Yomiuri conjectured that Kim expressed his intention to call on the United States in the future to "remove the military threat to the DPRK," "assure the maintenance of the current regime," and

“gradually ease economic sanctions.” Mainichi interpreted Kim’s remark as calling for Washington to abandon its policy of maximum pressure. Nikkei wrote that although North Korea expressed willingness to “progressively denuclearize,” Pyongyang may use negotiations to buy time and that the improved Sino-DPRK relations could undermine the pressure campaign led by the United States and Japan.

Asahi wrote that the GOJ is concerned that the international pressure on North Korea might be eased even if Pyongyang fails to take concrete actions toward denuclearization and that Japan would be left behind amid North Korea’s moves to go ahead with dialogue with the United States, South Korea, and China. Speculating that it is difficult for Tokyo to move forward with dialogue with Pyongyang unless there is an assurance for progress in the abduction issue, the paper conjectured that Japan will seek North Korea’s cooperation toward a resolution of the issue by strengthening cooperation with the United States through the planned summit between Prime Minister Abe and President Trump and on other occasions. Nikkei wrote that Prime Minister Abe’s diplomatic strategy based on strong ties with Washington has faltered as Japan’s presence has diminished relative to the growing influence of the United States and China in dealing with the DPRK.

ECONOMY

Japan reiterates request for exemption from U.S. steel tariffs

Sankei wrote that Trade Minister Seko spoke by phone with USTR Lighthizer on Wednesday and expressed Japan’s displeasure with the U.S. tariffs on steel and aluminum imports and reiterated a request for an exemption. The paper wrote that the U.S. official briefed Seko on recent trade issues.

In a related development, Asahi and Nikkei reported on the Trump administration’s announcement on Tuesday of its agreement with South Korea on amendment of the United States-Republic of Korea Free Trade Agreement (KORUS FTA). Asahi wrote that the United States may call on Japan to hold negotiations on a bilateral FTA in exchange for exempting Japan from steel tariffs.

SECURITY

Transfer of U.S. carrier-borne jets to Iwakuni to be completed this week

Asahi wrote that the Commander of U.S. Naval Forces Japan announced on Wednesday that it will complete the transfer of two FA-18 fighter units with a total of 24 aircraft from Atsugi AB to Iwakuni by the end of this week. The paper wrote that these will be the last units to be transferred to Iwakuni and that the transfer of U.S. carrier-borne jets from Atsugi to Iwakuni will be completed ahead of schedule.

