



Morning Alert - Monday, June 4, 2018

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK gave top play to a report that Kim Yong Chol, the high-ranking North Korean official who has been visiting the U.S., will return to North Korea as early as today. NTV led with a report that President Trump told reporters that the U.S.-DPRK summit will be held in Singapore on June 12 as originally planned. TBS gave top play to updates on the scandal involving Nihon University's American football team. Fuji TV and TV Asahi reported on follow-up reports on the sudden death of a well-known real estate mogul in Wakayama.

Major front-page items in national papers included the conclusion of the G7 financial ministerial meeting in Whistler, Canada, on Saturday and the defense ministerial meeting between the U.S., Japan, and South Korean held in Singapore yesterday.

INTERNATIONAL

U.S.-DPRK summit to be held on June 12

All Saturday evening papers led with President Trump's announcement on Friday that he will meet with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in Singapore on June 12 as originally scheduled. The President reportedly decided to go ahead with the historic sit-down after meeting with Kim Yong Chol, the North Korean leader's right-hand man, at the White House. The dailies claimed that in deciding to hold the summit, the President has apparently moderated his stance on North Korea, highlighting his remark that he no longer wants to use the term "maximum pressure." Nikkei said that the President's remarks made after meeting with Kim Yong Chol reflect his strong desire to make history through the denuclearization of North Korea. Mainichi pointed out that the DPRK official was invited into the Oval Office and then seen off by the President upon leaving the White House.

Noting that there is still a considerable gap between the two nations over the speed and scope of denuclearization, the dailies said the President indicated that he will probably hold more than one summit with the North Korean leader. Japanese press took this to mean that the President may allow North Korea to take a phased approach to relinquishing its nuclear and missile programs.

Sunday papers projected that a concrete roadmap toward “complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearization” probably will not be agreed upon in the Singapore session, highlighting the President’s statement that the Singapore meeting will be “a get-to-know-you kind of situation” and the beginning of “a process.” Asahi speculated that the President may be eager to call attention to the diplomatic feat of successfully obtaining a commitment from North Korea on denuclearization, which his predecessors failed to achieve. The daily expressed qualms about the maximum pressure campaign possibly being disrupted since the President has apparently dropped his pledge to apply “maximum pressure” on the Kim regime.

Yomiuri speculated that the President has perhaps come to recognize the need to hold several rounds of talks with the North Korean leader in order to “build confidence” with him. The paper construed the Singapore meeting as an opportunity for the two leaders to reduce the mutual hostility. It also conjectured that a second meeting between the President and Kim Jong Un could be convened at the DMZ on July 27 to mark the 65th anniversary of the signing of the Korean War armistice, possibly with South Korean President Moon in attendance.

Abe comments on U.S.-DPRK summit

All Sunday papers reported on remarks made on Saturday during an LDP meeting in Shiga Prefecture by Prime Minister Abe, who commented on President Trump’s latest decision to hold a summit with North Korea leader Kim Jong Un in Singapore by saying: “Japan intends to do its utmost to ensure that progress is made during the historic U.S.-DPRK summit on nuclear and missile development, as well as the abduction issue, which is more important than anything else.” He went on to say: “Japan will never tolerate a nuclear-armed North Korea. We will step up the pressure.”

Japan apprehensive about President Trump adopting conciliatory tone

All Sunday dailies wrote that the GOJ is reportedly worried that President Trump might be so eager to hold a summit with Kim Jong Un that he will be tempted to ease the pressure on North Korea ahead of its denuclearization. Yomiuri wrote that Japan is allegedly alarmed by the possibility that it will be forced to foot the bill for economic assistance to North Korea in the absence of substantial progress on the abduction issue. Nikkei said Japan is apparently desperate to maintain the maximum pressure campaign, projecting that Prime Minister Abe is set to ask President Trump not to ease the pressure on the DPRK when they hold a summit at the White House on Thursday. The daily claimed that the GOJ has already asked the USG to have the President make a stopover at

Yokota AB on his way home from Singapore so that the President can brief PM Abe on the outcome of the talks in person.

