



Morning Alert - Monday, December 12, 2016

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## HEADLINES

### Morning news

NHK gave top play to a report that Russian government officials arrived in Yamaguchi on Sunday ahead of the planned Japan-Russia summit slated for Dec. 15. The network said the two sides are conducting last-minute coordination at the working-level on “joint economic activities” in the Northern Territories. NTV led with a report that Japanese figure skater Yuzuru Hanyu became the first skater to win a fourth straight Grand-Prix Final title on Saturday. TV Asahi gave top play to a report that Tokyo Governor Koike announced that she will field candidates for the Tokyo assembly election next summer. Fuji TV reported that actor Hiroki Narimiya announced his retirement from the entertainment business.

No papers were published this morning due to a press holiday.

## INTERNATIONAL

### Radio station says Trump mulling tapping Bobby Valentine as next U.S. envoy to Japan

Saturday morning’s Nikkei reported on page 6 that the online version of U.S. sports radio station WEEI reported on Friday that President-elect Trump is considering tapping Bobby Valentine, the former manager of the Chiba Lotte Marines, as the next U.S. Ambassador to Japan. The paper said Trump’s transition team members have already met with Valentine, who reportedly declined to comment to the radio station. According to the report, New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, a member of the Trump transition team, suggested Valentine as a possible candidate. The paper also

wrote that Valentine is an old friend of Prime Minister Abe, and that Abe studied at Valentine's alma mater, the University of Southern California. The daily added that Valentine currently serves as the athletics director at Sacred Heart University in Connecticut. Most other papers carried similar reports on Saturday or Sunday, with Saturday evening's Asahi quoting Valentine as saying: "It is probably just speculation, but I am honored to become news... I am very satisfied with my job at the university." Asahi added that as of Dec. 9, the only media to report on the news were WEEI and media that cited WEEI reports.

### **ExxonMobil chief may be tapped as secretary of state**

All Sunday morning papers reported that several U.S. media outlets reported on Friday that President-elect Trump is expected to name ExxonMobil CEO Rex Tillerson as secretary of state. Asahi wrote that Trump is apparently planning to appoint a business leader as his secretary of state as he places importance on the economy. The daily said that ExxonMobil is one of the largest international oil companies, and Tillerson is a close friend of Russian President Putin.

### **Suga calls new U.S. cabinet lineup "reassuring"**

According to Sunday morning's Mainichi, Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga delivered a speech in Tokyo on Saturday, during which he welcomed President-elect Trump's cabinet lineup. He reportedly said: "There are several members who are pro-Japan. It is a reassuring cabinet lineup for Japan." Suga also disclosed that Michael Flynn, who will assume the post of national security advisor, told him when they met in October that "the U.S.-Japan alliance is extremely important." Suga reportedly added that the security cooperation between the U.S. and Japan will not change significantly.

### **South Korean President Park impeached**

All Saturday morning papers reported on their front pages that South Korea's National Assembly passed a motion on Friday to impeach President Park. The papers said 234 of the 300 members of parliament voted in favor of the bill, which means nearly half of the ruling Saenuri Party rebelled. The papers said Park's presidential powers were suspended on the same day, and Prime Minister Hwang Kyo-ahn will serve as acting president while the Constitutional Court reviews the legality of her removal from office, which could take up to 180 days. Sunday's Sankei wrote that Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga said in a speech in Tokyo on Saturday that it will be "extremely difficult" to hold a trilateral summit between Japan, South Korea, and China this year as planned.

### **Park's impeachment creates power vacuum in East Asia**

Saturday morning's Nikkei reported that the GOJ is closely watching the situation in East Asia in view of the power vacuum that has been created following the passage of the impeachment of President Park on Friday. The paper said China or North Korea could change the power balance in the region leading to regional instability. Given that it is unknown whether President-elect Trump will uphold the Obama administration's policy of placing importance on the Asia-Pacific region, the paper

said prospects for the future are becoming increasingly uncertain.

The paper also wrote that the GOJ is concerned about the outlook for the comfort women issue and security cooperation with South Korea, including the GSOMIA that took effect in November. The paper said these achievements that were made possible under President Park could be overthrown depending on who becomes the next leader of South Korea. The daily said while Suga expressed hope that the Japan-South Korea cooperation in many fields will remain unchanged, a senior MOFA official expressed concern by saying: "When the presidential election begins, all the candidates will begin by rejecting the current administration."

### **Abe to be first incumbent prime minister to visit USS Arizona Memorial**

Saturday morning's Nikkei reported that Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga announced at a press conference on Friday the GOJ's official view that Prime Minister Abe will be the first incumbent prime minister to visit the USS Arizona Memorial in Pearl Harbor later this month. Noting that there have been media reports that former Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida was the first incumbent premier to visit Pearl Harbor in 1951, the paper said Suga said the government could not confirm whether former Prime Minister Yoshida visited Pearl Harbor.

