



Morning Alert - Tuesday, February 7, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK led with a report on President Trump's immigration order, saying that the government is expected to submit additional legal briefs to the appeals court in San Francisco in support of the order. TV Asahi reported on the Super Bowl on Sunday, saying that Lady Gaga included a subtle anti-Trump message in her performance. Other news included reports that Tokyo Governor Koike may field about 70 candidates in Tokyo assembly election in July.

Several national dailies led with follow-up reports on a systematic "amakudari" scheme at the Education Ministry in which bureaucrats acquired lucrative jobs after retirement. Other major front-page stories included the start of sea-based FRF construction work off Camp Schwab yesterday and a business tie-up between Toyota and Suzuki.

SECURITY

FRF construction work begins offshore

All papers front-paged yesterday's start of operations off Camp Schwab to place numerous concrete blocks on the ocean floor in order to install underwater fences at four locations to prevent the spread of dirt due to drilling for the FRF construction. Mainichi reported that the central government is aiming to build the replacement facility in about five years. The papers speculated that the move is meant to demonstrate the Abe administration's commitment to implementing the present Futenma relocation plan ahead of Prime Minister Abe's summit with President Trump on Friday. The premier is likely to underscore to the U.S. leader the progress made on the relocation front, as well as the importance of the bilateral alliance in ensuring peace and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region. The

Okinawa prefectural government asked the Defense Ministry to suspend the operation. Several dailies reported extensively on a protest staged by base opponents in the ocean and in front of the U.S. installation, noting that riot police forcibly removed picketers from the scene.

GOJ determined to go ahead with reclamation

Yomiuri wrote that the central government is set to expedite the construction work, including bank protection operations in around May, with the goal of showing base opponents prior to the Nago mayoral and the Okinawa gubernatorial elections next year that the FRF construction can no longer be reversed. Asahi wrote that the Abe administration was emboldened by Secretary of Defense Mattis' remarks made in Tokyo over the weekend that the Henoko plan is the only solution, quoting Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga as saying: "PM Abe and Secretary Mattis confirmed this point." Tokyo Shimbun claimed that the GOJ used "external pressure" by the Pentagon leader to go ahead with the sea-based construction work.

Onaga put in difficult position

Most dailies explained that Okinawa Governor Onaga appears to be on the defensive in the face of the central government's steadfast determination to implement the FRF construction. The papers claimed that although Onaga has reiterated that he will employ all tools available to derail the Henoko plan, not many viable options are left now as the Supreme Court has already ruled against his rescindment of the landfill permit, which he thought would be his "trump card." While the defiant governor is reportedly mulling "canceling" the permit or refusing to extend a permit to destroy rock reefs off Schwab that expires on March 31, the GOJ will probably ignore such steps and go ahead with the construction. Because the Okinawa leader's political foundation was shaken by the recent resignation of a scandal-hit vice governor, Asahi said some of his supporters are calling for a prefectural-wide referendum to achieve a breakthrough.

F-22s to fly into Okinawa

Sankei wrote briefly that 12 USAF F-22s will arrive at Kadena AB today for training, speculating that the state-of-the-art stealth fighters will fly to Okinawa for the first time in almost a year perhaps to deter provocations by North Korea.

INTERNATIONAL

Abe to propose creation of free trade rules in meeting with U.S. leader

Mainichi front-paged an article speculating that when Prime Minister Abe meets with President Trump in Washington on Friday, he will put forward the idea of the U.S. and Japan jointly drawing up trade and investment rules so as to hold China's growing economic presence in check. The GOJ is apparently hoping that trade rules to be crafted by Tokyo and Washington will be used for a free

trade agreement involving multiple nations like the TPP. The daily claimed that the plan is aimed at deflecting possible calls from President Trump for negotiating a bilateral trade agreement. The Abe administration is afraid that it will be pressured by the new U.S. leader to make major concessions on the agricultural front if it agrees to enter bilateral trade talks.

In a related development, most papers took up yesterday's remarks by Abe, who commented on his upcoming summit meeting with the President by saying: "I would like to issue a clear message to the world that the U.S.-Japan alliance is ironclad. I am confident that the peace and stability of Japan and the region will become even more solid after the summit." He also mentioned his meeting with Defense Secretary Mattis last week and said: "I was in almost full agreement with the Secretary on the significance of the U.S.-Japan alliance in the Asia-Pacific." The premier reportedly expressed hope that Mattis' beliefs are shared by other U.S. officials, including President Trump, by saying: "His views cannot be easily overturned."

Japan, U.S., ROK to hold meeting to discuss DPRK

Yomiuri reported on the disclosure by several GOJ sources that arrangements are being made for the chief representatives to the Six-Party Talks from Japan, the U.S., and South Korea to assemble in Washington in mid-February to confirm trilateral coordination to deal with nuclear and missile provocations by North Korea. MOFA Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau Director General Kanasugi will attend the session.

GOJ to set up taskforce for "joint economic activities" in Northern Territories

Mainichi wrote that the GOJ is planning to create later this week an interagency panel tasked with working out the details of "joint economic activities" with Russia in the disputed Northern Territories. The taskforce will begin internal discussions ahead of the full-fledged negotiations on the economic initiative with the Russian government that will commence in March.

ECONOMY

Lackluster performance by Big Three in Japan

Yomiuri reported on the number of foreign cars sold in Japan in January, emphasizing that only about 600 U.S. vehicles were purchased by Japanese consumers last month in contrast to over 15,000 units sold by Mercedes Benz, Volkswagen, BMW, and other European automakers. The daily said the data shows that President Trump's criticism of the closed nature of the Japanese automobile market is unfounded, attributing the Big Three's poor performance to a lack of marketing efforts, such as the failure to introduce small cars. The paper took up remarks made by a U.S. auto industry source, who said it will not be easy for the Big Three to adopt a new approach to the Japanese market because their sales strategy has been to highlight the power and heft of their SUVs, as opposed to the compact and luxurious features of European models.

New Zealand trade minister to visit Japan

Mainichi printed a Jiji story from Sydney on an announcement made on Monday by New Zealand Trade Minister McCully that he will visit Japan, Singapore, and Mexico soon. He will explore the possibility of effectuating the TPP without the participation of the U.S., as several TPP signatories have reportedly insisted on the effectuation even in the absence of U.S. membership. The official will hold talks with Economic and Fiscal Policy Minister Ishihara while in Tokyo.