Mainichi opined that “daylight” has emerged between Tokyo and Washington because President Trump seems inclined to allow North Korea to take a phased approach toward denuclearization. The national daily conjectured that since the U.S. leader appears to be taking a more conciliatory line toward the DPRK ahead of the Singapore summit, the GOJ is looking to coordinate with hardliners in the Trump administration, such as National Security Advisor Bolton, to remind the President that easing sanctions could hamper denuclearization. Sankei argued that giving too much consideration to North Korea could backfire by allowing it to put off denuclearization indefinitely, adding that the U.S. leader should terminate nuclear negotiations without delay if the DPRK is found to be procrastinating.

Today's Yomiuri ran a prominent inside-page story on mounting concern within the GOJ about whether President Trump will firmly address the abduction issue during his talks with Kim Jong Un in Singapore next week. The fact that the President did not bring up the human rights issue during his meeting at the White House on Friday with Kim Yong Chol has reportedly alarmed GOJ officials, with a source involved in U.S.-Japan diplomacy saying: “I was frankly surprised by the fact that the President stated clearly that he did not talk about human rights. It is necessary to remind the Trump administration of the importance of the abduction issue.” The article predicted that PM Abe will take up the subject during his summit with the President later this week and that Foreign Minister Kono will probably do the same if he meets with Secretary Pompeo in Washington on Wednesday.

Abe to propose launching multilateral talks on DPRK denuclearization

Saturday morning's Mainichi reported on the disclosure by several GOJ sources that when meeting with President Trump at the White House on June 7, Prime Minister Abe is likely to propose the establishment of a multilateral framework for realizing the denuclearization of North Korea in the event that the U.S. leader strikes a nuclear deal with Kim Jong Un in Singapore. The participants are expected to conduct coordination on sharing the cost of the IAEA's verification of North Korea's denuclearization measures. The GOJ is reportedly considering asking European nations to become members of the envisioned framework so that the idea will not be interpreted as an attempt by Tokyo to resurrect the Six-Party Talks.

SDF ship detects suspicious transfer of cargo involving DPRK vessel

All Saturday morning papers reported on a GOJ announcement on Friday that an MSDF patrol ship spotted in the East China Sea off Shanghai on May 24 a DPRK-flagged vessel connected to an unidentified tanker via a hose. The GOJ reportedly suspects that the two ships were engaged in a ship-to-ship transfer prohibited under UN Security Council resolutions.

ECONOMY

Papers allege schism emerges between U.S., other G7 members over import tariffs

All national dailies except Mainichi gave top play on Monday to the conclusion on Saturday of the G7 financial ministerial meeting in Whistler, Canada, highlighting the substantial rift that emerged between the U.S. and the six other member states, including Japan, over the import tariffs that the Trump administration has imposed on metal products from selected nations. In the chairman's statement released upon the conclusion of the meeting, the Canadian government expressed "concern and disappointment" over Washington's protectionist measures. Nikkei conjectured that the six nations stepped up their criticism of the U.S. since the Trump administration has proposed tariffs in the auto sector, a key industry for Europe and Japan. Mainichi claimed that the six G7 members' "patience" with the Trump administration's protectionist orientation is wearing thin.

In response to the strong rebuke of U.S. trade policy from the six participants, Treasury Secretary Mnuchin stressed that President Trump is focused on "rebalancing our trade relationships." He dismissed comments from the other G7 officials that with the tariffs the U.S. is circumventing international trade rules and ceding leadership of a global economic and trading system it built after WWII. "I don't think in any way the U.S. is abandoning its leadership in the global economy," said the U.S. official.

Japan bracing for strong trade pressure from Trump administration

All Saturday papers reported extensively on the USG's imposition of high tariffs on steel and aluminum imports from the EU, Canada, and Mexico, highlighting the three countries' strong reactions to what the papers called a unilateral protectionist measure by the Trump administration. Nikkei opined that the tariffs might backfire on the U.S. since almost 500,000 jobs could be lost in America as a result of retaliatory steps by the three countries and claimed that trade friction with these allies could undermine the existing united front against China's intellectual property violations.

The dailies opined that although Tokyo has been trying to respond relatively calmly to Washington's imposition of tariffs on Japanese metal products to avoid disrupting ties with the Trump administration ahead of the planned U.S.-North Korea summit, some GOJ officials are growing increasingly concerned that the USG will step up its trade pressure by raising tariffs on Japanese auto imports. Mainichi said Japanese officials are bracing for the possibility of the Trump administration demanding that Japan open up its agricultural market further in exchange for exempting Japanese autos from the proposed high duties.

