



Morning Alert - Tuesday, June 19, 2018

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HEADLINES

Morning news

All TV networks and national papers led with extensive coverage of the powerful earthquake that hit Osaka and the surrounding area on Monday, killing four people and disrupting transportation and utilities.

This morning's dailies reported heavily on disruptions in gas and water supplies as well as railway operations, noting that the quake exposed the vulnerability of Osaka's aging infrastructure. The papers also reported on the closure of auto parts, electronics, and other manufacturing plants in Osaka and Kyoto, voicing apprehension about a prolonged suspension of industrial production and distribution in the Kansai region.

INTERNATIONAL

Abe comments on North Korea during Diet session

All dailies took up remarks made at the parliament on Monday by Prime Minister Abe, who commented on the abduction of Japanese nationals by North Korea by saying: "I would like to make efforts to reach a settlement by building mutual confidence with North Korea.... It is true that Chairman Kim has exercised leadership in organizing a summit with the United States. I would like to make a fresh start between Japan and North Korea and take a step forward by ending mutual distrust." According to Asahi, Abe praised Kim's leadership three times during the day's Diet session. Yomiuri opined that these statements represent the prime minister's new approach of promoting dialogue with Pyongyang. While voicing his resolve to "seize every possible opportunity" to hold a summit with Kim, Abe reportedly stressed that such a meeting is contingent upon a settlement of the abduction issue and that Japan will not extend economic aid until the issue is resolved.

On the U.S.-DPRK summit last week, PM Abe said in the same Diet session: “President Trump adopted a new approach of urging North Korea to take actions by building mutual confidence and sharing a brighter future to be opened after denuclearization.” Speaking on the joint statement issued by the U.S. and DPRK leaders, the prime minister disclosed that when he met with the President in April, he advised him to have Kim sign a joint document at the Singapore summit. “The statement is significant because it lays the foundation for denuclearization,” said Abe. Foreign Minister Kono separately commented on the U.S.-North Korea statement by saying: “It is inconceivable that a document signed by the top leader would be rejected under the current North Korean regime.” On the absence of any reference to North Korea’s ballistic missile program in the U.S.-DPRK joint document, the premier said Tokyo is committed to seeking the elimination of all of North Korea’s ballistic missiles. Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga said Japan is willing to foot the bill for verification of North Korea’s denuclearization by the IAEA and other inspectors by saying: “It is natural for a country that would benefit from the peace dividend to help shoulder the cost of denuclearization verification.”

In a related item, Sankei’s latest opinion poll showed that almost 70% of respondents expressed opposition to a GOJ plan to shoulder some of the cost of verifying the steps toward denuclearization taken by the Kim regime. According to the daily, 82.5% said the denuclearization of North Korea is unlikely despite the Singapore summit, whereas almost three out of five were pessimistic about progress on the abduction issue. Some 37% said Kim outperformed President Trump in the Singapore sit-down, while approximately 19% said the opposite.

Kim Jong Un may visit China today

Nikkei front-paged a speculative piece claiming that according to a source involved in Sino-DPRK relations, Chairman Kim is planning to fly to Beijing today for a summit with President Xi. According to the article, the North Korean leader is expected to brief his Chinese counterpart on his meeting with President Trump and seek Beijing’s support in negotiating denuclearization with Washington. As high-level talks on a nuclear-free North Korea are likely to be convened later this week between the USG and the DPRK government, Kim is reportedly anxious to align his approach toward the Trump administration with Xi’s. The daily speculated that since this will be Kim’s third trip to China, he is apparently planning to use the “China card” as negotiating leverage with the U.S.

South Korea focuses on human rights aspect of comfort women issue

Asahi, Yomiuri, and Sankei reported from Seoul on a press conference yesterday by Foreign Minister Kang, who disclosed that her ministry will announce shortly a plan to play up the comfort women issue as a “serious human rights issue” in the international community. The minister stressed that the matter should be treated as “sexual violence against women during wartime.” The local Korean media reportedly projected that the ministry may make an announcement as early as today on the launch of a blue-ribbon commission aimed at eradicating sexual violence in conflict zones. Asahi projected that the Moon administration’s new policy on the matter will rekindle the history

dispute with Tokyo. The GOJ reportedly lodged a protest against Kang's remarks yesterday by saying: "As the two nations agreed in the 2016 comfort women accord to refrain from denouncing or criticizing each other in the international community, Kang's remarks are unacceptable."

South Korea starts military training near Takeshima

Asahi, Sankei, and Yomiuri wrote that the ROK military began a two-day drill in the vicinity of the Liancourt Rocks (known as Takeshima in Japan and Dokdo in South Korea) in the Sea of Japan on Monday, quoting a South Korean Defense Ministry spokesperson as saying the semi-annual training is intended to "prevent foreign forces from invading Dokdo, which is South Korea's territory." Six warships and seven airplanes are expected to participate in the training that will involve the Navy, Marines, and naval police. The GOJ filed a protest on Monday.

PM Abe to visit Europe, Middle East next month

Mainichi reported that Prime Minister Abe plans to visit Belgium, France, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt from July 11 through 18, saying that in Brussels he is expected to sign with the EU leaders a bilateral economic partnership agreement. Abe is also likely to deliver the first-ever speech at a NATO summit by a Japanese leader. In Paris, Abe will hold a summit with French President Macron and sign a bilateral acquisition and cross-servicing accord. The Japanese leader also plans to observe with Macron a Bastille Day military parade in the French capital on July 14.

ECONOMY

METI issues report on unfair trade practices

Sankei and Mainichi spotlighted METI's release on Monday of an annual report on unfair trade practices by foreign countries in which it warned against the "results-oriented approach" taken by an unspecified industrialized country. The daily speculated that METI had the Trump administration in mind, noting that the report expressed concern about the "spread of the adverse effects" of retaliatory measures. The ministry reportedly stated in a separate trade document that the GOJ plans to resolve disputes with the U.S. over its metal tariffs through "bilateral and multilateral consultations, with the possible launch of a WTO dispute settlement mechanism in mind."

International confab on steel canceled at the last minute

Nikkei wrote that the "Global Forum on Steel Excess Capacity Ministerial Meeting" scheduled for Wednesday in Paris was canceled yesterday due to rising trade friction between the United States and its trading partners. Noting that a total of 33 nations and regions, including the U.S., the EU, Japan, and China, were expected to send senior officials to the international ministerial conference on excess steel production, the daily said trilateral coordination on China's steel production between the U.S., Japan, and Europe is being disrupted as a result of trade disputes triggered by the Trump administration's imposition of high tariffs on foreign metal imports.

POLITICS

Public support for Abe rebounds

Sankei front-paged the results of its latest opinion poll that put support for the Abe cabinet at 44.6%, up 4.8 points from a month ago, and nonsupport at 45.6%, down 2.9 points. The daily attributed the recovery of approval of the premier to the public's expectations for his diplomatic prowess amid the growing possibility of a radical change in the situation on the Korean Peninsula following the recent summit between President Trump and Chairman Kim.

