



Morning Alert - Tuesday, December 20, 2016

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## HEADLINES

### Morning news

NHK gave top play to a report that a truck plowed into a market in Berlin on Monday, killing at least nine people and injuring dozens more. All commercial networks led with reports that Japanese singer ASKA was released on Monday after prosecutors decided not to indict him on charges of using stimulants due to a lack of evidence.

The resumption of Osprey flights in Okinawa received prominent front-page coverage in all national papers today. Other major news items included a GOJ policy of offering a scholarship worth 20,000 to 40,000 yen per month for students from low income families and the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication's plan to start in FY2017 an online course to train cyber-defense professionals.

## SECURITY

### U.S. resumes Osprey flights despite Okinawa's opposition

All papers reported extensively on the resumption of Futenma-based Osprey flights on Monday, only six days after what Okinawans described as the "crash" of one of the tilt-rotor planes in shallow waters in Nago City. The Japanese government consented to the resumption after receiving the U.S. military's explanation that the mishap was not caused by a mechanical failure or structural flaws in the aircraft. After her meeting with USFJ Deputy Commander Chiarotti yesterday, Defense Minister Inada told the press that the U.S. explanation of the mishap was reasonable and consistent with the views of experts in the ministry and the SDF. However, the GOJ still asked for the continued suspension of mid-air refueling training by Ospreys for the time being. Okinawa Area Coordinator

Nicholson released a comment saying that he is highly confident that Osprey flight operations can continue to be conducted safely.

### **Okinawa enraged**

According to the papers, Okinawa officials and residents were extremely upset that their calls for an indefinite flight suspension and withdrawal of the aircraft from the Futenma base were dismissed categorically. Governor Onaga told the press on Monday afternoon: "I'm frightened that the local government has been ignored by the central government. The unilateral resumption considerably undermined the relationship of trust." He criticized the central government for not being able to make an independent decision. The papers said even local politicians who have been tolerant of the Osprey deployment at Futenma were displeased with what they called the "premature" resumption.

### **Kantei accepts early resumption**

According to Asahi, the GOJ condoned the resumed operation sooner rather than later while taking into account such anticipated developments as the Supreme Court ruling today on the Okinawa governor's cancellation of a landfill permit for the FRF construction, the ceremony marking the return of the Northern Training Area on Dec. 22, and Prime Minister Abe's trip to Pearl Harbor next week. It said some GOJ officials had been sympathetic toward the U.S. desire to resume Osprey flights quickly since they understand the important role played by the tilt-rotor aircraft in maintaining regional peace and security. The Kantei reportedly gave the greenlight to the resumption out of concern that the suspension, if prolonged for weeks, might prompt incoming President Trump to say "we will leave Okinawa."

Mainichi claimed that although DM Inada was rather cautious about the early resumption, the Kantei, Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga in particular, was confident of eventually obtaining local understanding for the resumption based on the assessment that the reduction of the security burden on Okinawa would be reduced significantly following the planned NTA return later this week. Suga has rebuffed Governor Onaga's request for the cancellation of the reversion ceremony. The paper said some GOJ officials and LDP lawmakers are alarmed by the Kantei's hard line toward Okinawa. DM Inada is likely to travel to Okinawa to attend the event so that she can hold discussions with local government officials on Osprey flights and other U.S. military affairs.

### **SOFA remains hurdle**

Nikkei claimed Japan had little choice but to prioritize the U.S. military over local sentiment in Okinawa in the absence of legal grounds for having a say in U.S. military operations. Yomiuri wrote that the central government is put in dilemma between the U.S. military and Okinawa because it has no authority to interfere with U.S. military operations. Tokyo Shimbun asserted that Japan was not

able to oppose the early resumption in view of what it called unfair legal arrangements for the U.S. military in Japan, explaining that Italy and Germany are able to influence U.S. military operations because their SOFAs with the U.S. are much stronger than Japan's.

Asahi and Mainichi noted that the SOFA also stands in the way of Japanese probe into the accident, pointing out that the U.S. military has not replied to a request by the Japan Coast Guard for cooperation in its investigation made soon after the accident occurred last week. Mainichi also said apprehension about Osprey safety is rapidly growing in communities across Japan that are expected to host U.S. and GSDF Ospreys in the near future, including Saga Prefecture, with Governor Yamaguchi commenting on the resumption by saying: "As I've requested a thorough probe, I assumed the central government would respond appropriately. The early resumption was unexpected."

## **INTERNATIONAL**

### **Abe considering visiting U.S. capital for summit with Trump in late January**

Yomiuri and Mainichi claimed that the GOJ has asked the Trump transition team to arrange a bilateral summit in Washington right after he assumes office on Jan. 20, noting that PM Abe is hoping for a meeting on Jan. 27. The papers said the Abe administration believes that a summit meeting with the U.S. leader on the proposed date would send a strong message on the strength of the U.S.-Japan alliance and close personal bonds between the two countries' leaders. Mainichi projected that Abe will probably lobby Trump hard to make a statement affirming his commitment to strengthening trans-Pacific relations. Sankei ran a similar story, adding however, that the negotiations with the Trump team for a summit are running into difficulties.

### **Japan considering evacuation drill for missile launch by North Korea**

NTV reported early this morning that Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga disclosed on Monday that the GOJ is considering holding an evacuation drill "as soon as possible" based on the scenario that North Korea launches a ballistic missile aimed at Japan. The network said the GOJ will use the J-Alert system to provide emergency information to local municipalities, which will then via loudspeakers relay to residents the message to evacuate. The network said the GOJ judged that there is an increased need for conducting an evacuation drill given that the DPRK launched more than 20 ballistic missiles this year.

## **POLITICS**

### **Dissolution of Lower House for snap election in January unlikely**

Yomiuri reported that it appears to be extremely difficult for PM Abe to dissolve the lower chamber in January for a snap election given his extremely tight diplomatic schedule, including a possible

summit meeting with President Trump in Washington on Jan. 27 and a four-nation tour of Southeast Asia in mid-January. Noting that the regular Diet session will probably be convened on Jan. 20 or 23, the paper conjectured that if the premier chose to dissolve the House of Representatives by late January, he would perhaps not be able to pass the FY2017 budget program by Mar. 31, a scenario that might be detrimental to the growth of the Japanese economy.

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