



Morning Alert - Tuesday, June 26, 2018

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK gave top play to a report on the murder of an IT seminar instructor on Sunday in Fukuoka. NTV, Fuji TV, and TV Asahi led with reports on yesterday's games at the FIFA World Cup. TBS gave top play to a report that a man was arrested after he barricaded himself at a restaurant in Yoyogi, Tokyo, on Monday.

Major front-page items in national papers included updates on the earthquake that hit Osaka a week ago, a GOJ policy on updating laws connected to the implementation of the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction, a central government plan to establish comprehensive rules on the application of artificial intelligence to medicine, and a major Japanese bank's moves to promote "digital wallets."

INTERNATIONAL

Japan prepared to offer technical assistance for DPRK denuclearization

Asahi highlighted the disclosure by several GOJ sources that Foreign Minister Kono explained Japan's readiness to provide technical assistance for the denuclearization of North Korea when he held a trilateral meeting with his U.S. and South Korean counterparts in Seoul on June 14 after the Singapore summit between President Trump and Kim Jong Un. The GOJ is reportedly prepared to dispatch nuclear engineers and scientists who have been involved in the decommissioning of the reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant based on the judgment that the dismantling of nuclear-related facilities in North Korea will involve operations under a high radiation environment and that Japan's expertise will be useful since the U.S. does not have much experience dealing with nuclear accidents domestically. According to the report, Assistant Secretary of State for International Security and Nonproliferation Ford exchanged views with MOFA officials on the Japanese proposal

when he visited Tokyo last week. FM Kono plans to visit Vienna in early July to discuss with senior IAEA officials the details of Japan's possible technical contributions. The daily added that Tokyo will continue to hold discussions with Washington on the details of Japan's cooperation since North Korea may refuse to host Japanese experts.

According to Nikkei, FM Kono, who is currently visiting Indonesia, commented on Japan's possible personnel contributions to DPRK denuclearization by telling the press yesterday: "A very large number of professionals will be needed when North Korea takes its first steps toward denuclearization in a serious manner.... Secretary of State Pompeo will hold consultations with the DPRK on how to move forward with the denuclearization."

U.S. to press North Korea to take steps toward denuclearization

Asahi took up a Reuters' story that quoted a Pentagon source as saying that the Trump administration is expected to submit to North Korea a list of demands for denuclearization, including concrete measures and timing. The source reportedly said it will be soon be known whether the Kim regime is going to respond to the U.S. demands "in good faith."

MOFA to split Northeast Asia Division into two units

Sankei and Mainichi wrote that on July 1 the MOFA Northeast Asia Division under the Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau will be separated into two sections – one covering South Korea and the other covering North Korea – so that issues related to the DPRK, including the abductions and denuclearization, can be dealt with more effectively. The present division has reportedly been overwhelmed in dealing with these issues.

Japanese leader to attend NATO summit for first time

Yomiuri reported that coordination is underway for Prime Minister Abe to take part in the NATO summit to be held in Brussels on July 11-12 as part of his European and Middle East tour in the summer, noting that this will be the first time for a Japanese premier to attend a leaders' meeting of the trans-Atlantic security partnership. Abe will likely give a speech calling call for European support on such issues as North Korea's denuclearization and maritime security, with China's acceleration of its maritime push in mind.

Japan pledges 2.5 billion yen in aid for Indonesia

Asahi wrote from Jakarta that Foreign Minister Kono held a meeting with his Indonesian counterpart yesterday and offered 2.5 billion yen in grant-in-aid for the development of six remote islands on the southern edge of the South China Sea where a large number of Chinese trawlers have long engaged in illegal fishing. The Indonesian official reportedly welcomed Japan's assistance by saying that a bilateral strategic partnership will contribute to ensuring regional stability. The two ministers agreed to convene a bilateral 2+2 foreign and defense ministerial meeting in Japan later this year.

SECURITY

Defense Secretary Mattis to tour East Asia

Yomiuri reported on a Pentagon announcement on Sunday that Defense Secretary Mattis will visit China, South Korea, and Japan from June 26 through 29 to hold talks with his regional counterparts on the Korean Peninsula situation and China's militarization of the South China Sea. The Secretary is expected to express U.S. resolve to continue engaging with this region. The top U.S. defense official will visit Tokyo on Friday for talks with Defense Minister Onodera.

ECONOMY

PM Abe criticizes U.S. metal tariffs

Yomiuri focused on remarks made at the Diet on Monday by Prime Minister Abe, who criticized the high tariffs that the Trump administration has imposed on steel and aluminum imports by saying: "They could have adverse effects on the multilateral trade system by throwing the global market into confusion. They are extremely regrettable." As for Japan's response, the premier reportedly hinted at his reluctance to take countermeasures, such as imposing retaliatory duties on U.S. products, by saying: "We will pursue the best possible strategy by effectively combining various tools while always maintaining the option of retaliatory action." Asked if Japan will make concessions on the trade dispute in exchange for obtaining U.S. support for resolving the abduction issue with North Korea, the prime minister reportedly stressed that there will never be a quid pro quo involving the two issues.

In a related story, Nikkei highlighted press remarks yesterday by Keidanren Chairman Nakanishi, who commented on the trade friction caused by the Trump administration's tariffs by saying: "I don't think the economy will be completely disrupted. However, they are extremely abnormal. I am very worried."

Talks begin in Tokyo on regional free trade framework

Yomiuri reported that negotiators from 16 nations in the Asia-Pacific region assembled in Tokyo yesterday for five days of discussions on the proposed establishment of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). In the session, co-chaired by Japan and Singapore, the participants are expected to narrow their differences on such issues as reducing import tariffs and regulating electronic commerce. The daily projected that if an accord on the RCEP initiative is reached, it will serve as a deterrent to protectionism.

SOCIETY

Japan to revise laws to facilitate swift return of children abducted by parents

Sankei asserted in its lead story that the GOJ is likely to amend two statutes so as to facilitate the smooth return of children abducted by their Japanese parents, noting that a Justice Ministry panel is expected to put together a package of recommendations on revisions to the two laws so that enforcement officers appointed by the court can ensure the return of such minors without the

consent of their Japanese parents in cases where repatriation is ordered by a court. The paper said the State Department in May listed Japan as one of the countries showing a pattern of noncompliance with the Hague treaty on cross-border parental child abduction. While predicting that the amendment of the statutes would probably expedite the smooth return of minors, the daily underscored that sufficient consideration should be given to the feelings of the children when enforcing repatriation.

