



Morning Alert - Thursday, December 29, 2016

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK and most commercial broadcasters led with reports on an earthquake with an intensity of lower 6 on the Japanese scale that struck Ibaraki Prefecture and surrounding regions on Wednesday evening.

Most papers led with the historic visit to Pearl Harbor by Prime Minister Abe, followed by Dentsu President Ishii's announcement yesterday that he will step down to take responsibility for excessive overtime by many employees as evidenced by the suicide of a female worker last year.

INTERNATIONAL

Abe underscores reconciliation at Pearl Harbor

All dailies continued to give extensive coverage to the joint visit to Pearl Harbor by President Obama and Prime Minister Abe, explaining that in his remarks before U.S. veterans and other participants, the Japanese leader took an extremely "future oriented" approach with the goal of "overwriting" the prevalent U.S. perception of Pearl Harbor. Abe concluded his remarks by saying he hopes Pearl Harbor will be remembered as a symbol of reconciliation

Reconciliation with Asian neighbors remains unachieved

The dailies reported that although Japan has achieved genuine reconciliation with the U.S. through the visits to Hiroshima and Pearl Harbor this year, Tokyo still needs to make additional efforts to do the same with its Asian neighbors, including China, South Korea, and North Korea. They pointed out

that the prime minister avoided using such words as apology, contrition, and remorse, and instead emphasized the “spirit of tolerance.” Asahi projected that this will be a key phrase in describing Abe’s diplomacy from now on, with a source close to the premier saying that Abe is hoping that China, South Korea, and other countries will embrace the “spirit of tolerance” in achieving reconciliation with Japan. Mainichi speculated that the prime minister did not use any remorseful language in his Pearl Harbor remarks perhaps in the belief that he explained his views on WWII sufficiently in his address at the U.S. Congress last April and the special statement on history that he released last August.

On Abe’s visit to Pearl Harbor, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson stressed on Wednesday that Japan will not be able to begin a new chapter without achieving reconciliation with its Asian nations.

Nikkei said the Hawaii speech showed that Abe is conducting “practical diplomacy,” noting that some conservative elements at home are not pleased that Abe apparently prioritizes establishing rapport with China and South Korea over his conservative beliefs. Those conservatives are calling for Abe to visit Yasukuni Shrine to offer prayers to the fallen just as he did at Pearl Harbor. They are also afraid that China may insist that he visit Nanjing to apologize for the Nanjing massacre. However, an LDP lawmaker close to Abe dismissed such qualms by saying that Japan has finally been able to achieve genuine reconciliation with the U.S. even without offering an apology because Abe has successfully established a relationship of trust with President Obama thanks to his realistic diplomacy.

Trump presidency looms over two leaders’ speeches

All papers wrote that there is no question that in emphasizing the importance of reconciliation, both President Obama and PM Abe were trying to send the incoming Trump administration a message that the importance of the U.S.-Japan alliance in world affairs will remain strong even after Jan. 20. Asahi wrote that at their final summit held ahead of the Pearl Harbor pilgrimage, the two leaders brought up such subjects as the TPP, the Senkaku Islands, and U.S. force realignment perhaps in an attempt to remind the Trump administration of the robust state of bilateral relations.

On his part, President Obama wanted to heal the wounds caused at home by the bitter presidential campaign in which President-elect Trump used inflammatory rhetoric. The dailies speculated that the President’s use of phrases such as “we must resist the urge to demonize those who are different” and “reconciliation carries more rewards than retribution” was apparently aimed at the next U.S. leader. Sankei said with the Pearl Harbor speech, the departing U.S. leader warned his successor against becoming inward looking with his “American-first” policy.

Ruling coalition praises Abe, opposition voices criticism

All papers reported on domestic reactions to Abe's Pearl Harbor visit and his remarks. Ruling officials hailed the premier for making an "impressive" speech pledging Japan's commitment to never repeat the horrors of war again. On the other hand, opposition officials were rather critical of the absence of an apology, regret, and his views on history in the speech. Democratic Party President Renho took issue with the prime minister having altered the constitutional interpretation of Article 9 to enact the comprehensive security laws, which she claimed runs counter to his promise made in the speech to never wage war again.

Abe, Obama discuss range of issues in final summit

All dailies took up the final summit between President Obama and Prime Minister Abe in Hawaii on Wednesday, during which they exchanged views on a wide range of topics, including the recent entry of a Chinese carrier battle group into the South China Sea, the Osprey accident in Okinawa, North Korea's nuclear and missile development, and the TPP. PM Abe said the Osprey accident was regrettable and called for additional information on the cause and measures to ensure flight safety. The Japanese leader welcomed the Obama administration's position that the Senkaku Islands fall under the scope of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty.

Comfort women statue briefly erected in Busan

All papers reported that a group of Korean citizens installed a statue of a girl symbolizing the suffering of the comfort women in front of the Japanese consulate in Busan on Wednesday in a bid to criticize the bilateral comfort women accord sealed with Japan exactly a year ago. According to the dailies, local security authorities took it down about four hours later on account of "traffic control violations." While the removal apparently represented the Park administration's commitment to follow through with the bilateral pact, the papers expressed concern that the landmark accord may be rendered irrelevant once President Park steps down next year. The GOJ relayed to the ROK government its displeasure over the temporary installation of the statue.

Japanese diplomat criticizes U.S. over sanctions against South Sudan

Asahi took up remarks made to the daily by Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN Okamura, who was heavily involved in recent Security Council negotiations on the U.S.-proposed sanctions resolutions against South Sudan that was rejected last week when Japan and other majority members abstained from voting. The Japanese diplomat chastised the U.S. by saying: "Although Japan has sent troops to South Sudan, the U.S. commitment only consists of words. America has a persistent cowboy mentality in which it believes that justice is done if the villains are punished.... Doubts remain about the effectiveness of the arms embargo. They are not a panacea to end the conflict. What is necessary right now is to help the South Sudan government build a new state." He defended Tokyo's abstention by saying: "Japan has offered cooperation to the local government through the dispatch of SDF personnel. This cooperative relationship must not be undermined by sanctions."

Japan, China agree to enhance economic cooperation

Yomiuri reported that senior economic ministers of Japan and China gathered in Tokyo yesterday and confirmed mutual economic cooperation. The Japanese side reportedly called for the resumption of bilateral “high-level economic dialogue” by cabinet ministers that has been suspended since August 2010.

POLITICS

Inada to visit Yasukuni today

NHK reported that Defense Minister Inada plans to visit Yasukuni Shrine this morning for the first time since she assumed her current post. The network said that Inada has visited the shrine every year on April 28, when the San Francisco Peace Treaty came into force in 1952, and Aug. 15 as the leader of an LDP parliamentary group. However, she did not visit Yasukuni on Aug. 15 this year because she was visiting Djibouti to inspect an MSDF unit deployed there from Aug. 13. Nikkei reported that Minister for Reconstruction Imamura visited Yasukuni on Wednesday.

