



Morning Alert - Monday, March 6, 2017

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## HEADLINES

### Morning news

NHK and NTV gave top play to reports that a disaster relief helicopter crashed into the mountains during training in Nagano Prefecture on Sunday. Three crew members were killed in the accident and six others remain missing. TBS, Fuji TV, and TV Asahi led with reports on an enrollment briefing held on Sunday at Moritomo Gakuen's new elementary school.

NHK later reported that the South Korean military announced that North Korea apparently fired a projectile toward the Sea of Japan at around 7:36 this morning, saying that the GOJ is currently collecting and analyzing information. The network said Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga told reporters when he entered the Kantei this morning that the GOJ is aware of the development.

Main front-page items in national papers included the helicopter crash in Nagano, the opening of China's National People's Congress on Sunday, and an LDP convention yesterday in which the ruling party formally decided to allow its president to serve for up to three consecutive three-year terms.

## INTERNATIONAL

### Secretary Tillerson to visit Japan

Saturday morning's Nikkei front-paged a report from Washington claiming that Secretary of State Tillerson will visit Tokyo on March 17-18 for talks with Prime Minister Abe and Foreign Minister Kishida. The paper said that the primary purpose of the visit will be to discuss North Korea, speculating that Washington may possess intelligence pointing to the reclusive regime's readiness to

conduct a missile or nuclear test. The paper added that the Secretary will explain to Japanese officials the ongoing review of U.S. policy toward North Korea, which could include the use of military force or regime change. The paper said this will be the third time for the foreign ministers of Japan and the U.S. to meet in about a month. According to the daily, Secretary Tillerson will visit China and South Korea after Japan.

Nikkei wrote in a separate article that Secretary Tillerson has decided to make an “urgent trip” to Northeast Asia in order to enhance coordination with Japan, South Korea, and China based on the assessment that DPRK poses “the most pressing threat.” In addition to North Korea, the Secretary will discuss with Abe and Kishida plans for President Trump and Vice President Pence to visit Japan later this year. The daily predicted that the President will probably visit Japan in November when he attends the annual APEC leaders’ meeting in Vietnam.

Other media outlets filed similar stories, with Yomiuri saying on Sunday that Secretary Tillerson will probably arrive in Tokyo on March 16. NHK on Saturday quoted Assistant Secretary Russel as telling the network: “Without a doubt, the Secretary will want to exchange views and consult closely with Tokyo” on North Korea, although he stopped short of mentioning a specific timeframe for the Secretary’s Japan trip. Russel also explained that the Secretary will brief Japan and South Korea on the status of the White House’s ongoing review of its strategy toward North Korea.

Sunday’s Mainichi said when Secretary Tillerson meets with senior Chinese officials in Beijing, he is likely to press them to ratchet up the pressure on Pyongyang so as to dissuade the defiant neighbor from continuing its missile and nuclear development.

### **Group of Japanese lawmakers to visit Washington**

Saturday morning’s Sankei wrote that a suprapartisan group of Diet members plans to visit the U.S. for six days starting on Tuesday to exchange views with U.S. members of Congress on such issues as security, trade, and investment. Former Minister for Economic and Fiscal Policy Amari, one of the members of the delegation, told the press on Friday that it is important to narrow the gap between Japan and the U.S. over the TPP.

### **Human rights report voices concern about freedom of press in Japan**

Saturday evening’s Nikkei took up this year’s annual human rights report released on Friday by the State Department, highlighting its concern raised about freedom of the press in Japan. The document highlighted Minister of Internal Affairs and Communications Takaichi’s suggestion that the broadcasting license of a TV network would be suspended if it aired politically biased programs repeatedly, noting that her remark represents increasing government pressure against critical and independent media. The USG report also referred to the issue of “karoshi,” or death from overwork. Other papers ran similar stories in their Sunday editions.

## **U.S. aware of Japan's interest in possible reinstatement of DPRK as terror sponsor**

Saturday evening's Mainichi reported from Washington on press remarks on Friday by Japanese Ambassador to the U.S. Sasae, who said the USG is aware that Japan is keenly interested in whether or not the Trump administration will reinstate North Korea on its list of state sponsors of terrorism. The Japanese diplomat stressed that the recent killing of Kim Jong Nam in Kuala Lumpur shows that Pyongyang is involved in acts of terrorism overseas.

