



Morning Alert - Monday, May 7, 2018

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK gave top play to the forecast for heavy rain in western Japan. TBS led with a report on the evacuation of more than 1,700 people after the Kilauea Volcano erupted on Hawaii's Big Island. Other commercial networks gave top play to reports that pop group TOKIO's talent agency announced that it has terminated the contract of Tatsuya Yamaguchi, a member of the group who came under fire recently for kissing a high school student against her will.

No papers were published this morning due to a press holiday.

INTERNATIONAL

President Trump reportedly mentioned reducing U.S. troops in South Korea in summit with Abe

Saturday's Yomiuri front-paged the disclosure by several sources involved in U.S.-Japan relations that President Trump allegedly referred to the idea of reducing the U.S. military presence in South Korea during his Mar-a-Lago summit with Prime Minister Abe in April. In response, the premier reportedly expressed opposition to the idea by explaining that a substantial reduction would undermine U.S. military readiness for a possible Korean Peninsula contingency. The GOJ is reportedly alarmed by the possibility of the U.S. leader proposing the idea as a quid pro quo for concrete steps toward denuclearization in his planned summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

In a related development, all Sunday papers except Nikkei reported on a meeting between National Security Advisor Bolton and his ROK counterpart at the White House on Friday, during which they confirmed that there is "no plan to change the bilateral defense posture in South Korea." By doing so,

they dismissed a New York Times report claiming that President Trump has allegedly instructed the Pentagon to consider scaling back the U.S. military presence in South Korea.

Michael Pompeo sworn in as Secretary of State

Friday's Yomiuri, Asahi, and Sankei took up the swearing in ceremony of Michael Pompeo as Secretary of State held at the State Department on Wednesday, noting that President Trump visited the department for the first time to attend the ceremony. In reply to the President's statement that he has no doubt that Secretary Pompeo will make America proud, the Secretary was quoted as saying: "We will employ tough diplomacy when necessary to put the interests of the American people first.... I will make sure America is always a respected and principled leader on the world stage." As for North Korea, Secretary Pompeo said: "We are committed to the permanent, verifiable, irreversible dismantling of North Korea's weapons of mass destruction program." He called the planned summit between the President and Kim Jong Un an "unprecedented opportunity to change the course of history on the Korean Peninsula."

Asahi said State Department employees are enthusiastic about working for their new boss. Sankei's Washington bureau chief wrote that in leading the State Department, Secretary Pompeo may try to emulate Secretary Powell under the George W. Bush administration and Secretary Baker under the George H. W. Bush administration.

Japan anxious to highlight abductee issue ahead of U.S.-DPRK summit

All Saturday papers except Mainichi reported from New York that Abduction Issue Minister Kato and a group of family members of Japanese nationals abducted by North Korea met with the parents of Otto Warmbier on Thursday, noting that the Japanese group asked the American couple to work with them in addressing North Korea's gross violations of human rights. Asahi said that by arranging a session between the kin of the Japanese abductees and the Warmbiers, for whom President Trump has shown a great deal of sympathy over the loss of their son, the Japanese government is hoping the U.S. leader will address the issue of the Japanese victims during his upcoming summit with Kim Jong Un. The Warmbiers later attended a UN symposium on North Korea and said, "We have to stand up for Otto and for all the families" of the Japanese abductees.

In a related development, Yomiuri, Sankei, and Mainichi reported on a meeting at the White House on Friday between the abductees' families and NSC Senior Asia Director Pottinger, during which the Japanese families asked for U.S. help in bringing their loved ones home. Minister Kato accompanied them. The U.S. official reportedly said President Trump fully understands the importance of the matter and will raise it during the summit with Kim Jong Un. Sankei wrote that the family members have extremely high expectations for the U.S. leader to achieve a breakthrough in the decades-long struggle to rescue their kin. According to the articles, the family members made a similar plea to Under Secretary of State Shannon.

