



Morning Alert - Tuesday, December 27, 2016

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK and Fuji TV gave top play to reports that Prime Minister Abe arrived in Hawaii at around 4 a.m. Japan time today and laid flowers at the Ehime Maru Memorial and the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific where U.S. military personnel who died in the Pacific War are buried. The networks said the premier will visit Pearl Harbor tomorrow and hold his final summit with President Obama. TBS and TV Asahi gave top play to reports that the leaders of the local governments that will host events for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics visited Tokyo Governor Koike and organizing committee chief Mori separately on Monday to discuss the costs to be paid by the organizing committee. NTV led with a report on the last TV appearance of Japanese pop group SMAP on Monday evening before the group disbands at the end of the year.

Lead items in national papers included a plan by the Health Ministry to call for Japanese companies to put an end to excessive overtime and Prime Minister Abe's planned visit to Pearl Harbor tomorrow.

INTERNATIONAL

Abe to use Pearl Harbor visit to remove history-related constraints

Saturday morning's Asahi published a prominent report on Prime Minister Abe's upcoming visit to Pearl Harbor, conjecturing that the conservative Japanese leader is anxious to use the opportunity to free Japan from "constraints" arising from the country's defeat in WWII. The daily said the premier has been anxious to conduct "future-oriented" diplomacy with the U.S., Japan's Asian neighbors, and other countries, quoting him as saying recently to his close aides: "President Obama did not

offer an apology in Hiroshima, so I don't need to apologize at Pearl Harbor. This is not apology diplomacy; it is strategic diplomacy." The daily claimed that Abe had been hoping to arrange a trip to Pearl Harbor under the Obama presidency in the belief that it would be difficult to do so under the Trump administration. The premier reportedly believes that visiting the Hawaii war memorial together with "pro-peace" President Obama will help expand his domestic support base to include liberals.

In a related article, Friday's Yomiuri wrote that Defense Minister Inada and Foreign Minister Kishida will accompany Abe when he visits Pearl Harbor. Today's papers said Abe left for Hawaii yesterday, quoting him as telling the press upon departure: "I'll be visiting Pearl Harbor to console the souls of war victims on behalf of the Japanese people. With President Obama, I would like to pledge to future generations not to repeat the devastation of war and emphasize the power of reconciliation." Yomiuri projected that in his remarks at the USS Arizona Memorial, the premier will not offer an apology for the Pearl Harbor attack. Instead, he will highlight the significance of trans-Pacific reconciliation by calling the bilateral ties an "alliance of hope."

Hawaii governor comments on Abe's Pearl Harbor visit

Saturday's Nikkei ran an interview with Hawaii Governor Ige, who welcomed Prime Minister Abe's planned trip to Pearl Harbor by saying: "The visit will be a symbolic time to affirm that cooperative relations between the U.S. and Japan are indispensable to peace in the Pacific." He also expressed hope for stronger connections between his state and Japan through increased business and people-to-people exchanges as a result of Abe's visit.

Two other Japanese prime ministers visited Pearl Harbor in past

Several Saturday papers reprinted a Kyodo piece from Los Angeles saying that according to a Japanese-language newspaper published in Honolulu, former Prime Ministers Ichiro Hatoyama and Shinsuke Kishi visited Pearl Harbor on October 29, 1956, and June 28, 1957, respectively. If the Hawaii Hochi's reporting is accurate, Prime Minister Abe will be the fourth Japanese leader to visit the site in addition to Prime Minister Yoshida, who reportedly traveled there in 1951.

U.S., Japanese scholars call for Abe to clarify his views on history

Monday's Asahi wrote that some 50 American and Japanese opinion leaders, including film director Oliver Stone and Princeton University Professor Richard Falk, published a letter on Sunday asking Prime Minister Abe to clarify his previous "controversial" remarks on history, such as "there is no fixed definition of aggression." In releasing the letter ahead of Abe's historic tour of Pearl Harbor, they also wanted to learn whether the Japanese leader intends to visit China, the Korean Peninsula, or elsewhere in Asia to pay tribute to the victims of WWII.

Trilateral vice foreign ministerial meeting planned for January

Monday's Nikkei wrote that the vice foreign ministers of the U.S., Japan, and South Korea will assemble in Seoul ahead of the inauguration of the Trump administration on Jan. 20 in order to

confirm trilateral coordination in dealing with North Korea. The top diplomats are also expected to affirm mutual security cooperation to counter China's aggressive naval operations.

However, today's Asahi said the vice ministerial meeting will be held in Washington on around Jan. 5, noting that the USG has asked for the meeting to be convened in the U.S. capital instead of Seoul to remind the incoming Trump administration of the importance of trilateral partnership. Vice Foreign Minister Sugiyama will join Deputy Secretary of State Blinken and his ROK counterpart. Sugiyama is reportedly also hoping to hold a meeting with National Security Advisor-designate Flynn and others in the Trump transition team.

