



Morning Alert - Thursday, April 27, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK gave top play to a report on a congressional hearing with PACOM Commander Admiral Harris on Wednesday, during which he said that “with every test, Kim Jong Un moves closer to his stated goal of preemptive nuclear strike capability against American cities.” He was also quoted as saying: “As President Trump and Secretary Mattis have made clear, all options are on the table. We want to bring Kim Jong Un to his senses, not to his knees.” The PACOM commander also said the USS Carl Vinson is “in striking range and power projection range of North Korea if called upon to do that.”

TV Asahi led with a report that the U.S. test-launched an ICBM in California on Wednesday in an apparent move to keep North Korea in check. The network also reported that President Trump convened a meeting with all 100 senators on Wednesday to explain the North Korea situation.

Other top TV news included the resignation of Reconstruction Minister Imamura.

Top stories in national dailies included a GOJ-sponsored bill on the Emperor’s abdication (Yomiuri); a GOJ survey on the effectiveness of anticancer drug treatment for elderly patients (Mainichi, Sankei); and a plan by the Innovation Network Corp. to sell off nearly a 20% stake in Renesas Electronics, signaling that the chipmaker is on track to make a full recovery (Nikkei).

Asahi led with a report on the ruling coalition’s agreement with the opposition bloc to hold intensive deliberations at budget committee meetings of both houses of the Diet on May 8 and 9, during which Prime Minister Abe is expected to respond to questions from the opposition parties about former Reconstruction Minister Imamura’s gaffe.

INTERNATIONAL

Japan, China agree to respond resolutely to North Korea

All papers reported on a meeting between MOFA Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau Director-General Kanasugi and China's Special Representative for Korean Peninsula Affairs Wu Dawei in Tokyo on Wednesday. After the talks, Wu paid visits to Foreign Minister Kishida, National Security Council Secretariat Secretary General Yachi, and Komeito chief Representative Yamaguchi.

Yomiuri wrote that Kanasugi and Wu agreed to deal with further provocations by North Korea resolutely and cooperate in fully implementing UNSC resolutions. The paper also wrote that Kanasugi called on China to impose additional sanctions, including limiting oil exports to North Korea. Nikkei wrote that despite Kanasugi's call for China to implement economic sanctions, Wu stressed the importance of a peaceful settlement of the North Korean issue.

Asahi wrote that although the two diplomats agreed to call on North Korea to exercise self-restraint, the gap between Tokyo and Beijing remained unbridged because China responded cautiously to Tokyo's request for it to ratchet up the pressure on Pyongyang out of concern that additional pressure could lead to the collapse of the Kim regime. The paper wrote that attention is focused on whether China will agree to impose an oil embargo on North Korea, but Wu only said to reporters after the talks that China will respond seriously to North Korean provocations based on UNSC resolutions. Wu also voiced displeasure over joint military exercises between the U.S. and Japan that involve the USS Carl Vinson Strike Group by saying that China hopes the situation on the Korean Peninsula will be resolved peacefully by political and diplomatic means.

U.S., ROK accelerate installation of THAAD missile defense system

All papers reported on the delivery on early Wednesday morning of equipment for the THAAD missile defense system, including radar and launching pads, to the site for its deployment in Seongju in South Korea's North Gyeongsang Province. The delivery was made much earlier than originally scheduled.

Asahi quoted a source connected to U.S.-ROK relations as saying that the two nations plan to make a provisional announcement on the completion of the installation of the system ahead of the presidential election in South Korea on May 9 out of concern that the deployment will have to be reviewed if the next ROK administration rejects it. The ROK Ministry of Defense said it will ensure that the THAAD system will have full operational capabilities by the end of this year.

However, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman called for the cancellation of the deployment of the system during a regular press briefing on Wednesday by saying that the move will heighten tensions in the region and undermine China's security interests.

Yomiuri and Nikkei wrote that PACOM Commander Admiral Harris told a congressional hearing on Wednesday that the THAAD missile defense system will be operational within a few days.

Japan, Russia to agree to establish medical center at hospital in Khabarovsk

Wednesday evening's Yomiuri front-paged a report saying that it has obtained working plans for the economic cooperation between Japan and Russia in the health care field that will be agreed upon in talks between Prime Minister Abe and President Putin in Moscow today. The plans comprises six projects, including the early establishment of a "Japan-Russia preventive medical diagnosis center" in Khabarovsk and Japan's support for medical care for newborn infants. The paper wrote that Russia has a strong interest in cooperation with Japan in health care because the average life expectancy in Russia is 69, substantially lower than Japan's 84. The paper speculated that the GOJ hopes the economic cooperation projects will lead to progress in its territorial talks with Moscow.

Kishida to kick off tour of U.S., Turkmenistan, Austria today

Yomiuri and Sankei wrote that MOFA announced on Wednesday that Foreign Minister Kishida will visit the U.S., Turkmenistan, and Austria from April 27 through May 3. Kishida plans to attend a UN Security Council meeting on North Korea in New York on April 28 and hold trilateral talks with Secretary of State Tillerson and ROK Foreign Minister Yun on the sidelines. Kishida also plans to attend a foreign ministerial meeting with five central Asian nations in Turkmenistan on May 1 and a preparatory meeting for an NPT review meeting in Vienna on May 2.

In a related story, Nikkei wrote that Prime Minister Abe, Foreign Minister Kishida, and Defense Minister Inada have decided to shorten their foreign tours during the Golden Week Holidays in view of the rising tensions over North Korea. Kishida has cancelled his planned visit to Saudi Arabia, and Inada has cancelled her trip to Vietnam.