SECURITY

U.S., Japan, ROK defense chiefs voice support for diplomatic efforts on DPRK denuclearization

All Monday papers reported from Singapore on a trilateral defense ministerial meeting between the U.S., Japan, and South Korea held on Sunday, noting that in a joint statement issued afterward, the three officials expressed support for ongoing diplomatic efforts to realize the “complete, verifiable, and irreversible” denuclearization of North Korea. Although they also confirmed the need to maintain the sanctions against North Korea required by relevant UN Security Council resolutions, including cracking down on ship-to-ship transfers of prohibited goods, the statement stopped short of using the word “pressure” apparently out of deference to President Trump’s recent remark that he no longer wants to use the phrase “maximum pressure.”

According to an unnamed senior DOD official cited by Asahi, Secretary Mattis did not refer to “maximum pressure” during the trilateral session. The daily said this marked a sharp contrast with the previous meeting between the same three ministers held last October, during which they agreed to step up pressure on the North. Yomiuri speculated that the three defense chiefs probably avoided using language that might provoke the Kim regime prior to the Singapore summit between President Trump and Kim Jong Un. Defense Minister Onodera reportedly told the press afterward: “North Korea has been actively seeking dialogue lately. It is needless to say that pressure and dialogue need to be balanced.... There is a consensus that pressure will continue until the problem is resolved.” According to Yomiuri, a GOJ source voiced concern about the failure by the three ministers to mention “pressure” even though North Korea has not taken any concrete measures toward denuclearization.

U.S. takes hard line toward China’s militarization of South China Sea

All Sunday papers reported on the ongoing Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, focusing on strong criticism of China’s maritime advancement in the South China Sea voiced by Secretary of Defense Mattis on Saturday. In remarks to the annual security conference, the U.S. defense chief accused China of “intimidation and coercion” in the Indo-Pacific and declared the U.S.’s unwavering commitment to safeguarding its interests in the region by saying: “China’s policy in the South China Sea stands in stark contrast to the openness our strategy promotes.... Make no mistake. America is in the Indo-Pacific to stay. This is our priority theater.”

Citing an unnamed DOD official, Asahi asserted that the Secretary revised his speech repeatedly up until the last minute in an effort to convey the U.S.’s strong concern about China’s rapid militarization of the South China Sea. The dailies said participants from other nations, including Japan and Vietnam, echoed the Secretary’s criticism of China’s conduct. Chinese officials reportedly reacted very strongly.

In a related development, all papers wrote that Secretary Mattis held a trilateral meeting with his Japanese and Australian counterparts on the margins of the international confab on Saturday, saying that with China in mind, the three ministers agreed to draw up guidelines for trilateral defense cooperation called “strategic action agenda.”

Meanwhile, Sunday's Sankei wrote that the South Korean defense minister criticized remarks made at the Shangri-La meeting by Defense Minister Onodera, who expressed doubts about North Korea's commitment to denuclearization. The South Korean official reportedly stressed that dialogue with the North may be disrupted if Tokyo remains skeptical of the Kim regime's intentions.

MOD notifies host prefectures of deployment of new missile defense platforms

All Saturday morning papers reported that senior Defense Ministry officials informed the prefectural governments of Yamaguchi and Akita on Friday of its plan to install Aegis Ashore batteries at local GSDF camps. In response, the two governors reportedly asked the ministry to promptly provide local residents with detailed explanations.

Asahi added that the justification for the expensive missile defense platforms may be rendered irrelevant if North Korea agrees to dismantle its nuclear and missile programs as a result of the anticipated U.S.-DPRK summit.

AMBASSADOR

Ambassador Hagerty participates in sports festival at Tokyo elementary school

In its metropolitan news section on Sunday, Yomiuri reported that Ambassador Hagerty and Tokyo Governor Koike took part in a sports festival at Sugekari Elementary School in Tokyo on Saturday as part of the Tokyo metropolitan government's "Global Friendship Project" designed to encourage local students to increase ties with foreign countries ahead of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. The daily quoted the Ambassador as telling the students that it is important for the United States and Japan to learn about each other and to enhance their friendship. Sankei ran a similar article in which it referred to the Embassy's "Go for Gold" initiative.