Meanwhile, Saturday's Sankei wrote that Secretary General Yachi of the National Security Secretariat and National Security Advisor-designate Michael Flynn held talks on Thursday and agreed to deepen mutual security coordination with China's maritime advancement and North Korea's nuclear and missile development in mind. Yachi also met with current National Security Advisor Susan Rice.

Japan and other nations block UN sanctions resolution against South Sudan

All Saturday dailies wrote that a UN Security Council resolution aimed at enforcing the arms embargo against South Sudan was voted down because 8 of the 15 council members, including Japan, China, and Russia, abstained from voting. Based on the assessment that the resolution could upset the South Sudan government and cause the security situation to deteriorate, Japan chose not to endorse the USG-proposed sanctions to ensure that the Juba-based SDF personnel now authorized to conduct "rush to rescue" operations will be able to carry out their peacekeeping mission safely. Japanese Ambassador to the UN Besho justified the abstention by saying the resolution would be "counterproductive." His American counterpart Samantha Power denounced Japan and others who didn't support the motion by saying that "history is going to be a very harsh judge of their decision."

Sunday's Asahi wrote that Japan has lobbied the government of South Sudan to make efforts to maintain stability with the goal of ensuring the safety of the SDF troops there. Some GOJ officials are reportedly displeased that Washington has been spearheading discussions on sanctions even though it has not deployed U.S. troops there. The article added, however, that international NGOs operating in South Sudan have denounced Japan and other nations for blocking the resolution, which they think would have been effective in preventing mass casualties.

Most comfort women to accept money provided by Japan

Most Saturday papers reported from Seoul on the disclosure by the Reconciliation and Healing Foundation that 34 of the surviving 46 South Korean comfort women have voiced their intention to receive payments of 10 million yen each from the fund financed by Japan's contribution of 1 billion

yen under the bilateral comfort women accord. The bereaved families of the victims who had died before the pact was sealed a year ago are entitled to receive about 2 million yen each.

In a related article, Saturday's Sankei took issue with the ROK government's continued failure to remove a comfort women statue from in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul, expressing doubt as to whether the departing Park administration and its successor will be able to follow through with this and other elements of the comfort women accord. The paper added that South Korean activists have stepped up their campaigns to erect similar memorials not just in South Korea but also in China, Australia, and elsewhere. Other papers also voiced concern today over whether the pact will be honored by the next ROK government, with Mainichi underscoring that failure to do so would have adverse effects on trilateral security cooperation with Japan and the U.S.

Chinese aircraft carrier heading toward South China Sea

All Monday papers reported extensively on an MSDF announcement on Sunday that a Chinese flotilla of six warships, including an aircraft carrier, passed through international waters between the main island of Okinawa and Miyako Island on Sunday morning toward the western Pacific. Today's dailies said the convoy is now apparently heading toward the South China Sea, speculating that the PLA's move is perhaps meant to hold the incoming Trump administration in check, as it is expected to take a hard line toward China's maritime advancement.

Japan, Russia to hold vice-ministerial talks by March

Friday's Mainichi reported on the disclosure by a diplomatic source involved in Russo-Japanese relations that the two nations' vice foreign ministers will meet in February or March to discuss the details of the "joint economic activities" initiative for the Northern Territories. The top diplomats are tasked with working out the details of a special economic zone in a manner that "does not compromise the legal position of either country" on the territorial dispute.

In related stories, all Sunday papers printed the results of a Cabinet Office poll showing that some 27% of Japanese think relations between Tokyo and Moscow are good, up six points from ten months ago. However, only almost 20% said they "feel affinity" toward Russia. More than 80% Japanese did not feel affinity toward China for the fifth consecutive year.

JCG to launch unit to help Southeast Asian nations enhance patrol capabilities

Sunday's Asahi front-paged an informal decision by the Japan Coast Guard to establish a seven-member special unit in FY2017 tasked with assisting countries in Southeast Asia in enhancing their maritime patrol operations to counter China's advancement in the South China Sea through personnel exchanges and other programs. By supporting coast guard capacity building instead of naval expansion, Japan hopes to avoid military clashes between these countries and China.

UNGA adopts motion calling for discussions on nuclear weapons convention

All Sunday papers reported that the UN General Assembly endorsed a motion on Friday calling for discussions to be held on drawing up a nuclear weapons convention despite opposition from four of the five nuclear powers as well as Japan, Germany, and other countries. Proponents of the resolution plan to launch negotiations starting in March, although most of the opponents are likely to boycott the talks. Japan will probably be placed in an awkward position since it has traditionally tried to bridge the gap between the nuclear and non-nuclear powers.

SECURITY

U.S., Japan agree on new definition of civilian component

All Monday evening papers reported on an announcement by Foreign Minister Kishida earlier in the day that the USG and the GOJ have “reached an effective agreement on a legally-binding draft governmental pact” on narrowing down the scope of the civilian component to be covered by the SOFA. According to the minister, the two governments are looking to sign a formal accord to supplement the SOFA before President Obama steps down on Jan. 20. Kishida said: “The agreement sets a good example of mutual cooperation by the two nations producing tangible results without fail.” Secretary of Defense Carter also issued a statement expressing hope for a final agreement in an expeditious manner. Prime Minister Abe and President Obama plan to endorse the agreement when they meet in Hawaii tomorrow.

