



Morning Alert - Thursday, April 20, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning News

NHK gave top play to a report on Vice President Pence's first official visit to Japan, during which he issued a strong warning to North Korea by calling the nation "the most dangerous and urgent threat." NTV led with a report on the strong winds in the Kanto region on Wednesday. TBS, Fuji TV, and TV Asahi reported on an article in a weekly magazine about Vice Minister of Economy, Trade, and Industry Toshinao Nakagawa, who recently announced his resignation due to an extramarital affair.

Most papers led with a GOJ blue-ribbon commission's recommendation on redrawing electoral districts in the House of Representatives to reduce the vote value disparity between densely and sparsely populated areas. The papers also gave prominent front-page coverage to the start of parliamentary deliberations yesterday on the GOJ-sponsored "anti-conspiracy legislation."

INTERNATIONAL

Vice President Pence vows to defend U.S. allies from North Korean threat

All papers took up Vice President Pence's speech yesterday to U.S. military and MSDF personnel aboard the USS Ronald Reagan, during which he warned North Korea not to threaten U.S. allies in the region by saying: "We will defeat any attack and meet any use of conventional or nuclear weapons with an overwhelming and effective American response." He underscored the U.S. defense commitment to Japan and South Korea by saying: "The United States once again will stand with our allies and stand up to our enemies."

Nikkei said that although the Trump administration is eager to showcase the United States' overwhelming military power to deter North Korea, its basic principle in managing the nuclear and missile standoff with the defiant regime is apparently to seek a "peaceful solution." The paper added that Washington is inclined to press China to play a greater role through such measures as enforcing tougher economic sanctions.

Japan, U.S., ROK confirm coordination over DPRK

Yomiuri and Nikkei reported that assistant secretary-level defense officials of the U.S., Japan, and South Korea assembled in Tokyo yesterday and agreed to take a concerted approach toward North Korea's relentless provocations. They also said China's economic retaliation against South Korea for its plan to deploy a THAAD platform is "unjust."

ROK presidential candidate comments on relations with Japan

Yomiuri published a written interview with Ahn Cheol-soo, the former leader of South Korea's People's Party, who is viewed as one of the two frontrunners in the ongoing presidential election campaign. The centrist politician noted that if elected, his administration would keep bilateral history disputes with Japan separate from economic and security cooperation. He indicated that the 2015 comfort women accord needs to be modified so as to take into account the "wishes of the victims." Speaking on the proposed conclusion of a GSOMIA, Ahn said: "It is militarily important to collect information on North Korea's nuclear and missile development without fail."

ECONOMY

Vice President Pence expresses hope for bilateral trade talks

All papers reported on Vice President Pence's speech to a group of influential businessmen yesterday. The Vice President expressed Washington's intention to pursue bilateral trade negotiations with Tokyo by saying: "The United States seeks a stronger and more balanced bilateral trade relationship with Japan. Our goal is simple. We seek trade that is both free and fair and benefits both our nations equally. This requires breaking down barriers and leveling the playing field so that American companies and exporters enjoy high levels of market access." The Vice President also expressed gratitude for Japanese contributions to the U.S. economy by saying: "Ever since President Donald Trump's election, Japanese businesses have dramatically increased their commitment to the American economy, and we're grateful."

Asahi took up his meeting with selected Japanese business leaders, including Keidanren Chairman Sakakibara, during which the Vice President called for greater investment in the U.S., particularly in the high-tech field. The U.S. official reportedly pledged the Trump administration's support for expanding the Japanese corporate presence in the U.S. Nikkei added that the Vice President was presented with the Mt. Fuji Dialogue Global Leadership Award for his efforts to attract Japanese business investment in Indiana while governor from 2013 to 2017.

Japan to seek effectuation of TPP without U.S. participation

Yomiuri front-paged a GOJ decision to coordinate with the remaining 11 TPP signatories to implement the regional free trade deal without U.S. participation based on the assessment that the Trump administration will not rejoin the pact in the foreseeable future. Japan plans to propose this idea at the upcoming TPP trade ministerial meeting in Vietnam next month. The daily said Tokyo is afraid of potentially being drawn into bilateral trade talks by the Trump administration, noting that it is determined to uphold what was agreed upon with the Obama administration under the TPP even under such a scenario. Yomiuri added that effectuating the TPP without the U.S. will not be easy since it will require changing the wording of the agreement and may entail renegotiation of import duties that would make parliamentary approval more difficult in some member states.

Foxconn keen to acquire Toshiba spinoff in cooperation with Apple and other U.S. firms

Mainichi front-paged a report on Foxconn's idea on forging a partnership with Apple, Amazon, Dell Computer, and Sharp to acquire the flash memory business to be deconsolidated by Toshiba. The paper explained that the proposal is intended to address GOJ concern that one of Japan's key technological bases may be sold off to a firm closely connected to China. Under the proposal, the Taiwan-based electronics giant is considering obtaining only about 20% of Toshiba Memory's stock, with the remaining shares held by the three partners in addition to Toshiba. Foxconn also proposed building in the U.S. a Toshiba Memory factory that would employ 16,000 workers in a bid to obtain the Trump administration's backing for its buyout plan.

Asahi wrote the Innovation Network Corp of Japan and the Development Bank of Japan may join forces with Broadcom and American private equity firms Silver Lake Partners and KKR to counter Foxconn's bid to purchase Toshiba's semiconductor division.

SECURITY

SDF to conduct joint air training with Australia

All papers reported that Defense Minister Inada held talks with her visiting Australian counterpart Payne on Wednesday and agreed that the two militaries will carry out joint training involving fighter jets in Japan next year for the first time ever. They affirmed their intention to seek enhanced bilateral and trilateral defense cooperation with the United States with a special focus on training and interoperability. The two officials will take part in a bilateral 2+2 foreign and defense ministerial meeting scheduled for today.

