



Morning Alert - Tuesday, May 29, 2018

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## HEADLINES

### Morning news

NHK gave top play to a report that a high-ranking North Korean official who has been referred to as Kim Jong Un's "butler" arrived in Singapore on Monday, saying that he is expected to meet with U.S. officials to discuss plans for a U.S.-DPRK summit. NTV and Fuji TV led with reports that a man wielding a knife was shot by police and pronounced dead at the hospital on Monday after attacking a man and a police officer in Kumamoto. TBS and TV Asahi gave top play to reports on the scandal involving Nihon University's American football team.

Major front-page stories in national dailies included intense debate on the Moritomo and Kake Gakuen scandals held at the Diet on Monday, a GOJ plan to establish an inter-agency post tasked with overseeing the management of public documents and records, and the diplomatic negotiations underway between the U.S. and South Korea on the possibility of arranging a summit between President Trump and Kim Jong Un in Singapore on June 12.

## INTERNATIONAL

### U.S., Japan to hold summit prior to U.S.-DPRK meeting

All Tuesday papers reported on a teleconference held on Monday night between President Trump and Prime Minister Abe, during which they agreed to meet ahead of a possible summit between the U.S. leader and DPRK leader Kim Jong Un in Singapore on June 12. The papers said the time and location of the U.S.-Japan meeting will reportedly be arranged later, but it might be held in Canada as the two officials are expected to attend the annual G7 summit there on June 8-9, or in Washington. According to the articles, the prime minister mentioned that he had met with the families of the Japanese abductees earlier in the day and told the President: "It is absolutely necessary to resolve the abduction issue." President Trump reportedly expressed his understanding.

The premier told the press afterward: “We agreed to cooperate to make the U.S.-North Korea summit a meaningful one through close bilateral coordination and based on our shared policies.” Mainichi wrote on Sunday that although the premier had already been making arrangements to meet with the President on the sidelines of the G7 summit, he apparently decided that it is important to meet with him as soon as possible and confirm close bilateral cooperation in view of several countries’ active moves to hold the first-ever U.S.-DPRK summit on June 12.

As for Abe’s meeting with the abductees’ families yesterday, today’s Sankei quoted the prime minister as saying during the session that he will need to hold a summit with Kim Jong Un to reach a final settlement of the matter. Abe also explained that when meeting with President Trump prior to a possible Singapore summit, he will urge the U.S. leader to bring up the subject without fail if he meets with the DPRK leader.

### **U.S., North Korean leaders may hold summit on June 12 after all**

All Monday morning papers reported that President Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un are apparently eager to hold a summit on June 12 in Singapore as originally planned. Mainichi said that following a surprise meeting between Kim Jong Un and South Korean President Moon Jae-in on Saturday, the process for holding the U.S.-DPRK summit seems to be back on track. The paper speculated, however, that realizing the summit will be difficult since the U.S. and North Korea have not completely agreed on the process of denuclearization or the security of the regime.

Yomiuri wrote that President Moon told reporters after his meeting with Kim Jong Un on Saturday that the North Korean leader reiterated his commitment to “complete denuclearization” and said he was willing to hold working-level meetings with the U.S. to realize a summit on June 12. Meanwhile, the paper said President Moon also acknowledged that although the leaders of the U.S. and North Korea share the same view on denuclearization, discussions on the roadmap for denuclearization will be necessary. The daily said that the working-level meetings between the U.S. and DPRK will focus on whether an agreement will be reached between the U.S., which is calling for immediate and complete denuclearization, and North Korea, which is hoping for a regime guarantee and rewards for phased denuclearization.

### **Senior USG officials enter North Korea for talks**

Monday’s Asahi, Yomiuri, Nikkei, and Mainichi reported that according to the Washington Post, a U.S. delegation led by former U.S. ambassador to South Korea Sung Kim crossed the DMZ and entered North Korea on Sunday for talks to prepare for a U.S.-DPRK summit. Yomiuri wrote that North Korean Vice Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui is participating in the talks from the North Korean side, and they will continue until Monday or Tuesday. The paper wrote that the White House has also sent an advance team to Singapore for preparatory talks with North Korea.

### **Kono considering visit to Singapore**

Today's Yomiuri front-paged a speculative piece saying that Foreign Minister Kono is looking to visit Malaysia and Singapore on June 8-9 and that he may extend his stay to hold talks with Secretary of State Pompeo if President Trump meets with Kim Jong Un on June 12 as originally scheduled. In talks with his two East Asian counterparts, the top Japanese diplomat is expected to confirm mutual cooperation for realizing the denuclearization of North Korea. Asahi and Sankei ran similar articles.