Influential U.S. lawmaker stresses need to maintain pressure on DPRK

Friday's Nikkei published an interview with Senator Gardner of Colorado, whom the daily referred to as a rising star of the Republican Party. He reportedly explained that Washington will continue the maximum pressure campaign against North Korea until denuclearization is confirmed. The senator reportedly said that the Kim regime must take concrete actions if it wants Washington to trust its commitment to denuclearization. Arguing that China bears a heavy responsibility for maintaining the international encirclement of the DPRK, the senator reportedly underscored that the Trump administration would not hesitate to impose additional sanctions on Beijing if it moved to strengthen its economic ties with Pyongyang in the absence of concrete steps toward denuclearization.

Abe, Xi agree to cooperate in addressing North Korea issue in first teleconference

All Saturday papers wrote that Prime Minister Abe and Chinese President Xi spoke by phone on Saturday for the first time ever and agreed to enhance cooperation and coordination for the denuclearization of North Korea and the resolution of the abduction issue. They also agreed to thoroughly implement UN sanctions on the DPRK and expand bilateral exchanges in a wide range of areas. Yomiuri said the first-ever teleconference between the leaders of the two nations signifies the rapid improvement of Sino-Japanese relations, adding that the premier was keen to learn about communications between Beijing and Pyongyang. Nikkei speculated that China is anxious to team up with Japan out of concern that peace may be achieved on the Korean Peninsula without its meaningful involvement amid the rapid rapprochement between North Korea and the U.S. and South Korea.

Leaders of Japan, China, ROK likely to support Panmunjom Declaration

Thursday's Mainichi projected that the leaders of Japan, China, and South Korea are expected to issue a special statement at their trilateral summit in Tokyo on May 9 embracing the inter-Korean Panmunjom Declaration that calls for converting the Korean War armistice to a peace treaty. By adopting a special statement on the declaration, the three nations are reportedly hoping to confirm China's commitment to officially ending the Korean War. With regard to the declaration's call for realizing a "nuclear-free Korean Peninsula through complete denuclearization," the daily forecast that the proposed joint statement will not use the phrase "complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearization."

In a related story, Sunday's Asahi noted that attention will be focused on whether the gap between Japan, which insists on maintaining maximum pressure on North Korea, and South Korea and China, which are flexible about easing sanctions given Kim's recent peace overtures, can be narrowed in the summit. The paper added that Prime Minister Abe is hoping that the trilateral summit will lead to a visit to Japan by Chinese President Xi.

Japan, China to resume currency swap arrangement

All Thursday papers reported that during the upcoming bilateral summit between Prime Minister Abe and Chinese Premier Li to be held on the margins of the trilateral summit with South Korea in Tokyo on May 9, the two leaders are likely to agree on resuming financial cooperation, including a currency swap arrangement in the event of an economic crisis. The previous agreement expired in September 2013 and has not been renewed.

Abe urges Israeli, Palestinian leaders to seek peace using U.S. as mediator

All Thursday papers reported on Prime Minister Abe's meetings with Palestinian Authority President Abbas on Tuesday and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu on Wednesday, during which the Japanese leader urged the conflicting parties to resume peace talks under U.S. mediation. In his talks with the Israeli premier, Abe reportedly said that "the U.S.'s engagement is essential." However, the Palestinians are reportedly skeptical of Washington's impartiality, with Abbas reportedly calling for a multilateral framework for achieving peace with the Israelis. Asahi wrote that Abe proposed the idea of holding quadrilateral talks between Israel, Palestine, Jordan, and Japan to support economic reconstruction in the West Bank. The daily added that the U.S. is negative about the Japanese proposal.

