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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK gave top play to a report that the Defense Ministry disclosed on Monday the activity logs of GSDF troops in Iraq, saying that the troops operated in dangerous regions. All commercial networks led with reports that the Finance Ministry released on Monday a statement denying a tabloid report that Vice Minister Fukuda sexually harassed female reporters.

Most national dailies gave top play to the Defense Ministry's release yesterday of daily activity logs for GSDF logistical support operations in Iraq from 2004 through 2006, highlighting that some of the records described "combat" and "gunfire" in the vicinity of GSDF barracks even though Japanese personnel were only supposed to be deployed in "noncombat zones." Other main front-page items included high-level economic dialogue between Japan and China held in Tokyo on Monday, Vice Finance Minister Fukuda's denial of a sexual harassment allegation, and Niigata Governor Yoneyama's intention to resign ahead of the publication of a weekly magazine alleging his inappropriate involvement with a woman.

INTERNATIONAL

Defense issues to be addressed in U.S.-Japan summit

Nikkei projected that the Syria situation and other security issues will probably be brought up during Prime Minister Abe's summit with President Trump at Mar-a-Lago. The paper noted that Japan's security policy has gone through major shifts in the past in response to key developments in the region, such as the Gulf War in 1991 and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. On the latest airstrikes against Syria launched by the Trump administration, the paper wrote that while Japan voiced support for U.S. "resolve" to prevent the use of chemical weapons, the only thing the GOJ can do at this point is collect information. Pointing out that President Trump has been calling for Tokyo to

purchase more American defense equipment, the daily projected that the escalated tension in Syria may have an impact on Japan's security policy and defense budget.

Prime Minister Abe meets with top Chinese diplomat

All papers reported that visiting Chinese Foreign Minister Wang paid a courtesy call on Prime Minister Abe on Monday, during which they exchanged views on the Korean Peninsula situation. In response to the premier's call for bilateral cooperation to achieve North Korea's denuclearization, Wang reportedly underscored the importance of resolving the standoff through dialogue. The two officials agreed to further improve bilateral relations through a visit to Tokyo by Premier Li for a trilateral summit with South Korea on May 9. The top Chinese diplomat reportedly told the press afterward: "We consider Pyongyang's proposal to address its security concerns in a reasonable manner legitimate. It is important to move forward with denuclearization and a peace mechanism simultaneously."

Kim Jong Un asked Beijing for economic support

Asahi front-paged the disclosure by an informed source that when visiting Beijing for a summit with Chinese President Xi in late March, DPRK leader Kim Jong Un called for massive economic aid in a bid to improve his nation's impoverished economy. The daily stressed that it is uncertain whether the Chinese will respond positively to the request because economic aid could undermine international sanctions on the defiant regime. The DPRK leader also reportedly asked the Chinese leader to assure the security of his regime.

ECONOMY

Japan, China hold first high-level economic dialogue in eight years

All papers took up Monday's high-level economic dialogue held in Tokyo between Japan and China, during which the two sides confirmed the importance of strengthening free trade centering on the WTO mechanism amid rising concern about a global trade war as a result of the Trump administration's imposition of tariffs. During the first such dialogue in eight years, they agreed to accelerate discussions for a trilateral FTA with Seoul and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership initiative. The participants also agreed to provide government support for business tie-ups between the two nations' commercial enterprises that are interested in China's "One Belt, One Road" trade promotion initiative. The Japanese side reportedly asked the Chinese to take measures to prevent intellectual property infringement and address the oversupply of steel products. They agreed to hold economic dialogue regularly, with Foreign Minister Kono saying after the session that the next meeting will probably be held in Beijing next year.

The papers conjectured that the Chinese strongly called for the resumption of economic dialogue in a bid to play up stronger cooperation with Tokyo on the trade front with the goal of keeping the Trump administration's protectionist trade policy in check. Nikkei wrote that the GOJ agreed to the resumption despite opposition from some officials in order to draw attention to the Abe

administration's accomplishments in improving ties with Beijing amid rising public disapproval of the prime minister.

As for the "One Belt, One Road" initiative, Yomiuri wrote that Japan is not necessarily embracing it fully and will promote its "open and free Indo-China" strategy in cooperation with the U.S. to rein in the growing economic influence of China in the region. The papers said the Chinese side did not give any concrete response to Japan's request concerning the protection of intellectual property and the overproduction of metal products. Sankei wrote that the scope of trade coordination between Tokyo and Beijing is limited in the first place since Japan shares with the U.S. and Europe strong concerns about China's improper trade practices.

POLITICS

Ruling coalition worried about harassment scandal engulfing vice finance minister

All papers reported extensively on a statement released by the Finance Ministry yesterday dismissing an allegation published in a weekly magazine that Vice Finance Minister Fukuda had sexually harassed female journalists. While admitting that he used offensive language at private events, the top ministry official reportedly told internal investigators that he has never used such language with female journalists. The statement reportedly asked the alleged victims to come forward and testify to prove the allegation, adding that the vice minister is prepared to file a libel suit. According to the articles, the publisher, Shinchosha, dismissed the ministry's statement on the same day, emphasizing that it has full confidence in its reporting.

The dailies wrote that concern is mounting within the ruling coalition about whether the ministry is handling the latest scandal appropriately, especially at a time when public support for the Abe administration has been declining steadily due to the Moritomo Gakuen and Kake Gakuen scandals. Many ruling and opposition lawmakers are reportedly disturbed by the fact that the Finance Ministry asked female reporters to come forward based on the judgment that protecting the victims, including their privacy, is critical in dealing with sexual harassment. A consensus is reportedly emerging within the ruling coalition that Fukuda's swift resignation is necessary to prevent the further weakening of Prime Minister Abe's grip on power. Asahi conjectured that while the Kantei at one point had tried to relieve the vice minister of his duties, it decided not to do so at least for the time being out of deference to Finance Minister Aso, whose support seems to be essential in ensuring the administration's political viability.

Ruling coalition steps up support for its candidate in Okinawa mayoral race

Yomiuri reported that the ruling LDP and its junior partner the Komeito party are mobilizing personnel and other resources to campaign for the incumbent in Sunday's mayoral election in Okinawa City in a bid to defeat his rival, who is backed by Okinawa Governor Onaga. As its candidates have defeated Onaga-backed contestants in mayoral races in Nago and Ishigaki earlier

this year, the ruling coalition is reportedly determined to prevail in the latest “proxy war” between the Abe administration and the governor with the goal of moving forward with the FRF construction off Camp Schwab.