In a related story, Monday's Asahi reported that Kono told reporters in Yamagata when asked about the inter-Korean summit on Saturday: "The international community will remain calm and continue to impose maximum pressure on North Korea. Nothing will change until North Korea completes denuclearization." Kono also said in a speech in Yamagata that he has doubts about North Korea's dismantlement of its nuclear test site on May 24 because no experts were invited to attend.

### **PM Abe, President Putin agree to support U.S.-DPRK summit**

All Sunday and Monday morning papers reported on a summit followed by a joint press conference held by Prime Minister Abe and Russian President Putin in the Kremlin on Saturday evening, saying that the two leaders agreed to work closely to support North Korea's denuclearization and a U.S.-DPRK summit. The two leaders also reportedly agreed to dispatch this summer a taskforce to the Northern Territories to look into joint economic activities.

Asahi quoted PM Abe as saying at the press conference: "If Japan and Russia cooperate, we can do great work that serves each other's interests. That is where we can find a resolution that is acceptable to both sides." The paper added, however, that practically no progress was made on the territorial issue, saying that although Japan wanted to announce the launch of sea urchin farming and greenhouse strawberry cultivation in the Northern Territories, it failed to do so and no progress was made on creating a special system needed to launch joint economic activities, including cracking down on illegal business activities on the islands.

Sankei wrote that Prime Minister Abe focused on deepening his relationship of trust with President Putin in order to ultimately conclude a peace treaty, given that trust will be essential in resolving issues associated with North Korea, including the abduction of Japanese nationals, and in eventually making progress on the territorial issue.

### **Leaders of Japan, France agree to maintain pressure on North Korea**

Saturday morning's Nikkei reported that Prime Minister Abe met over lunch with French President Macron in St. Petersburg on Saturday, saying that the two leaders agreed to maintain pressure on North Korea in order to persuade it to abolish its nuclear weapons and ballistic weapons in a complete, verifiable, and irreversible manner. The daily said PM Abe expressed support for the Iran nuclear deal and confirmed close cooperation with France.

### **Poll: 68% say Japan should hold summit with DPRK**

Nikkei reported on Monday that according to its opinion poll, 68% of respondents said Prime Minister Abe should hold a summit with Chairman Kim Jong Un, while 23% said he should not. Regarding President Trump's announcement of the cancellation of the U.S.-DPRK summit, 49% of respondents welcomed it and 33% did not.

### **Japan protests ROK politician's trip to disputed outcrops**

All Tuesday morning dailies wrote that MOFA has filed a protest with the ROK government over a visit to Takeshima (also known as the Liancourt Rocks and Dokdo) by a South Korean parliamentarian on May 23 to honor troops stationed there. The GOJ reportedly conveyed to the ROK government that the lawmaker's island visit was very regrettable.

### **Former Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui to visit to Okinawa**

Sunday morning's Sankei reported that several sources disclosed that Taiwan's former President Lee Teng-hui is making arrangements to visit Okinawa from June 22 to 26. The paper said Lee is expected to attend the unveiling of a memorial for Taiwanese soldiers who were killed in the Battle of Okinawa and also deliver a speech. The paper said this is the first time in about two years for the former Taiwanese leader to visit Japan.

### **Vietnamese leader stresses close cooperation with Japan**

Sunday's Asahi reported that Vietnamese President Tran Dai Quang, who will make an official visit to Japan from May 29, told the daily and other media outlets on Friday that he "supports Japan's active role in maintaining stability and prosperity in the region" in relation to Vietnam's territorial conflict with China in the South China Sea. The Vietnamese leader also reportedly said: "Japan and Vietnam are in agreement on ensuring freedom of navigation in the South China Sea and the importance of peaceful resolution of conflicts."

## **SECURITY**

### **U.S. warships sail near South China Sea islands claimed by China**

Sunday's Asahi, Nikkei, and Sankei reported on a Reuters story saying that according to USG officials, two U.S. warships sailed near the Paracel Islands in the South China Sea, which are claimed by China, on Sunday. Asahi wrote that this was part of the U.S. military's "freedom of navigation" operations, adding that the USS Higgins, a guided-missile destroyer, and the USS Antietam, a guided-missile cruiser, came within 12 nautical miles of the Paracel Islands. The papers added that the Pentagon disclosed on May 23 that it canceled its invitation to China to the annual Rim of the Pacific Exercise (RIMPAC) to protest China's rapid construction of military outposts in the South China Sea. Meanwhile, the Chinese Defense Ministry reportedly released a statement saying: "The provocation by the U.S. ships hurt the trust of both the Chinese and U.S. forces. China adamantly opposes it." Today's Nikkei opined that the latest freedom of navigation operation was part of the Trump administration's policy of applying stronger pressure on Beijing on multiple fronts, including trade and North Korea.

