



Morning Alert - Thursday, January 12, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning news

All TV networks gave top play to reports on President-elect Trump's first press conference held on Wednesday, highlighting his refusal to take a question from a CNN reporter.

Several national dailies also led with Trump's press event held at Trump Tower, highlighting his acknowledgement that Russia launched a cyberattack during the U.S. presidential election campaign.

INTERNATIONAL

Kishida discusses comfort women issue with envoys

All papers reported that upon his return from a European tour on Wednesday, Foreign Minister Kishida held talks with Ambassador to South Korea Nagamine, Consul General in Busan Morimoto, and others to discuss the renewed tension with South Korea over a comfort woman statue in Busan. Several dailies noted that Japan is likely to take a wait-and-see attitude for now in the hope that the Park administration will take the first step toward achieving a breakthrough, conjecturing that it may be some time before Nagamine and Morimoto return to their posts. Asahi projected that they will not do so until after Prime Minister Abe returns from an overseas trip on Jan. 17.

Senior LDP official to visit U.S.

Nikkei and Yomiuri wrote that LDP Policy Research Council Chairman Motegi plans to visit the U.S. starting on Jan. 17 for talks with Republican officials, including Senator Sullivan and Senator Wicker, in order to collect information on the incoming Trump administration's foreign and security policies.

Abe to leave for Southeast Asia, Oceania today

Most papers reported that Prime Minister Abe will depart today on a trip to the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Australia, explaining that his foremost goals are to reaffirm mutual naval security cooperation with the aim of holding China's maritime advancement in check and to ensure diplomatic coordination in preparation for the inauguration of the Trump administration, which may not maintain the departing Obama administration's rebalance-to-Asia initiative.

Abe to visit Russia twice this year

Yomiuri reported from Moscow on visiting Economic Minister Saito's meeting with a Russian deputy prime minister, during which the Russian official projected that Prime Minister Abe will probably visit Russia in April and September this year for talks with President Putin.

China disrupted Australia's patrol operations in South China Sea

Sankei gave top play to a report claiming that during trilateral defense talks held last month by Japan, the U.S., and Australia, the Australian participants disclosed that their military's surveillance and patrol operations in and around the South China Sea were disrupted by the Chinese several times last year. On one occasion, on Sept. 26, PLA Air Force J-11 fighters flew close to an Australian patrol plane in the area in an apparent act of harassment. The Australian officials stressed the importance of not only enhancing trilateral security cooperation but also reaching out to ASEAN members in dealing with China's aggressive military operations.

SECURITY

U.S. military helipad construction destroyed habitats of endangered species

Wednesday evening's Asahi published a prominent front-page story claiming that the habitats of a large number of endangered species, such as the Okinawa woodpecker and the Ryukyu leaf turtle, were destroyed due to the construction of six helipads for the U.S. military in the Northern Training Area. Some 30,000 trees were reportedly cut down and massive amounts of dirt and sand were brought in to build the platforms and associated roads. The daily said the GOJ went ahead with the construction despite the prefectural government's strong opposition in order to respond to the U.S. military's needs.

Ishiba says Japan should say "no" to Trump's demand to pay more security costs

Tokyo Shimbun took up a speech delivered yesterday in Kanazawa by former Defense Minister Ishiba, who said the GOJ should say "no" if the Trump administration demands that it pay more to station U.S. troops in Japan. While explaining that Japan currently shoulders 75% of the costs necessary to host U.S. military personnel and hardware, the politician said if Tokyo paid more, the U.S. troops would be tantamount to "mercenaries."

F-35s depart for Iwakuni

Sankei reprinted a Kyodo story from Washington saying that a fleet of ten F-35s fighters departed from a Marine base in Arizona on Monday for permanent deployment at Iwakuni. The planes will arrive at the Marine base in Yamaguchi Prefecture shortly via Alaska. Six additional stealth fighters will be deployed to the same base later this year.

POLITICS

Komeito calls for “careful deliberations” on conspiracy legislation

Most dailies reported on a meeting held yesterday between LDP Secretary General Nikai and his Komeito counterpart Inoue, during which the latter official called for careful parliamentary debates on the conspiracy legislation that the Abe administration is expected to submit later this month. The junior ruling partner has been cautious about the bill, which will be called “legislation on premeditation for terrorism and other acts,” on account of strong negative opinions among the public. The party is worried that Diet debate on the controversial bill will adversely impact its performance in the Tokyo metropolitan assembly election in the summer. According to Mainichi, the Komeito party is also concerned that the Abe administration and the ruling LDP will reach out to Nippon Ishin, the third largest opposition party, to pass the bill as they did in enacting the casino law in December.

ECONOMY

Froman criticizes Trump for his opposition to TPP

Mainichi printed a Kyodo piece from Washington on speech by USTR Froman on Tuesday, during which he ridiculed President-elect Trump’s intention to withdraw from the TPP by saying: “That would be the biggest gift any U.S. president could give China.... It’s hard to believe that any president would like to surrender U.S. leadership in the Asia-Pacific region.”

In a related story, Sankei wrote that Japan is likely to inform New Zealand shortly that it has completed domestic procedures necessary to ratify the TPP, explaining that it will be the first country among the 12 member states to do so. New Zealand is playing the role of facilitator.

FTA talks between Japan, China, ROK stall

Asahi reported that three-day trilateral FTA negotiations by Japan, China, and South Korea ended yesterday in Beijing without making any meaningful progress, noting that the three countries have failed to make concessions on reducing import duties almost four years after the first round of free trade talks began in March 2013. The daily speculated that Beijing and Seoul may not be as enthusiastic about the trilateral trade liberalization initiative since they signed a bilateral FTA in 2015, adding the fact that the Trump administration is negative about the TPP has probably decreased the

need for China and South Korea to conclude a trilateral free trade agreement. The next round of talks will be held in Japan.

AMBASSADOR

Abe hosts farewell dinner for Ambassador Kennedy

Mainichi and Nikkei reported that Prime Minister Abe held a “sayonara” dinner at a Japanese restaurant in Ginza on Wednesday for Ambassador Kennedy, who plans to leave post next week. Upon leaving the restaurant, the premier shook hands with the Ambassador to bid her farewell and his wife Akie hugged her in a gesture of appreciation.

