
 **JAPAN MEDIA
HIGHLIGHTS**

Afternoon Alert - Wednesday, February 28, 2018

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HEADLINES

Noon news

NHK led with the forecast for strong winds and rain in western and northern Japan from this evening to tomorrow. NTV gave top play to a report that 11 people fell ill and received treatment on Tuesday after a suspicious letter carrying a hazardous unknown substance was opened at a military base located near the Pentagon in Virginia. TBS and TV Asahi led with reports that the Lower House is expected to pass the FY2018 budget this afternoon. Fuji TV reported that papers were filed with prosecutors against a teenage sumo wrestler on charges of assaulting a teenage girl in 2016.

INTERNATIONAL

North Korea's Choe Son Hui promoted to vice foreign minister

NHK reported that according to a source familiar with the situation on the Korean Peninsula, Choe Son Hui, formerly the director of the North American department at North Korea's foreign ministry, has been promoted to vice foreign minister, adding that relevant nations are closely watching to see if her promotion is related to North Korea's recent willingness to resume dialogue with the U.S. The network said Choe has long been involved in negotiations with the U.S. and served as a deputy chief negotiator at the Six-Party Talks. She has exchanged views with former USG officials through international forums and on other occasions even after the U.S.-DPRK talks ended in February 2012 and reportedly met with Special Representative Joseph Yun in Norway last May to discuss the release of an American university student who had been detained in Pyongyang.

Ambassador Sasae says dialogue with North Korea premature

NHK reported on its website this morning that Japanese Ambassador to the U.S. Sasae held his last press conference in Washington on Tuesday before retiring next month. He said that holding

substantive dialogue with North Korea is premature given that there has been no change in North Korea's nuclear and missile programs. Ambassador Sasae reportedly expressed concern by saying: "The strength of the U.S.-Japan alliance is being tested."

Concerning North Korea's positive stance toward dialogue with the U.S., Sasae reportedly said: "It has to be a meaningful dialogue," premised on the DPRK's abandoning its missile program. Sasae stressed the importance of holding meaningful dialogue through continued pressure on the North. He also said the alliance between the U.S. and Japan has been strengthened during his term. The ambassador pointed out that building a constructive relationship with China will be a challenge, saying: "The rise of China has become obvious, and the U.S. is on the alert." The network added that Sasae will be replaced by former Vice Foreign Minister Sugiyama.

- [High seas cargo transfers by N. Korea targeted for crackdown](#) (The Asahi Shimbun)
- [Japan seeks help to block North Korea's smuggling at sea](#) (Nikkei Asian Review)

ECONOMY

Convenience stores expanding services in response to fierce competition

NHK's "Close-up Gendai +" reported that the number of convenience stores in Japan has swelled to 57,000, causing a slowdown in sales at each store. They are reportedly expanding their services in the face of fierce competition from online shopping services and expanded drugstores. The program said the keys to the survival of convenience stores are to target elderly customers, expand overseas, and open stores in underpopulated areas.

- [EU, Japan leaders to sign free trade by summer: EU official](#) (Kyodo News)
- [Gov't to require prior local legislatures' approval for inviting casinos to operate](#) (Mainichi)
- [Suspicious transmissions preceded massive NEM theft](#) (The Japan News)
- [Editorial: Are casinos a sound tool for growth as government aims to pass bill?](#) (The Japan News)

POLITICS

- [Prime minister's schedule on Feb. 27, 2018](#) (Nikkei)
- [Japan lower house panel approves record 97.71 tril. yen budget for FY 2018](#) (Kyodo News)
- [Profile of new Okinawa-Northern Territories minister Teru Fukui](#) (Nikkei)
- [New Okinawa-Northern Territories minister Fukui's ability put to test](#) (Mainichi)
- [Okinawa affairs minister replaced with another LDP Nikai faction member](#) (Yomiuri)
- [Ishiba's cooperation to speed up LDP's consensus building on constitutional revision](#) (Yomiuri)
- [Cartoon: Discretionary work system](#) (Akahata)

OPINION POLLS

- [26% of high school students spend more than five hours on Internet every weekday, Cabinet Office poll](#) (Yomiuri)

- [Majority of univ. students in Japan don't read books, Cabinet Office poll](#) (Jiji Press)
- [50% say constitutional amendments do not need to be passed by Diet this year, Mainichi poll](#) (Mainichi)

SCIENCE

- [Japan lagging behind in using satellites for security purposes](#) (Yomiuri)

SOCIETY

Operation Tomodachi monument erected in Sendai park

NHK reported that a ceremony was held today to erect a monument to commemorate Operation Tomodachi following the Great East Japan Earthquake seven years ago. The monument was reportedly erected in Ainokama Park near Sendai International Airport, which the U.S. Air Force and Marines helped reconstruct together with the SDF after it was severely damaged by the tsunami. The troops used the airport to deliver relief goods to disaster-hit regions. The network said the monument is intended to help share with future generations the lessons learned by those involved in the disaster relief operations.

- [Japan rounds up 341 in first crackdown on asylum seekers working illegally](#) (The Japan Times)

SECURITY

- [DM Onodera voices concern over flights of Russian strategic bombers near Japan](#) (Mainichi)
- [Cyberattacks increase by 20% in 2017](#) (Nikkei)

OKINAWA LOCAL PRESS

- [Coordination underway to set up TPP secretariat in Japan](#) (Ryukyu Shimpo)
 - [Onaga hopeful about new Okinawa minister's understanding of the prefecture](#) (Ryukyu Shimpo)
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