Nikkei said Abe was eager to make substantive contributions to peacebuilding in the Middle East with the goal of securing stable energy supplies and reining in international terrorism ahead of the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo. The paper added, however, that Japan is limited as to what it can do in the region because of the Trump administration's pro-Israeli stance. Pointing out that anti-American sentiment has deepened among the Palestinians following the Trump administration's decision to move the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem, Yomiuri quoted an unnamed senior MOFA official as saying: "The political honeymoon between President Trump and Prime Minister Abe is not necessarily good for Japan's diplomacy in the Middle East."

Hitachi asks UK to present steps to support construction of nuclear plants

Thursday's Asahi reported that Hitachi has been calling for the British government to come up with a package of measures by the end of May to help it build two nuclear reactors on Anglesey, an island off northwest Wales, as planned based on the judgment that the nuclear plant export initiative will falter without financial support from the British government. The construction costs for the project have reportedly more than doubled due to the stronger nuclear safety regulations put in place following the Fukushima nuclear accident seven years ago.

In a related development, all national papers reported either on Friday or Saturday that Hitachi Chairman Nakanishi met with British Prime Minister May on Thursday and asked for financial support in order to move forward with the nuclear plant construction.

SECURITY

Lockheed sounds out Japan on jointly producing F-22 variant

Friday's Nikkei claimed in its lead story that Lockheed-Martin has proposed to the Japanese government the idea of jointly producing a new fighter that the Defense Ministry plans to introduce in around 2030 as the successor to the ASDF's aging F-2s, noting that the U.S. defense contractor has suggested that the new model could be a hybrid of the F-22 and the F-35. While noting that the Defense Ministry has been hoping to introduce a purely domestically produced aircraft as the F-2's successor, the article projected that it will be difficult for Tokyo to reject the offer because of the importance of maintaining a solid alliance with the U.S. amid the harsh security environment in East Asia. The paper added that the involvement of Japanese defense contractors will hold the key to the success of the proposed joint project.

SDF to be allowed to counter cyberattacks

Thursday's Yomiuri led with a GOJ policy of equipping the SDF with capabilities to counter cyberattacks by allowing it to stage DDoS (distributed denial of service) attacks against enemy computer servers. Such operations would be carried out only if the enemy also launched a physical attack on Japan using weapons since cyberattacks are often launched while hijacking the servers of innocent third parties. The new policy will be included in the National Defense Program Guidelines to be updated by the end of this year. The daily pointed out that the SDF is facing a serious shortage of personnel in this field, adding that more effective measures possibly using "malware" may need to be adopted in deterring and countering the growing threat of cyberattacks.

SDF to reinforce Djibouti installation

Sunday's Mainichi wrote that the GOJ is mulling upgrading the SDF camp in Djibouti for use as a platform for operations to protect Japanese citizens abroad and conduct international humanitarian support. The GOJ is looking into building additional barracks and warehouses at the installation where some 170 SDF personnel are currently stationed to engage in international anti-piracy missions. The idea will be formally taken up when the National Defense Program Guidelines are updated in December.

ECONOMY

U.S. cabinet members comment on TPP

Thursday's Mainichi reported on a speech in Washington on Tuesday by USTR Lighthizer, in which he commented on future trade talks with Japan. Noting that bilateral negotiations are more effective than returning to the TPP, the top U.S. trade official reportedly expressed hope to start FTA talks with Tokyo at some point. Yomiuri took up a speech by Commerce Secretary Ross in Los Angeles on Tuesday, in which he indicated that it is unlikely that the U.S. will return to the TPP any time soon since the Trump administration needs to focus on NAFTA renegotiations and trade talks with China. The commerce chief reportedly told a TV network on the same day that the TPP is "defective."

AMBASSADOR

Ambassador Hagerty tries his hand at Japanese calligraphy

Thursday's Sankei reported on page 19 that Ambassador Hagerty tried his hand at Japanese calligraphy at his residence on Wednesday, noting that his work will be exhibited at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum in Ueno this summer along with that of the ambassadors of Germany, France, and some 15 other nations. Joined by his wife and two daughters, the Ambassador received guidance from a calligraphy master in writing the Japanese character for "friend."

