



Morning Alert - Friday, December 30, 2016

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK and TV-Asahi led with reports on French media stories saying that the French police have discovered that a key witness in the case of a missing 21-year-old Japanese university student in Besancon is a Chilean man who has returned to his country.

Top stories in national dailies included a Yomiuri report on joint monitoring operations by the U.S. Navy and the MSDF in the Sea of Japan in preparation for possible missile launches by the DPRK, a Nikkei interview with Bank of Japan Governor Kuroda, and a Sankei article about fluctuations in Toshiba stocks.

INTERNATIONAL

China, ROK express displeasure at Inada's visit to Yasukuni

All papers ran front- or inside-page reports on Defense Minister Inada's visit to Yasukuni Shrine on Thursday. Several papers speculated that Inada visited the controversial shrine out of deference to conservatives. The Chinese Foreign Ministry summoned a minister counselor of the Japanese Embassy in Beijing to express opposition to the visit. A ministry spokesperson stated at a news conference that the visit, which took place on the heels of a "tour of reconciliation" to Pearl Harbor by Prime Minister Abe and Defense Minister Inada, evinces great irony. The South Korean Foreign Ministry called in a minister counselor of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul to lodge a protest. The ministry said in a statement that it was "deplorable that a responsible Japanese politician visited Yasukuni Shrine, which glorifies past colonial invasions and invasive wars, and enshrines war criminals." Yomiuri wrote that although South Korea expressed a "deep sense of disappointment"

over Prime Minister Abe's "masakaki" offering to the shrine for its autumn festival in October, it did not use the term "disappointment" for Inada's visit.

DOS official makes comment

When asked about Inada's Yasukuni visit by reporters, Prime Minister Abe declined to comment on the matter. Mainichi wrote that Inada's visit to Yasukuni may affect Japan's defense cooperation and exchanges with China and South Korea as well as Tokyo's efforts to improve ties with those nations. The paper quoted a U.S.-Japan diplomatic source as saying that Inada's visit to Yasukuni has caused the Obama administration to lose face since it has been urging Tokyo to improve ties with Beijing and Seoul. The paper ran a Jiji story from Washington saying that an unnamed State Department official commented on the visit by saying the United States will continue to stress the importance of promoting healing and reconciliation in dealing with history issues. The paper interpreted this remark as a call for restraint, adding that it is unusual for the State Department to issue a comment about a cabinet minister's visit to Yasukuni. Yomiuri ran a similar report on the comment by the DOS official, adding that although relations between Washington and Tokyo became strained when the USG released a statement expressing "disappointment" with Abe's visit to Yasukuni in December 2013, the U.S. did not express strong criticism of the visit by Inada probably to avoid undermining the reconciliation demonstrated by the recent visit to Pearl Harbor by the U.S. and Japanese leaders.

SECURITY

U.S. notifies Japan of plan to resume aerial refueling training for Ospreys

Most papers wrote that the USFJ has notified the GOJ of its plan to resume aerial refueling training involving Ospreys early next month. Asahi wrote that according to a GOJ source, the U.S. announced the plan based on the understanding that it will be possible to prevent mishaps similar to the recent Osprey accident in Nago if proper procedures are followed and safety is confirmed. Although there are cautious views within the GOJ about the resumption of aerial refueling training, a senior Defense Ministry official told the U.S. side that it is unavoidable because the absence of such training would limit the range of Osprey operations in contingencies.

USN, MSDF conduct monitoring operations against DPRK missile launches

Yomiuri gave top play to a report saying that it has learned from several GOJ sources that the U.S. Navy and the MSDF began joint monitoring operations this fall in the Sea of Japan to prepare for missile launches by the DPRK. According to the paper, Secretary of Defense Carter agreed on the proposal made by Defense Minister Inada when they met in Washington in September. The U.S. Navy has dispatched its Yokosuka-based Aegis-equipped vessels to the Sea of Japan to support the

MSDF's around-the-clock monitoring operations when its ships had to leave the area for refueling or maintenance.

POLITICS

Cabinet support rises to 64% after Pearl Harbor visit

Nikkei front-paged the results of its joint survey conducted with TV Tokyo on Dec. 28-29 following Prime Minister Abe's visit to Pearl Harbor with President Obama earlier this week. The approval rating for the Abe cabinet stood at 64%, up 6 percentage points from the previous survey in late November, marking a 38-month high. Disapproval dropped 4 points to 26%. An overwhelming majority of 84% welcomed Abe's visit to Pearl Harbor, helping boost cabinet support. However, the paper wrote that some members of the ruling coalition feel that strong support will not last because the public is still wary of the GOJ's handling of such domestic issues as the casino bill and pension reform.