## **"Patrol boat diplomacy" picking up momentum**

Sunday's Asahi wrote that the Abe administration has promised Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia that it will provide patrol boats for their coast guards in order to help them counter China's efforts to change the status quo in the South China Sea. According to the daily, in addition to providing equipment, Japan plans to send a team of experts to offer advice on how to operate patrol boats and crack down on illegal fishing so as to establish the rule of law in the area.

## **Atlanta facility rejects proposal for comfort woman statue**

Sunday's Sankei reported that the Center for Civil and Human Rights in Atlanta has decided not to go ahead with the proposed installation of a comfort woman memorial on its premises. The paper praised the GOJ and local Japanese citizens for conducting effective lobbying to derail the initiative. The proponents of the installation are reportedly disappointed by the center's "policy turnaround."

## **Hokkaido municipalities to propose joint economic activities for disputed isles**

Saturday morning's Mainichi reported that five municipalities in Hokkaido, including Nemuro, have put together a plan to submit to the GOJ for the proposed "joint economic activities" on the Northern Territories. They will ask the central government to grant them "special economic zone" status so that their communities can participate in a range of economic activities with Russians on the islands in such fields as tourism, medicine, and seafood processing.

## **SECURITY**

### **Osprey to participate in U.S.-Japan joint military exercise**

NHK carried a two-minute report this morning on a joint military exercise between the SDF and the U.S. military that will begin today in Gunma and Niigata prefectures, in which Futenma-based MV-22 Ospreys will participate. NHK commentator Masuda said concerns remain over the safety of Ospreys, adding that while many accidents occurred during its development phase, the accident rate is low today. He also said this will be the first time for Ospreys to participate in a military drill since the incident in which an Osprey made an emergency landing in waters off Nago, Okinawa, last December. He said local citizens groups are voicing opposition to the Osprey's participation in the drill and both prefectures are asking the MOD for information and thorough safety measures. Masuda explained that a total of six Ospreys will participate in the drill, adding that the MOD and the

U.S. military are hoping to play up the transportation capability of the Osprey through the training. He added that since concerns over the safety of the aircraft are growing again, more thorough explanations will need to be provided to the local municipalities.

### **Japan alarmed by China's arms expansion**

All Sunday papers reported on China's announcement on Saturday that its military budget this year will grow by about 7%, quoting Foreign Minister Kishida as saying: "China's rapid and nontransparent arms expansion has been a source of concern within the international community." Yomiuri wrote that Prime Minister Abe is anxious to increase defense spending based on the assessment that "China is bound to apply greater pressure on the Senkakus," in the words of an unnamed senior SDF official. The daily noted that lately the premier has repeatedly expressed concern about China's pursuit of maritime interests, highlighting his recent remarks at the Diet that his administration is not bound by the conventional policy of limiting defense spending to 1% of GDP.

### **Most concrete blocks now in place on ocean floor off Henoko**

Sunday's Tokyo Shimbun wrote that most of the 228 concrete blocks for installing underwater fences to prevent the spread of dirt have already been placed on the ocean floor off Camp Schwab following the start of the work a month ago. The paper noted that since the work has gone smoothly, the GOJ may now be able to commence bank protection work in April, a month earlier than originally scheduled.

### **Mayoral election revote in Kagoshima to focus on U.S. military training**

Sunday's Asahi took up a mayoral election revote in Nishinoomote, Kagoshima Prefecture, to be held on March 19, explaining that the four candidates are split over the proposed relocation of the U.S. military's FCLP to Mage Island in its jurisdiction. The revote is necessary because none of the six candidates in the election in January were able to collect enough votes to be legally declared the winner. The article said the GOJ is paying close attention to the revote in the belief that Japan's relations with the Trump administration, which is calling for its allies to take on greater defense burden, may deteriorate if the relocation plan suffers a setback as a result of the election.