## **Japan to decide on development plan for F-2 successor by year-end**

Sunday's Sankei reported that several GOJ sources disclosed on Saturday that the Ministry of Defense is planning to draft a Japan-led international joint development plan for a fighter jet to replace Japan's F-2 as early as this fall. The paper wrote that the Defense Ministry will compare the new plan with a plan to jointly develop fighter jets with U.S. firms and a plan to import existing models, and make a final decision by the end of this year.

### **ECONOMY**

## **Abe comments on U.S. idea to raise auto import tariffs**

This morning's Sankei took up remarks made at the parliament on Monday by Prime Minister Abe, who commented on President Trump's proposal on increasing tariffs on imported vehicles by saying: "Japanese automakers have made considerable contributions to the U.S. economy by creating high-quality employment in America. The GOJ plans to urge U.S. officials to gain an accurate understanding of the situation.... We will be paying close attention so as to prevent this from having adverse effects on Japan."

## **Japanese trading companies to increase LNG production capacity by 60%**

Saturday morning's Nikkei gave top-page play to a report that Japan's six major general trading companies, including Mitsubishi Corporation and Mitsui & Co. Ltd., will increase their LNG production capacity by 60% by 2020, from the current 16 million tons to 26 million tons combined. The paper said the companies will also expand imports of U.S. shale gas to Japan, adding that the increase could help to ease pressure from the U.S. amid the Trump administration's calls for reducing the U.S. trade deficit with Japan. The daily added that several major LNG production sites are located in the U.S., including a facility to produce LNG from shale gas currently under construction in Cameron, Louisiana.

## **Japan's gross external assets exceed 1,000 trillion yen**

Saturday morning's Sankei reported that the Finance Ministry announced on Friday that Japan's net value of assets held by the government, businesses, and individuals stood at about 328 trillion yen (\$3 trillion) at the end of 2017, down 2.3% from the year before, saying, however, that Japan remained the biggest creditor nation for the 27th straight year. The paper added that Japan's gross external assets rose 2.7 percent to a record 1,012 trillion yen due mainly to the increase in Japan's foreign direct investment (FDI). The paper said Japan's FDI in the U.S. rose 4.5% to a record 55 trillion yen at the end of 2017, adding that this was partly due to increased investment in the U.S. by Japanese automakers and other firms as a result of President Trump's calls for FDI.

### **POLITICS**

## **Public approval for Abe cabinet drops slightly to 42%**

Monday's Nikkei reported that public support for the Abe cabinet was 42%, down 1 point from last month, in the latest Nikkei/TV Tokyo survey conducted on May 25 to 27. Nonsupport reached the highest level since the launch of the second Abe cabinet in 2012 at 53%, up 2 points from last month. About 74% of respondents said they were not convinced by PM Abe's denial of involvement in the Kake Gakuen scandal, while 16% said they were. In addition, 50% of respondents who support the cabinet said they were not satisfied with the premier's explanation, while 33% said they were. On the issue of document tampering related to the controversial sale of state-owned land to Moritomo Gakuen, 68% said the prime minister bears responsibility, while 23% said he does not.

Mainichi also reported on the results of its weekend poll, which showed that 31% of respondents, up 1 point from last month, expressed approval of the Abe cabinet, while 48%, down 1 point, expressed disapproval. On the Kake Gakuen scandal, 70% said they cannot trust the premier's explanation, while 14% said they can.

### **Diet session likely to be extended through early July**

This morning's Yomiuri and Asahi projected that the Abe administration and the ruling coalition are likely to extend the present Diet session by as long as three weeks through early July so as to ensure the enactment of key bills, including legislation on casino implementation and work-style reforms.

### **Former PM Nakasone turns 100**

All weekend papers reported that former Prime Minister Nakasone turned 100 on Sunday. Nakasone reportedly released a statement on Sunday, saying: "I have lived in the eras of Taisho, Showa, and Heisei, and a new era will begin next year. I am filled with deep emotion about having lived in four eras." Nikkei wrote that Nakasone will become the second prime minister to live to the age of 100, after Naruhiko Higashikuninomiya, who died in 1990 at the age of 102. Nakasone also reportedly expressed hope in the statement that both the ruling and opposition parties will seek to revise the Constitution.