Mainichi said Kishida’s announcement was made rather hastily perhaps in an attempt to minimize the anticipated negative reaction from Okinawa to the GOJ’s moves to restart FRF construction work today. Okinawa Vice Governor Ageda on Monday welcomed the U.S.-Japan agreement to limit the scope of the civilian component.

Okinawa leader withdraws rescindment of landfill permit

All Tuesday papers reported that Okinawa Governor Onaga on Monday officially withdrew his rescindment of the landfill permit for FRF construction issued by his predecessor to comply with a recent Supreme Court verdict calling the rescindment illegal. As a result, the central government plans to resume relevant work off the coast of Camp Schwab as early as today by reinstalling buoys in the area to demarcate the construction zone. The governor told the press on Monday: “This is the best option for now. Otherwise, Okinawa may be criticized. However, I’ve renewed my resolve not to allow the FRF construction.”

NTA return ceremony held in Nago despite protest at different venue

All Friday papers reported on a ceremony commemorating the return of a sizable portion of the Northern Training Area held in Nago on Thursday evening, noting that Ambassador Kennedy, Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga and other U.S. and Japanese officials, as well as several municipal leaders, celebrated the largest reversion of land occupied by the U.S. military since Okinawa was returned to Japanese administration in 1972.

The papers said the celebratory mood at the venue marked a sharp contrast to the anger echoed at almost the same time in a different part of Nago where some 4,000 people, including Okinawa Governor Onaga, lodged a strong protest against the recent MV-22 Osprey “crash” in shallow waters nearby. Asserting that the Abe administration prioritized the U.S. military over Okinawa by accepting the resumption of Osprey flights less than a week after the mishap, the governor strongly criticized the central government for neglecting local sentiment by going ahead with the reversion ceremony. He also criticized the U.S. military by saying that its “occupier’s mentality” runs deep and it cannot be called a “good neighbor.”

U.S. military retrieves Osprey wreckage

Friday’s Mainichi reported that the U.S. military told the GOJ on Thursday that it has collected the fuselage and other wreckage from the Osprey that went down in Nago, noting that the Japan Coast Guard will now be unable to conduct an investigation of its own at the impact site.

In a related story, several Saturday papers took up press remarks made on Friday by Defense Minister Inada, who stressed that the resumption of air refueling training by the Futenma-based Ospreys will be premised on the confirmation of the implementation of thorough safety measures.

Governors call for measures to prevent further accidents involving U.S. military aircraft

Several papers reported today that 15 prefectural governors hosting U.S. military installations in their jurisdictions filed a request with MOFA and MOD on Monday asking that thorough measures be taken to prevent accidents and incidents involving U.S. military aircraft. They made the request in response to a series of mishaps, including the crash of an F/A-18 Hornet off Shikoku, in the past several months.

Inada decides not to observe missile defense platform on Guam

Monday’s Sankei claimed in a front-page story that Defense Minister Inada has decided not to observe a THAAD platform when she visits Guam in mid-January out of deference to Russia, as President Putin expressed reservations about U.S.-led missile defense systems when he held summit meetings with Prime Minister Abe in Japan earlier this month. In choosing not to observe the missile platform, the defense minister is hoping to avoid “provoking” Moscow at this juncture in view of Abe’s desire to visit Russia at an early date and a recent bilateral accord on holding a 2+2 foreign and defense ministerial meeting.

POLITICS

Abe administration extends overtures toward third largest opposition party

All Sunday papers reported on a meeting on Saturday between Prime Minister Abe and Japan Innovation Party President and Osaka Governor Matsui as well as former Osaka Mayor Hashimoto, during which they exchanged views on the recently enacted casino law and constitutional revision.

The articles said the meeting signified rapid rapprochement between the Abe administration and the third largest opposition party, with Nikkei speculating that Abe is hoping that the outspoken Hashimoto, who shares Abe's conservative ideology, will use strong rhetoric to call for constitutional amendment. The administration is also increasingly counting on the Osaka-based JIP to serve as a check against the junior ruling partner, the Komeito party, which is inclined to take a more liberal line in managing the coalition government with the LDP.

Sunday's Yomiuri wrote that Komeito is displeased with the rapid rapprochement between the Abe administration and the JIP, noting that recent overtures toward Tokyo Governor Koike by the Tokyo chapter of the junior ruling partner are viewed as an expression of distrust of the LDP, whose Tokyo chapter members are highly critical of the governor's political management.

Ordinary Diet session to be convened on Jan. 20

Saturday's Sankei claimed that the Abe administration and the ruling coalition have decided to convene a regular Diet session on Jan. 20 right after Prime Minister Abe completes his four-nation tour of Southeast Asia. Major items on the agenda for the six-month parliamentary session will include the FY2017 budget and legislation allowing Emperor Akihito to abdicate.

