



Morning Alert - Monday, February 27, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning news

Most networks gave top play to reports that the Malaysian health minister held a press conference on Sunday and said that a large amount of VX nerve agent was used to murder Kim Jong Nam. Other top news included a report on the Tokyo Marathon held on Sunday.

Top stories in national dailies included an estimate that TEPCO's compensation for the Fukushima nuclear accident may end up costing each household 1,484 yen in additional electricity fees per year (Asahi); the situation in Fukushima six years after the nuclear accident (Mainichi); the police's discovery of a fraud group targeting Chinese in Fukuoka (Yomiuri); an increase in the number of small-scale geothermal generation projects in Japan (Nikkei), and the growing production of synthetic meat to prepare for the possibility of a food crisis in the future (Sankei).

SECURITY

Kishida, Onaga discuss Futenma relocation

Most Monday papers wrote that Foreign Minister Kishida held a meeting with Okinawa Governor Onaga at the prefectural government office on Sunday. The governor stated that it is extremely regrettable the U.S. and Japanese leaders confirmed at their recent summit meeting that Henoko is the only solution for Futenma relocation. Onaga submitted formal requests for the central government to cancel the Henoko plan, end operations at the Futenma base within five years, relocate the base out of Okinawa, and cancel the Osprey deployment in Okinawa. Kishida reportedly told the governor that local understanding is essential for the U.S. military to be stationed in Japan in a stable manner and that the GOJ will make efforts to reduce the base-hosting burden on Okinawa.

in a tangible manner. The foreign minister also explained the U.S.-Japan agreement in January that clarifies the scope of the civilian component covered by the SOFA. Nikkei wrote that the governor continued to demonstrate a confrontational stance despite the fact that the foreign minister traveled to Okinawa to meet with him. Yomiuri added that Kishida later held talks with Okinawa Area Coordinator Lt. Gen. Nicholson and agreed to cooperate in reducing the base-hosting burden on the prefecture.

Nikkei and Sankei wrote that Kishida expressed the central government's readiness to support Okinawa's efforts to attract more foreign tourists to the prefecture by saying that Okinawa can be a model for other local governments by making efforts to bring in foreign tourists and investment to boost local economic growth.

Landfill work for runway construction at Naha airport suspended

Monday's Sankei wrote that the landfill work for constructing a second runway at Naha Airport has been suspended since Feb. 13, when the Okinawa governor's permit to destroy rock reefs expired. Speculating that the governor's decision not to renew the permit was related to his opposition to the FRF construction at Henoko, the paper wrote that a delay in the start of operations at the runway planned for March 2020 would probably have a major impact on the local economy.

U.S. Navy responds to Tokyo Shimbun article on Atsugi-based F/A-18s

Sunday's Sankei wrote that Commander, Naval Forces Japan posted a [tweet](#) on Feb. 23 responding to a Tokyo Shimbun report on Feb. 17 alleging that 60% of the carrier-based F/A 18 fighters stationed at the Naval Air Facility Atsugi may be unable to fly due to insufficient defense funding. CNFJ wrote that Tokyo Shimbun's article was based on speculation because the paper failed to make an inquiry to the U.S. Navy, and that its readers are entitled to be given accurate information. It also argued that the F/A-18s and other aircraft are completely capable of performing their missions and are always ready to defend Japan.

INTERNATIONAL

Japan-U.S. Parliamentary Friendship League members to visit U.S. next month

NHK reported this morning that members of the Japan-U.S. Parliamentary Friendship League will visit the U.S. from March 7 to 12 to exchange views with members of Congress and experts on trade, investment, and security. The network said former Foreign Minister Nakasone from the LDP, who heads the league; former Economic Revitalization Minister Amari from the LDP; and former foreign minister Maehara from the DP will visit the U.S. in an effort to deepen U.S.-Japan relations at the parliamentary level. The network also reported that the LDP's Koya Nishikawa and Hiroshi Moriyama are making arrangements to visit the U.S. early next month in order to collect information on the Trump administration's trade policy.

U.S. lawmakers discuss possibility of reinstating DPRK on list of sponsors of terrorism

Yomiuri wrote that discussions have been accelerating particularly among U.S. lawmakers on reinstating North Korea on the list of state sponsors of terrorism in response to Pyongyang's development of missile technology and the murder of Kim Jong Nam. According to the paper, six senators sent a joint letter to President Trump urging his administration to consider reinstating the DPRK on the list in response to Pyongyang's missile launch on Feb. 12. Representative Brad Sherman recently stated that the United States should never have taken North Korea off the list.

In a related story, Sunday's Nikkei wrote that the U.S., Japan, and South Korea might discuss the possibility of the U.S. reinstating North Korea on its list of state sponsors of terrorism during a meeting of their chief representatives for the Six-Party Talks that will be held in Washington on Feb. 27. The paper speculated that the three nations might discuss the issue in response to Pyongyang's recent launch of a ballistic missile and the murder of Kim Jong Nam.

