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Afternoon Alert - Thursday, March 22, 2018

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HEADLINES

Noon news

All networks led with reports that 13 climbers who were unable to descend from Mount Mito in Okutama, Tokyo, due to heavy snowfall on Wednesday were rescued early this morning.

INTERNATIONAL

South Korea proposes inter-Korean ministerial talks on March 29

NHK reported this afternoon on an announcement by the South Korean government that it has proposed via a communication channel holding a ministerial-level meeting with North Korea on March 29 on the North Korean side of Panmunjom to discuss the details of the planned summit between North and South Korea at the end of next month. The network said Unification Minister Cho Myoung-gyon will lead the South Korean delegation, which will also include a senior Blue House official and a senior National Intelligence Service official. The network also reported that South Korea is planning to send a delegation of about 160 singers and idol group members to Pyongyang from March 31 to emphasize the mood of reconciliation between the two nations.

- [Japan-Russia friction over missile defense overshadows isles issue](#) (Kyodo News)
- [Gist of Kono-Lavrov foreign ministerial on March 21](#) (Yomiuri)
- [Chinese premier “positively considering” visit to Japan](#) (Tokyo Shimbun)
- [Gov’t makes final adjustments to hold trilateral summit with China, ROK on May 9](#) (Yomiuri)
- [Abe plans to visit Middle East from late April to early May](#) (Yomiuri)
- [Japan welcomes U.S.-S. Korea joint military drills from April 1](#) (Jiji Press)
- [Survey of newspaper editorials on prospective U.S.-DPRK summit](#) (Sankei)
- [Canadian foreign minister to visit Japan next week](#) (Kyodo News)

ECONOMY

Treasury Secretary Mnuchin comments on TPP

Thursday evening's Yomiuri took up a Reuters report on press remarks in Santiago on Wednesday by Treasury Secretary Mnuchin, who noted that the Trump administration will consider rejoining the TPP once it accomplishes its goals on other trade priorities, such as updating NAFTA. He was quoted as saying: "Our focus at the moment is, obviously we're working on renegotiation of NAFTA, we're very focused on our trading relationship with China.... But as we accomplish our goals on these other trading relationships, this (the TPP) is definitely something that we will consider."

President Trump to announce steep tariffs against China on March 22

NHK reported at noon that White House Principal Deputy Press Secretary Shah told reporters on Wednesday that President Trump will announce on March 22 unilateral sanctions imposing steep tariffs on imports of Chinese goods. He was quoted as saying: "Tomorrow the President will announce the actions he has decided to take based on USTR's 301 investigation into China's state-led, market-distorting efforts to force, pressure, and steal U.S. technologies and intellectual property."

Meanwhile, the network said that although USTR Lighthizer explained before a House of Representatives committee on Wednesday that discussions are underway on whether to exclude the EU or nations such as Argentina from the planned tariffs on steel imports, he did not refer to Japan. The network claimed that the Trump administration is planning to impose extremely tough measures in order to correct the trade imbalance as promised in the election campaign and that there is growing concern that the new measures will escalate into an exchange of retaliatory sanctions among nations, including China, and intensify trade friction. The network asserted that the new measures are likely to pose a major risk to the robust global economy.

- [U.S. seeks bilateral FTA with Japan](#) (Nikkei Asian Review)
- [Japan ranks second in direct investment in the U.S. in 2017](#) (Tokyo Shimbun)
- [G-20 members voice concerns about rising protectionism](#) (Nikkei Asian Review)

POLITICS

- [Disclosed papers show 90% of gov't secret funds spent without receipts](#) (Kyodo News)
- [Editorial: Gov't's poor response to Moritomo paper alterations heightens distrust](#) (The Japan News)
- [Editorial: Abe can't sweep away Moritomo distrust by protecting own skin](#) (The Mainichi)
- [Cartoon: Moritomo scandal](#) (Asahi)
- [Cartoon: Abe and Koike](#) (Akahata)
- [Prime minister's schedule on March 20, 2018](#) (Nikkei)
- [Prime minister's schedule on March 21, 2018](#) (Nikkei)

OPINION

POLLS

- [Pollees' optimistic about work-style reform falls to 28%, those opposed to amending Art. 9 rises to 51%, Asahi poll](#) (Asahi)
- [Opinion poll & results from Asahi Shimbun](#) (Asahi)
- [Only 39% say constitutional amendments need to be passed by Diet this year, Mainichi poll](#) (Mainichi)
- [Cartoon: Cabinet support rate](#) (Akahata)

SOCIETY

- [662 m. yen stolen in cryptocurrency remittance fraud cases in Japan in 2017](#) (Jiji Press)

SECURITY

- [MOD to establish Ground Component Command in GSDF](#) (Tokyo Shimbun)
- [LDP panel makes recommendations for new defense policy guidelines](#) (Yomiuri)
- [Japan to give final 3 trainer aircraft to Philippines next week](#) (Kyodo News)
- [2nd Japanese defense satellite to be launched in April](#) (Kyodo News)

OKINAWA LOCAL PRESS

Discussion continues on compensation for crimes involving civilian base workers

Wednesday's Okinawa Times and Ryukyu Shimpo highlighted remarks made at the Diet on Tuesday by MOFA North American Affairs Bureau Director General Suzuki, who suggested that the victims of off-duty crimes committed by civilian base employees may be entitled to claim SOFA-based compensation by the U.S. military even if the perpetrators were not directly hired by the U.S. military. Suzuki made the comment in view of the alleged reluctance on the part of the U.S. military to offer an ex gratia payment to the family of an Okinawa woman who was murdered by Kadena AB employee Kenneth Shinzato in April 2016 on the grounds that Shinzato was hired by a U.S. military contractor and was not a direct hire of the U.S. military.

According to the articles, the senior MOFA official commented on the scope of "employees of the United States Armed Forces" as defined in the SOFA by saying: "Our understanding is that this is not necessarily limited to direct hires. Workers who are hired indirectly should also be included." Defense Minister Onodera reportedly stressed during the same Diet session that Shinzato was "accorded the status of a U.S. Armed Forces employee as defined by the SOFA" at the time, adding that discussions are underway between the U.S. side and the GOJ with regard to the interpretation of the SOFA provision in question. Foreign Minister Kono said separately the GOJ is making "earnest efforts" to ensure that the appropriate compensation will be paid to the bereaved family.

- [Bar association to send mission to Europe to study SOFAs](#) (Okinawa Times, Ryukyu Shimpo)

