



Morning Alert - Friday, March 30, 2018

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK and Fuji TV gave led with reports that Shohei Otani got a hit in the season opener in his debut with the Los Angeles Angels on Thursday. TBS led with a report that the inter-Korean summit will be held on April 27. NTV and TV Asahi gave top play to reports that stablemaster Takanohana was demoted two ranks by the Japan Sumo Association on Thursday for his absence from the spring sumo tournament and failure to supervise a wrestler from his stable.

Main front-page items in national dailies included an inter-Korean accord on convening a summit between President Moon and Kim Jong Un on April 27 and North Korea's alleged efforts to step up operations to collect intelligence on China.

INTERNATIONAL

Concerns about potential schism emerging between U.S., Japan

Asahi wrote that a rift may be emerging in what it described as the "political honeymoon" between the U.S. and Japan, highlighting President Trump's renewed criticism of Japan's trade surplus with the U.S. and the U.S.'s decision not to spare Japanese metals from the tariffs at least initially. Although the GOJ is reportedly confident that Prime Minister Abe has succeeded in forging a strong personal bond with the U.S. leader, the daily quoted an unnamed USG source as saying: "The time has passed that bilateral problems can be managed only through personal ties between the top leaders." The daily wondered if the premier will be able to confirm the same level of strong bilateral cooperation on North Korea at his likely upcoming summit at Mar-a-Lago this time as he did at the same venue a year ago. The daily opined that President Trump may view the summit as a chance to obtain concessions on the economic front ahead of the November mid-term election.

In a related story, the daily highlighted Japanese Ambassador to the U.S. Sugiyama's press conference in Washington on Wednesday, during which he said that "everybody would agree that North Korea will be a key topic in the upcoming U.S.-Japan summit." As for the Trump administration's metal tariffs, the Japanese envoy said: "They are extremely regrettable measures.... Various ideas must be pursued to resolve bilateral trade issues."

Mounting calls for Abe-Kim summit

Nikkei claimed that within the GOJ there are mounting calls for exploring a Japan-DPRK summit out of fear that Japan may be bypassed by DPRK leader Kim Jong Un's accelerated diplomatic outreach. Nikkei reports that some of these officials are apparently eager to arrange a summit between Prime Minister Abe and the DPRK leader in order to enable the scandal-hobbled premier to regain lost ground. While explaining that the prime minister and Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga have lately not ruled out the possibility of such a summit, the daily speculated that laying the ground work for a possible sit-down between the two leaders would not be so easy since channels of communication between Tokyo and Pyongyang are tenuous.

NHK carried a similar story, quoting an unnamed senior GOJ official as saying: "Holding a Japan-DPRK summit is important. We are working through various channels to that end." The network speculated that while closely following the planned U.S.-DPRK summit the GOJ is making behind-the-scenes arrangements with North Korea for a possible Japan-DPRK summit.

Korean leaders to meet on April 27

All papers reported extensively on yesterday's inter-Korean ministerial meeting at Panmunjom where the two sides formally agreed to convene a summit between DPRK leader Kim Jong Un and his counterpart Moon at the "Peace House" on April 27. It will be the third sit-down ever between the leaders of the two Koreas. However, the two sides were not able to reach a consensus on the agenda of what will be the first inter-Korean summit in 11 years.

Yomiuri said President Moon is keen to bring up the denuclearization, which the Kim regime is now reportedly willing to pursue to defuse the tension on the peninsula. Although Pyongyang has allegedly conveyed to the U.S. and China its readiness to move forward with denuclearization, the DPRK media has made no announcement that its leader is willing to denuclearize. The daily conjectured that even if the DPRK strongman voiced willingness to denuclearize during the inter-Korean summit, President Trump may not necessarily be convinced unless he hears direct from Kim Jong Un, adding that upon completion of his sit-down with his DPRK counterpart, Moon may choose to travel to Washington to brief the U.S. leader on his summit with Kim. Asahi said the DPRK appears wary of making denuclearization an official agenda item for the inter-Korean summit perhaps based on the judgment that the issue of its nuclear stockpile should be discussed primarily with the United States. The daily speculated that Pyongyang may demand Washington not to fly nuclear-armed strategic bombers over the Korean Peninsula in exchange for its denuclearization.

In a related development, Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga reportedly commented on the planned inter-Korean summit by telling the press yesterday: “We would like to take advantage of various opportunities, such as Prime Minister Abe’s scheduled trip to the U.S., to closely coordinate policies between the U.S., Japan, and South Korea with the goal of encouraging North Korea to take concrete actions through the inter-Korean and the U.S.-DPRK summits.”

Abe to meet with abductee families today

Sankei wrote that family members of the Japanese abductees are expected to meet with Prime Minister Abe today to ask that in the summit with President Trump the abductions be taken up without fail. Some family members are reportedly planning to visit Washington in late April to seek the Trump administration’s support for rescuing their loved ones.

Chinese Embassy official calls for efforts to resurrect Six-Party Talks

Nikkei took up a press conference on Thursday by a spokesperson of the Chinese Embassy in Tokyo in which the diplomat underscored that China and others should step up efforts to jumpstart the Six-Party Talks.

Atomic bombing exhibit in Los Alamos to be canceled

Yomiuri wrote that a proposed exhibit on atomic bombing that the municipal governments of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have been pursuing to convene in Los Alamos, New Mexico, next summer will be canceled since Los Alamos History Museum, their cosponsor, has decided not to go ahead with the idea on the grounds that it is difficult to obtain local understanding. While explaining that the then-executive director of the museum agreed to start discussions on such an event while visiting the two cities last August, the daily speculated that organizing an event calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons at Los Alamos might be controversial given that many residents still work at nuclear-related laboratories and facilities there.

ECONOMY

Japan braces for enhanced trade pressure by Trump administration

Yomiuri took up a teleconference on Wednesday between USTR Lighthizer and Trade Minister Seko, during which the U.S. official reportedly did not reply positively to Japan’s renewed request that its metals be exempted from the tariffs. The daily wrote that following the recent formal agreement between the U.S. and South Korea to update the KORUS FTA, the Japanese government is increasingly wary of the Trump administration’s trade policy of applying greater pressure on Tokyo to enter bilateral free trade talks.

Meanwhile, Yomiuri highlighted press remarks on Thursday by Chairman Okada of the Japan Aluminum Association, who criticized the U.S. metal tariffs by saying: “They will bring a radical change to the metal market and have an adverse effect on the world economy.” The businessman reportedly emphasized that U.S. aluminum consumers will be forced to pay higher prices since they

will probably not be able to find alternative supplies as high-quality products account for the bulk of U.S.-bound aluminum from Japan.

Safeguard on U.S. beef imports to be lifted next month

Asahi wrote that the safeguard restrictions on U.S. beef imports in place since last August will be removed on April 1, noting that the present 50% tariff will be reduced to the original 38.5%. Because the system itself designed to protect domestic products from a surge in foreign imports will be preserved, the daily projected that it may become a point of dispute with the United States.

SECURITY

U.S., Japanese defense chiefs to meet on April 20

NHK reported this morning that Defense Minister Onodera is making arrangements to visit Washington on April 20 for a meeting with Secretary of Defense Mattis on the same day. The network said the two defense chiefs are expected to exchange views on defense cooperation over North Korea's apparent moves toward denuclearization. The network speculated that they will also confirm continuation of the maximum pressure campaign on the North until it abandons its nuclear and missile development programs. The network added that Onodera is hoping to deepen the relationship of trust with Secretary Mattis and highlight the robust U.S.-Japan alliance.

