



Morning Alert - Tuesday, April 18, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning News

NHK and most commercial broadcasters led with reports on the stormy weather across Japan. Lead items in national papers included Vice President Pence's meeting in Seoul on Monday with South Korean Acting President Hwang and the indictment of former South Korean President Park on bribery and other charges.

INTERNATIONAL

Vice President Pence to arrive in Japan today

NHK aired a 15-minute report on Vice President Pence's visit to South Korea and his expected arrival in Tokyo today for a two-day visit to Japan. The network speculated that the Vice President will confirm the importance of the U.S.-Japan alliance during his visit to Japan and discuss the response to North Korea in his planned talks with Prime Minister Abe. An international news reporter commented that the Vice President sent a strong warning to North Korea by visiting the DMZ on Monday, adding that Pyongyang should take the warning seriously. The journalist added that the Vice President's visits to Indonesia and Australia after the ROK and Japan will demonstrate the United States' continued commitment to the Asia-Pacific region.

Concerning the U.S.-Japan economic dialogue, an economic reporter commented that attention will be focused on whether the U.S. will refer to American producers' requests for Japan to further open its farm and auto markets during the dialogue. The GOJ is probably hoping that the two nations will not discuss the details of individual trade items in the first round of the dialogue. However,

Washington will likely call for holding bilateral negotiations to seek further liberalization in future talks with Tokyo.

U.S., South Korea affirm greater coordination to deal with DPRK

All papers reported extensively from Seoul on Vice President Pence's meeting with South Korean Acting President Hwang, during which they agreed to enhance bilateral and trilateral coordination with Japan to counter North Korea's continued provocations. The two officials also agreed to take "strong punitive measures" if Pyongyang conducts another nuclear test or missile launch. The papers highlighted the Vice President's strong warning against the Kim regime in a press conference: "We hope to achieve [North Korea's denuclearization] through peaceful means. But all options are on the table.... The era of strategic patience is over.... The world witnessed the strength and resolve of our new President in actions taken in Syria and Afghanistan. North Korea would do well not to test his resolve or the strength of the Armed Forces of the United States in this region."

The two leaders also shared the view that China should do more to dissuade the defiant neighbor from continuing provocations. The Vice President said: "President Trump and I have great confidence that China will properly deal with North Korea, but as President Trump made clear just a few short days ago, if China is unable to deal with North Korea, the United States, and our allies, will."

Vice President Pence values "bonds" with Japan

Yomiuri published a prominent profile of Vice President Pence, highlighting his close connections with Japan. The paper wrote that many Japanese companies, including Toyota and Honda, have set up operations in his home state of Indiana that employ some 50,000 Americans. Former Indiana Secretary of Commerce and Business Victor Smith was quoted as saying, "The relations between Indiana and Japan are special. They can be called kizuna (bonds).... Indiana has enjoyed benefits from Japan. Mr. Pence understands the importance of U.S.-Japan relations very well."

GOJ to regard DPRK missile launch into territorial waters as sign of "imminent armed attack"

Yomiuri front-paged a story claiming that the Abe administration would regard the firing of a ballistic missile by North Korea into Japan's territorial waters as the sign of an "imminent armed attack" that would allow the mobilization of the SDF for defense as specified under the comprehensive security laws. Although such a situation could technically be construed as an "armed attack" that would entail a military response, the GOJ believes that North Korea is not ready at this point to wage an all-out war on Japan.

Senior DPRK diplomat comments on abductions

Several papers reported on a press conference held yesterday in Pyongyang by Song Il Ho, North Korea's ambassador in charge of diplomatic normalization talks with Japan, in which he claimed that the 2014 Stockholm accord with Tokyo on the reinvestigation into the fate of the Japanese

abductees is no longer valid. He stressed that “nobody is interested” in the subject, adding that a North Korean committee in charge of the probe has already been disbanded. The diplomat noted, however, that Pyongyang is willing to address the issue of the Japanese who were left behind in North Korea after the end of WWII.

Philippine leader to visit Japan in June

Yomiuri wrote that arrangements are being made for Philippine President Duterte to visit Japan in early June for talks with Prime Minister Abe. This will be his second trip to Japan following a visit in October last year. According to the paper, Tokyo is eager to prevent Manila from extending overtures to Beijing.

Kishida to attend NPT meeting in Vienna

Yomiuri said Foreign Minister Kishida is likely to visit Vienna in early May to take part in a review conference on the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) to explore “realistic” ways to achieve nuclear disarmament. The goal of the conference will be to bridge the gap between proponents and opponents of the proposed Nuclear Weapons Convention. After Vienna, Kishida will visit Saudi Arabia.

ECONOMY

Japan keen to deflect U.S. pressure for holding bilateral trade talks

All papers reported on the economic dialogue to be held today between Vice President Pence and Deputy Prime Minister Aso, noting that the GOJ is optimistic that contentious trade issues, such as autos and agriculture, will not be addressed during the meeting due in part to the absence of senior trade officials from the U.S. delegation. Japan is anxious to focus on bilateral cooperation for the establishment of trade and investment rules so as to deflect U.S. demands for bilateral trade talks.

Asahi wrote, however, that the Japanese side is wary of a possible role to be played in future negotiations by Commerce Secretary Ross, who is viewed as a trade hawk toward Japan. Although he will not take part in the Pence-Aso discussions, he will meet with Trade Minister Seko today to exchange views on the bilateral trade imbalance, in addition to cooperation on energy and cyber security. According to Nikkei, Secretary Ross may also take up such issues as Toshiba’s planned sale of its flash memory division and the bankruptcy of Westinghouse. The daily also said the Vice President may address currency policy in his meeting with Aso.

U.S. agriculture lobby representative pins hope on economic dialogue

Mainichi ran an interview with National Council of Farmer Cooperatives CEO Charles Conner, who expressed strong hope that the Vice President will elicit Japan’s consent for starting bilateral trade talks in today’s economic dialogue. He explained that as a result of the Trump administration’s withdrawal from the TPP, the U.S. farm industry will no longer be able to enjoy the benefits in terms

of access to Japan that were promised under the regional free trade accord. Conner said the swift launch of agricultural trade negotiations with Tokyo is extremely important as they could become a model for similar talks with other trading partners. The former senior USDA official predicted that corn, pork, and beef will be high on the agenda in discussions with Japan.

METI to create new post to address trade disputes

Nikkei wrote that METI plans to create a new “general counsel” post in charge of handling trade disputes with foreign countries, noting that a Tokyo trade litigator in the commercial sector who used to work with the WTO will be appointed to the post. Under his supervision, a new team of lawyers and ministry bureaucrats will be established to liaise with the USTR so that the two countries can coordinate in dealing with dumping and other trade malpractice by China and other countries. The daily said in today’s talks with Minister Seko, Commerce Secretary Ross is likely to bring up possible coordination with Japan on a WTO dispute concerning China’s steel dumping.

SECURITY

SDF personnel leave South Sudan

All dailies wrote that some 70 of the GSDF personnel who have been engaged in peacekeeping operations in South Sudan left the country for Japan on Monday, noting that the approximately 300 members remaining in the nation will return home in several groups by the end of May. Given that this five-year operation in Africa is the only UN peace mission that Japan currently deploys its troops to, the papers predicted that the Abe administration will seek to participate in other peacekeeping operations in order to follow through with its “proactive pacifism” agenda.