Japan to provide \$2 million for CTBT monitoring of nuclear tests

Saturday's Asahi wrote that Japan notified the preparatory committee of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO) on Feb. 23 of its plan to provide \$2.43 million to help the organization tighten its monitoring of nuclear tests. The paper speculated that Japan made the move in response to the nuclear tests by North Korea. Out of the \$2.43 million, \$1.64 million will be used for a mobile platform designed to detect radioactive gas generated by nuclear tests. The platform will be installed in northern Japan for a two-year period.

Japan to participate in high-level preparatory meeting on fissile material cut-off treaty

Saturday's Asahi wrote that MOFA announced on Feb. 24 that Japan will participate in a meeting of high-level experts discussing a fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT) to be held in Switzerland in the summer. The FMCT is a proposed international agreement that would prohibit the production of highly-enriched uranium and plutonium – the two main components of nuclear weapons. Japan hopes that its participation will give momentum to the discussions on the envisaged accord that have been stalled for more than 20 years.

Defense think tank releases annual report on China's security policy

Saturday's Mainichi and Sankei wrote that the National Institute for Defense Studies released on Feb. 24 its annual report on China's security policy. The report says that China probably possessed more than 1,200 short-range ballistic missiles as of 2015, predicting that China will likely continue to build up its military capabilities.

Saudi king to visit to Japan

Saturday morning's Nikkei wrote that King Salman bin Abdulaziz of Saudi Arabia will visit Japan on March 12-15. This will be the first trip to Japan by a Saudi king in 46 years. King Salman will hold

meetings with Prime Minister Abe and Emperor Akihito during his stay in Japan. Japan and Saudi Arabia will probably discuss increasing their economic cooperation in view of Saudi Arabia's efforts to pursue structural reform to reduce its dependence on oil exports.

ECONOMY

Kishida, Seko to forgo TPP ministerial in Chile

Saturday's Sankei wrote that the GOJ will probably not to send Foreign Minister Kishida or METI Minister Seko to a TPP ministerial meeting to be held in Chile in March and instead will dispatch vice ministers and the chief TPP negotiator. Although Australia and other TPP member states are considering the possibility of moving forward with the TPP without the U.S., the GOJ plans to continue to urge the USG to return to the TPP based on the belief that implementing the free trade pact without U.S. is inconceivable.

RCEP negotiations to start on Feb. 27

Most Saturday morning papers wrote that a five-day working-level meeting for the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) will start on Feb. 27 in Kobe. METI Minister Seko told the chief negotiators of the RCEP member states on Feb. 24 that it is critically important to agree on open and high-level trade and investment rules in East Asia in view of the growing trend of protectionism worldwide. Mainichi wrote that the participants will accelerate their discussions because the importance of the framework has increased following the United States' withdrawal from the TPP. Yomiuri wrote that the participating nations will compete over who should take the lead in the largest free trade agreement in Asia. Nikkei wrote that the participation of China and India will be disadvantageous for RCEP because these nations are reluctant to open their markets. Sankei wrote that Japan is worried that China may take the lead in the discussions at RCEP.

Japan hopes to set international standards for drones

Sunday's Nikkei led with a report saying that the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry will take the initiative in setting international standards for drones by developing technology for improved safety of drone flight with the cooperation of JAXA. The ministry plans to obtain approval for its drone standards from the International Organization for Standardization by fiscal 2025. The paper wrote that the move is intended to support Japanese companies' development of overseas markets for drones.

Mass production of MRJ to be delayed

Sunday's Yomiuri wrote that Mitsubishi Heavy Industries has decided to scale back its mass production plan for the Mitsubishi Regional Jet (MRJ) from ten to one aircraft per month in 2020. The company made the decision because of the delay in the delivery of the aircraft by about two years from mid-2018 to mid-2020. The paper wrote that the change in the Mitsubishi's production plan will likely have a major impact on its subcontractors.

POLITICS

GOJ rebuts UN Special Rapporteur's criticism of Japan's human rights record

Sunday's Sankei led with a report saying that the GOJ has made counterarguments to concerns raised by David Kaye, UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression. Kaye, who interviewed GOJ officials, NGO activists, and journalists during his visit to Japan last April, plans to submit a report on the results of his survey in Japan to the UN Office of the High Commissioner in June. After closely analyzing the contents of his statements made at a news conference in Japan and in a preliminary report, the GOJ expressed concern that his observations of such issues in Japan as freedom of the press, descriptions of historical events in school textbooks, the state secrets law, and protest activities against U.S. bases in Okinawa are not based on facts.

OPINION POLLS

58% welcome outcome of U.S.-Japan summit

Monday's Nikkei front-paged the results of its nationwide survey conducted with TV Tokyo from Feb. 24 through 26, in which 58% of respondents welcomed the outcome of the recent U.S.-Japan summit, while 28% did not. Some 69% supported the joint statement declaring that the Senkaku Islands fall within the scope of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty, while 17% did not.

