



Morning Alert - Wednesday, June 20, 2018

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HEADLINES

Morning news

All networks and most national dailies led with reports that Japan beat Colombia 2-1 in the FIFA World Cup in Russia on Tuesday, saying that this is the first time for an Asian team to beat a South American team in the history of the World Cup.

INTERNATIONAL

Kim Jong Un holds summit with Chinese leader

All papers reported from Beijing on Tuesday's meeting between Chinese President Xi and DPRK leader Kim Jong Un, during which Kim reportedly explained the outcome of the recent summit with President Trump in Singapore. In response to Kim's remark that the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula "will open up a new and important situation," the Chinese leader promised that if the U.S. and North Korea can implement the agreement reached at the June 12 summit "step by step," Beijing will play a positive role in realizing denuclearization and establishing a permanent peace mechanism there. The articles said Kim is eager to obtain Beijing's support in the upcoming talks with the U.S., which is determined to maintain the current level of sanctions until the denuclearization is complete.

Noting that China has now hosted visits by the DPRK leader for three consecutive months, the papers conjectured that the Xi administration is anxious to boost its presence on the Korean Peninsula and ensure that it can play a major role in the possible issuance of a declaration ending the Korean War and the conversion of the existing armistice pact into a peace treaty.

Pointing out that Kim visited China ahead of anticipated denuclearization talks with Secretary of State Pompeo, who projected on Monday that he will likely travel back to Pyongyang "before too

terribly long” to try to flesh out the denuclearization commitments made by Kim, Sankei conjectured that China is determined to slow down the rapid rapprochement between Washington and Pyongyang so that it can continue to use the “North Korea card” in dealing with the Trump administration, which is upping the ante on the trade front.

U.S. suspends “war games” with South Korea

All dailies took up the official announcement made by the U.S. and ROK governments on the cancellation of the U.S.-ROK joint military drills in August, noting that the Trump administration appears to be willing to pause what the President has referred to as “war games” with Seoul as long as North Korea engages in denuclearization talks “in good faith.” Yomiuri projected that by cancelling the Ulchi Freedom Guardian exercises, Washington is set to press the Kim regime to implement denuclearization measures as fast as possible.

Asahi wrote that Pyongyang must be very pleased with the suspension since it no longer has to take countermeasures to the massive annual military drills, which have been very costly for the cash-strapped country. The paper quoted a South Korean military affairs analyst as saying that the decision to halt the Ulchi Freedom Guardian is tantamount to “economic assistance” to the Kim regime.

Japan apprehensive about pause in U.S.-ROK drills

Yomiuri opined that the Abe administration is worried that the cancellation of the Ulchi Freedom Guardian exercises may prompt the international community to ease its pressure on the DPRK, with a GOJ source saying that the Trump administration appears to be “too anxious for dialogue.” While quoting Defense Minister Onodera as telling the press yesterday that North Korea’s threats remain unchanged even after the Singapore summit last week, the daily projected that he plans to ask Secretary of Defense Mattis when he visits Tokyo next week to carry out bilateral drills between the U.S. and Japan and trilateral ones involving the ROK military as planned. Sankei quoted an unnamed senior MOD official as saying that the cancellation is an “unwelcome surprise,” arguing that the “maximum pressure campaign” orchestrated by the U.S. and Japan has suffered a setback. According to Mainichi, an unnamed high-ranking MOD official complained about the U.S. using the joint exercises as a “diplomatic card” by saying: “President Trump fails to understand that maintaining deterrence entails substantial ‘investment.’” The paper added that the GOJ is anxious to hold close communications with the USG out of concern that the cancellation may eventually lead to a major change in the U.S. force structure in East Asia. Nikkei claimed that although the GOJ is growing increasingly apprehensive about a possible decline in U.S. deterrence in Northeast Asia as a result of the suspension, it cannot openly express this concern amid the rapid reconciliation between the U.S. and North Korea.

FM Kono criticizes ROK policy on comfort women

Asahi and Yomiuri reported on press remarks on Tuesday by Foreign Minister Kono, who commented on South Korea's plan to draw international attention to the comfort women issue as "sexual violence against women during wartime." He was quoted as saying: "It runs counter to the spirit of the comfort women agreement.... As I just agreed in talks with my South Korean counterpart to improve bilateral relations, I am skeptical about the new policy. South Korea must be fully aware that that if such a policy is pursued, it would make it difficult to build a future-oriented relationship."

In a related development, Yomiuri and Sankei wrote that the ROK Foreign Ministry made an announcement yesterday on the launch of an "Action with Women and Peace" initiative designed to eradicate sexual violence in troubled regions. The papers noted that since a Korean activist on comfort women is listed as a member of a relevant blue-ribbon panel, the Japanese government is concerned that the program may be used as a platform to criticize Japan's handling of the matter. The dailies quoted an ROK Foreign Ministry spokesperson as saying that the initiative is "not directed at a specific nation" and that it is "not appropriate to link it" to the comfort women pact.

Senior U.S., Japanese diplomats discuss Iran

Yomiuri wrote that senior MOFA officials held talks with visiting high-ranking State Department officials in Tokyo yesterday on Iran, noting that the visitors provide a briefing on the Trump administration's decision to withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal. In reply to the U.S.'s explanations on reinstating sanctions against Tehran, the Japanese side reportedly asked that they be enforced in a manner that will not have adverse effects on Japanese businesses.

In a related story, TBS reported on its website that Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Peek, who is in charge of Iran and Iraq policies under the Trump administration, visited Japan to call on Japanese government and business circles to curb investment in Iran following the Trump administration's withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal. The network showed DAS Peek saying in an interview: "There is Iran's opaque financial environment, there is the domination of the economy by the state, the IRGC which conducts terrorism abroad, and yes, there are the sanctions that are coming into place." The network said the DOS official added that the U.S. will maximize pressure on Iran and draw it to a new negotiating table that not only covers Iran's nuclear development but also its missile development and military assistance to Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen. With regard to concerns that Iranian President Rouhani's position may be weakened and allow the hard-liners to gain power, DAS Peek reportedly said that the U.S.'s moves are not necessarily related to President Rouhani because missiles, terrorism, and proxy wars are plotted by a very small group within the Iranian government. He reportedly expressed the view that addressing Iran's assistance to armed forces is more pressing than Iran's domestic politics.

POLITICS

Diet session to be extended until July 22

All papers reported that the Abe administration and the ruling coalition are planning to decide today to extend the present Diet session by about a month to July 22 to ensure passage of key legislation on work-style reforms, casino implementation, accession to the CPTPP, and a major revision to the Civil Code. Although the Abe administration was initially hesitant to extend the present term considerably out of concern about the opposition camp continuing to grill Prime Minister Abe on the Kake and Moritomo Gakuen scandals, they have chosen to extend it more than a month in view of the recent improvement in public support for the premier. By enacting the major legislation this summer, the Abe administration is hoping to ensure that the premier will be reelected as LDP president in September.

SCIENCE

GOJ to formulate plan for reducing use of plastics by G20 summit next summer

Mainichi wrote that the GOJ is expected to put together a strategy to step up recycling to reduce plastic waste and stop using microplastics before it hosts the G20 summit in Osaka next June, quoting Environment Minister Nakagawa as telling the press on Tuesday: “Japan is aiming to exercise leadership in combating plastic pollution in the ocean.” Noting that Japan’s industrial sector is divided over the idea of abolishing the use of plastic bags by consumers, the daily predicted that discussions on drawing up the strategy may run into difficulties. The paper added that the U.S. and Japan did not endorse the “ocean plastics charter” in the recent G7 summit in Canada.

