



Morning Alert - Monday, March 13, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK and TBS led with reports that former South Korean President Park left the Blue House for the last time on Sunday, saying that she vowed in a statement to clarify the truth behind the corruption allegations. NTV and Fuji TV led with reports on Sunday's arrival of King Salman bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia with an entourage of about 1,000 people. TV Asahi gave top play to a report that Samurai Japan beat the Netherlands 8-6 in the World Baseball Classic on Sunday.

Top stories in national dailies this morning included a plan by the leaders of the House of Councillors and the House of Representatives to recommend the GOJ submit to the Diet a bill allowing only the present Emperor to abdicate (Asahi, Sankei); a plan by Yamato Transport to step up its cooperation with Sagawa Express and Japan Post in door-to-door delivery service for customers in high-rise buildings in Tokyo (Mainichi); an estimate by a group of scientists that a mega earthquake hitting the Nankai Trough could force up to 1.4 million households to evacuate (Yomiuri); and a plan by Japan and Saudi Arabia to strengthen their economic cooperation by reaching an agreement to establish special economic zones in the kingdom to invite Japanese firms ([Nikkei](#)).

Weekend papers and broadcasters reported extensively on the sixth anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, highlighting progress in reconstruction, prayers for the victims, and a government-sponsored memorial service in Tokyo.

INTERNATIONAL

ROK President Park ousted following court decision

All Saturday morning papers reported extensively on the decision on Friday by South Korea's Constitutional Court to uphold the parliament's impeachment of President Park Geun-hye over a corruption scandal. The papers wrote that Japan is highly concerned that trilateral coordination between the U.S., Japan, and the ROK against North Korea will be undermined under the new leadership in Seoul and that the next president will call on Japan to review the Japan-ROK comfort women agreement and General Security of Military Information Agreement. Yomiuri wrote that the U.S. plans to expedite its deployment of the THAAD missile defense system in South Korea out of concern that the Park administration will be replaced by an anti-U.S. government administration, speculating that Secretary of State Tillerson will issue a warning when he meets with Foreign Minister Yun in Seoul on March 17.

U.S., Japanese lawmakers discuss North Korea

Saturday evening's Nikkei wrote that members of the Japan-U.S. Parliamentary Friendship League held a press briefing on Washington on Friday to conclude their visit to the U.S. last week. Former Defense Minister Nakatani said that they shared the view with U.S. lawmakers and government officials that the North Korean threat has entered a new stage.

PM Abe's advisor to visit U.S.

Saturday morning's Nikkei wrote that Special Advisor to the Prime Minister Kawai will visit Washington on March 14-18 to hold meetings with his U.S. counterparts and members of Congress. He plans to discuss the security environment in the Asia-Pacific region, including North Korea's launch of ballistic missiles on March 6.

Japan to provide \$6 million in aid to help South Sudan fight famine

All Monday papers reported on remarks made to the press by Foreign Minister Kishida on Sunday, during which he announced Japan's plan to offer \$6 million in aid to South Sudan to help the country fight famine. Kishida stated that Japan will step up humanitarian assistance, including human resource development and food aid, to the country.

Yomiuri added that the foreign minister also commented on his planned meeting with Secretary of State Tillerson in Tokyo on March 15 by saying that he would like to confirm Japan's bilateral cooperation with the U.S. and its trilateral coordination with Washington and Seoul vis-à-vis North Korea.

Takaichi defends remarks on broadcasting in response to U.S. human rights report

Saturday morning's Mainichi and Nikkei wrote that during a news conference on Friday, Minister of Internal Affairs and Communications Takaichi rebutted the State Department's 2016 Human Rights Report, which expressed concern over freedom of the press in Japan by referring to a comment she made on the possibility of broadcasters being ordered to cease operations if they repeatedly produced politically biased content. Takaichi stated that she does not think the Japanese media are

being intimidated and believes the government should exercise its authority in a very careful manner and only in limited cases.

SECURITY

Japan to withdraw SDF from UN mission in South Sudan

All Saturday morning papers ran extensive front-page reports on the GOJ announcement on Friday that Japan will withdraw SDF troops from the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) at the end of May or later after five years of participation. Prime Minister Abe told reporters after a National Security Council meeting: "As South Sudan enters a new phase of nation building, we have judged that we will be able to bring to a close the SDF's operations in the nation." Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga said at a news conference that the decision was not made in response to the deteriorating security situation in the country, adding that the GOJ started considering the future of its peacekeeping operations in South Sudan last September. However, the papers wrote that the GOJ has been very concerned that the Abe administration would suffer serious damage if SDF personnel were killed in South Sudan. The opposition parties have criticized the decision by saying it was "overdue" and are set to grill the Abe administration in Diet deliberations on its decision to allow the SDF to carry out "rush-to-the-rescue" operations in line with the new security legislation.

Sunday's Nikkei wrote that the GOJ is studying the possibility of sending SDF troops to other UN peacekeeping missions, such as the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), in order to demonstrate Japan's continued contributions to international peace-building efforts.