### **Japan, Russia to relax visa requirements**

Saturday morning's Asahi reported on its front page that the governments of Japan and Russia will announce at the planned summit in Tokyo on Dec. 15-16 that reciprocal visa requirements will be relaxed. The daily said the period of stay for "multiple-entry visas" will be extended from the current three years to five years at maximum. The paper reported that while the GOJ had suspended talks on relaxing visa requirements with Russia as one of its sanctions against Russia over the Ukrainian issue, it will effectively ease the sanction at its own discretion instead of through talks.

### **PM Abe speaks with Ukrainian president**

Saturday morning's Nikkei reported that Prime Minister Abe spoke by phone with Ukrainian President Poroshenko for about 25 minutes on Friday ahead of President Putin's visit to Japan later this month. Noting that Ukraine has been concerned about closer relations between Japan and Russia, the network said Abe called for Ukraine's understanding by saying: "We will hold thorough discussions at the highest level in order to make progress on the peace treaty issue."

### **Comfort women museum opens in Taipei**

Sunday's Nikkei reported that Taiwan's first comfort women museum opened in Taipei on Saturday, saying that a senior member of a human rights group involved in the museum's establishment called for the GOJ to offer apologies and compensation to the victims. Two former comfort women from Taiwan and South Korea reportedly attended the opening ceremony.

## SECURITY

### **NTA return ceremony to be held in Okinawa on Dec. 22**

Saturday morning's Nikkei reported that Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga announced on Friday that a ceremony on the return of the majority of the land at the Northern Training Area in Okinawa will be held in Okinawa on Dec. 22. The paper said Suga will attend the ceremony, and that an invitation has been extended to Okinawa Governor Onaga.

### **GOJ to sue Okinawa for compensatory damages over Henoko**

Sunday morning's Sankei reported on its front page that the GOJ is considering suing the Okinawa government for compensatory damages over the issue of Futenma relocation to Henoko. According to the paper, the GOJ will consider such a possibility if Governor Onaga continues to oppose the relocation even after the GOJ wins a suit at the Supreme Court over Onaga's cancellation of permission for Henoko-related landfill work. The daily said the GOJ views Onaga's protest as a violation of the settlement clause and abuse of authority. The paper wrote that it is extremely rare for the GOJ to file a lawsuit for compensatory damages against a prefecture, adding that Governor Onaga will be put in a difficult position if he continues to adhere to his public pledge to prevent the Futenma relocation to Henoko.

### **MOD disputes China's claim that SDF planes fired "interference bomb"**

NHK reported this morning that China accused Japan of endangering six Chinese airplanes that passed between the main island of Okinawa and Miyako Island on Saturday morning by saying that two ASDF planes approached the Chinese aircraft and fired an "interference bomb." The network said the MOD released a statement in response by saying the SDF planes "followed strict procedures based on international law and the SDF law" and did not interfere with the Chinese planes or endanger them by firing an "interference bomb." The MOD also said it is "extremely regrettable" that the Chinese Defense Ministry released a unilateral announcement that could undermine Japan-China relations.

## ECONOMY

### **TPP bills pass Diet, RCEP increases presence**

All Saturday morning papers reported that the Diet passed the TPP bills on Friday, with Nikkei saying that the possibility of the treaty's effectuation remains uncertain as President-elect Trump has clearly stated that he will withdraw the U.S. from the trade deal. The paper said the momentum for the TPP is rapidly diminishing, and the focus of trade liberalization talks in Asia has shifted to the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

### **Japan, EU to seek broad agreement on EPA this year**

Sunday morning's Asahi reported on its front page that Japan and the European Union are seeking to reach a broad agreement on an EPA by the end of this year. According to diplomatic sources in Japan and the EU, the two sides are planning to announce a "broad" agreement as long as they can agree on an overall direction. The paper said the two sides will hold the chief negotiators' meeting in Tokyo starting on Monday in order to pave the way for a ministerial-level meeting. The daily wrote that the key is to what extent the two sides will be able to compromise, as Japan is demanding that the EU abolish tariffs on automobiles and home electronics, while the EU is calling for Japan to reduce tariffs on cheese and wine.

## **POLITICS**

### **Governor Koike to field candidates for Tokyo assembly election next summer**

Sunday morning's Asahi reported that Tokyo Governor Koike disclosed for the first time on Saturday her plan to field candidates for the Tokyo metropolitan assembly election slated for next summer. She reportedly told reporters: "Many of the students [of her political school] are eager to run. I would like to support and teach them about election strategies." The daily wrote that Koike's political school has about 3,900 students. Although she did not clearly state her intention to create a new political party, she hinted at such a possibility by saying: "I would like to keep my options open."

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