### **Japanese academia cautious about military research**

Sunday's Tokyo Shimbun led with the results of a Kyodo survey of 95 major universities nationwide concerning their positions on the nation's decades-long academic policy of not engaging in R&D for military purposes. The paper noted that some 40% of the schools said that academia should be kept separate from the military. Although the rest were apparently noncommittal, none of them supported the discontinuation of the policy. While noting that only 20% of the institutions have established internal rules on their scholars' participation in MOD-sponsored programs for basic research, the article wrote that Japanese colleges are having difficulty defining what constitutes military research since the results of many basic research programs can be used for both civilian and military purposes.

## **GOJ to enhance protection of inhabited islets near borders**

Sunday's Yomiuri gave top play to a GOJ plan concerning inhabited islands located near the nation's borders, noting that the government will set up facilities, purchase property, and create harbors on a total of 148 such isles nationwide with the goal of ensuring the "continued maintenance of activities" on them. The GOJ is afraid that the rapid aging and steady decrease in the population on these isles could be detrimental to the protection of territorial waters from possible foreign aggression.

## **ECONOMY**

### **Commerce chief vows to take hard line on trade with foreign partners**

Saturday evening's Nikkei took up remarks made on a CNBC show on Friday by Commerce Secretary Ross, who stressed that the Trump administration will take a "strong position" in trade talks with foreign nations, including the renegotiation of NAFTA, which he said will be the "first priority."

### **Japan paying close attention to U.S. energy policy**

On the Senate confirmation of Energy Secretary Rick Perry, Saturday morning's Mainichi predicted that the Trump administration will reverse the Obama administration's "pro-environment" policy and promote the domestic energy industry, as the new energy chief is apparently skeptical of global warming. The daily wrote that Japan is paying keen attention to the USG's new energy policy in the belief that the active development of resources in the U.S. such as shale gas and oil will help Japan diversify its energy supply sources and import petroleum and natural gas at lower prices.

### **No agreement forged in RCEP talks**

All Saturday morning papers reported on the conclusion in Kobe on Friday of a meeting of the chief negotiators for the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, noting that they failed to forge a consensus on anything despite intense discussions over five days on import tariffs, intellectual property protection, and investment rules. Japan, Australia, and New Zealand were at odds with China and India, which were hesitant about the former group's ambitious goal of seeking "high-level" trade liberalization. The next session will be held in the Philippines in May.

Yomiuri wrote that although Beijing appears to be anxious to conclude RCEP talks swiftly in a bid to seize the initiative in setting trade rules in the Asia-Pacific region following the derailment of the TPP, it continues to avoid bold market opening measures so as to protect domestic industries.

## **POLITICS**

### **LDP extends term of president to nine years at maximum**

All Monday papers reported on the LDP's annual convention held in Tokyo on Sunday, during which the ruling party officially approved a change in the party rule regarding term limits for its president,

highlighting that presidents will now be able to serve for three consecutive three-year terms at maximum. As a result, Prime Minister Abe will potentially be able to stay in office until 2021 if he is reelected next year. Mainichi said as the presence of Foreign Minister Kishida and former Regional Revitalization Minister Ishiba as Abe's potential challengers is fading in the face of the premier's strong grip on power, LDP agricultural policy panel chairman Koizumi may emerge as Abe's possible successor, noting that the junior politician is extremely popular among voters for his gentle, lone-wolf attitude.

Asahi said Abe is now looking to postpone the dissolution of the Lower House for a snap election until the autumn of 2018 based on the judgment that the ruling party could lose as many as 30 seats if the general election were to be held today and that such an outcome would be detrimental for him in seeking reelection as party leader in Sept. 2018. The daily said although the premier's grip on power appears to be rock solid due to his high popularity and the absence of powerful rivals within the LDP, Tokyo Governor Koike, who commands strong public support for her efforts to overhaul the metropolitan government, and the Trump administration are potential risks to his presidency. The daily projected that Japanese voters may become disappointed with the premier for his handling of ties with Washington depending on the outcome of planned bilateral economic dialogue.

On the other hand, Sankei speculated that Abe may choose to dissolve the lower chamber in April this year for a snap election so that his presidency will not be overshadowed by Governor Koike, who plans to field many candidates of her own in the July Tokyo metropolitan assembly election to defeat the LDP Tokyo chapter, which has opposed her reform agenda.