In a related development, Saturday evening's Asahi and Nikkei as well as Sunday's Sankei wrote that UN Deputy Spokesman for the Secretary-General Haq commented on the GOJ's decision to withdraw SDF troops from South Sudan during a regular press briefing on March 10 by saying that the UN is grateful for the very important role the SDF has played during its years of operations in South Sudan. Japanese Ambassador to the UN Bessho separately told reporters that UN Undersecretary General Ladsous for Peacekeeping Operations expressed appreciation for Japan's contribution to maintaining peace in South Sudan.

U.S., Japan conduct joint exercises involving Ospreys

Saturday's Asahi wrote that the press was invited to observe U.S.-Japan joint military exercises at the GSDF's Somahara base in Gunma Prefecture on Friday that involved a Futenma-based Osprey. Some 40 protesters rallied against the training, holding up a banner that said: "Ospreys go home!" A total of 750 U.S. Marines and SDF personnel and six Ospreys participated in the drills held March 6-11 at Somahara and the Sekiyama base in Niigata.

ECONOMY

Commerce Secretary Ross says trade deal with Japan is “very high priority”

Saturday morning's Nikkei front-paged a report on remarks made to the press by Commerce Secretary Ross on Friday, during which he stated that a bilateral free trade agreement with Japan is a “very high priority.” The secretary reportedly added that Japan is a major trading and security partner of the United States and that Japan made a great deal of effort to conclude the TPP. Saturday morning's Asahi and Saturday evening's Mainichi ran similar stories, with Mainichi speculating that the U.S. will likely ask Japan to begin talks on a bilateral FTA during their new economic dialogue to be launched in mid-April.

Japan to send vice ministers to U.S. in preparation for upcoming economic dialogue

Saturday morning's Mainichi wrote that Foreign Minister Kishida told a news conference on Friday that Japan will send the vice ministers of foreign affairs, finance, economy, and infrastructure to the U.S. in preparation for the U.S.-Japan Economic Dialogue to be launched in mid-April. Yomiuri ran a similar report, adding that Deputy Assistant to the President for International Economic Affairs Kenneth Juster and other officials will participate in talks with the visiting Japanese officials.

Aso calls on Toshiba to make decision on Chapter 11 bankruptcy for Westinghouse

Saturday morning's Mainichi wrote that Finance Minister Aso commented during a news conference on Friday on the possibility of Westinghouse filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy by saying that it will be necessary for Toshiba to make a decision by the end of March in order to finalize its earnings results. The paper wrote that it is unusual for a cabinet minister to comment on an individual company's insolvency, speculating that his remarks may affect Toshiba's decision. Trade Minister Seko separately told reporters that although he wouldn't comment on the business of an individual firm, many companies have gotten back on their feet after restructuring under Chapter 11. However, he added that he will discuss issues related to Westinghouse with the USG when he visits Washington this week if the U.S. side raises them.

Toyota mulls setting up production facility in Saudi Arabia

Sunday's Yomiuri wrote that in order to look into the possibility of establishing an assembly plant in Saudi Arabia, Toyota will launch joint research with the Saudi government. The automaker plans to exchange a memorandum of understanding with the Saudi government on March 14 on the occasion of King Salman's visit to Japan this week. Saudi Arabia is hoping to draw automakers and other manufacturers to the country as part of its efforts to reduce its dependence on oil production. Toyota, which holds about a 30% share of Saudi Arabia's auto imports, is hoping that demand will increase in the nation. However, the automaker will carefully consider the possibility of production in Saudi Arabia because there are not many parts manufacturers there.

POLITICS

Cabinet support drops 6 points to 55%

Monday's Sankei and Tokyo Shimbun reported on the results of a nationwide telephone poll conducted by Kyodo News on March 11-12, which showed that the support rate for the Abe cabinet dropped 6 points from the previous survey in February to 55.7%, while nonsupport increased by 3.5 points to 30.7%.

Some 45.5% opposed a bill to criminalize conspiracy to commit terrorism, while 33% supported it. Regarding the Emperor's envisioned abdication, 27.6% supported the GOJ plan to establish special legislation that allows only the present Emperor to abdicate.

Democratic Party holds convention

All Monday papers reported on the Democratic Party's first convention on Sunday since its establishment a year ago through the merger of the Democratic Party of Japan and the smaller Japan Innovation Party. Party President Renho expressed her resolve to make the Democratic Party a group that can present the Japanese people with an alternative. However, the papers wrote that Renho's grip on power is weakening, as her attempt to move up the party's target year for a nuclear power exit from "in the 2030s" to 2030 failed due to opposition within the party and from Rengo. Mainichi wrote that there are moves within the party to oust her from the presidency out of concern that the party may suffer a setback in the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly election in July and the next general election. Yomiuri wrote that Renho may be forced to step down depending on the results of the Tokyo election.