



Morning Alert - Monday, May 15, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning News

NHK led with a report that North Korea announced at around 6:30 a.m. that it successfully test-launched “a new type of intermediate-range ballistic missile” on Sunday. TBS, TV Asahi, and most national papers also gave top coverage to the missile launch. NTV and Fuji TV led with reports that an 18-year-old boy was arrested over his involvement in the murder of a 17-year-old girl in Taito Ward, Tokyo, on May 4.

INTERNATIONAL

North Korea fires missile

All Monday papers reported heavily on North Korea’s launch of a ballistic missile early Sunday morning, noting that the projectile reached an altitude of 2,000 kilometers and flew 800 km before landing in the Sea of Japan some 400 km east of the Korean Peninsula. Defense Minister Inada told the press that because the flight pattern was “rather unusual,” the projectile may have been a new type of intermediate-range ballistic missile. No damage to airplanes or ships was reported. The GOJ lodged a protest against the DPRK provocation through its embassy in Beijing. Prime Minister Abe denounced the launch by telling the press: “This cannot be accepted. The repeated ballistic missile launches pose a grave threat to our country and constitute a clear violation of UN Security Council resolutions.” The dailies said there were no disruptions to train operations across Japan this time because the GOJ did not activate its “J-Alert” missile warning system.

Japan, U.S., South Korea reaffirm close coordination

All papers wrote that following the latest DPRK missile launch, Secretary General Yachi of the National Security Secretariat and National Security Advisor McMaster spoke by phone and confirmed the need to enhance mutual and trilateral coordination with South Korea. The two officials also agreed to step up efforts to urge China to exercise its influence over North Korea. MOFA Asian and Oceanian Bureau Director General Kanasugi held separate teleconferences with Special Representative for North Korea Policy Yun and his South Korean counterpart. Noting that Foreign Minister Kishida also spoke by phone with ROK Foreign Minister Yun on Sunday to discuss the latest North Korean provocation, the papers said Kishida is aiming to hold a similar teleconference with Secretary Tillerson as soon as possible.

Missile test reveals DPRK's steady progress toward developing ICBM

The papers claimed that the fact that the missile was launched on a "very high trajectory" demonstrated the Kim regime's resolve to develop an ICBM and never succumb to U.S. pressure. The papers said, however, that the regime apparently took care not to have the missile fly too far to avoid triggering a military response by the United States or suspension of oil supplies from China. The dailies took up a press statement released by the White House calling for the international community to tighten sanctions on North Korea. According to Sankei, Special Advisor to the Prime Minister Kawai will visit Washington from today for talks with Trump administration officials and members of Congress on North Korea.

China is reportedly very displeased that Pyongyang carried out the missile test only a few hours before President Xi hosted the Belt and Road Initiative conference, which was characterized by the Chinese as the "largest diplomatic event ever" held in the country. The missile launch reportedly caused the Chinese leader to "lose face" in front of a large number of foreign dignitaries. South Korea's Moon administration has also been put in a very difficult position since the latest North Korean provocation came only a few days after its inauguration and was in opposition to the new ROK government's "pro-dialogue" policy. The Moon administration will probably have little choice other than to follow its predecessor's approach of maintaining close coordination with the U.S. and Japan if North Korea's provocations continue.

Senior DPRK diplomat mentions possible dialogue with U.S.

Several Sunday papers took up press remarks made at Beijing Airport on Saturday by a high-ranking North Korean diplomat in charge of U.S. affairs, who said the Kim regime is ready to hold dialogue with the Trump administration if the "conditions are met." The official was on her way back to Pyongyang from Oslo where she and other DPRK diplomats held informal talks with retired USG officials, including former Ambassador to the UN Thomas Pickering.

Aso, Mnuchin confirm coordination on DPRK sanctions

All Saturday evening papers took up Finance Minister Aso's meeting with Treasury Secretary Mnuchin on the margins of a G7 financial minister's conference in Italy on Friday, during which they agreed to take a concerted approach in enforcing economic sanctions on North Korea. The two officials reportedly did not discuss bilateral trade or currency exchange.

In a related development, several Sunday papers took up Secretary Mnuchin's press remarks on Saturday upon the conclusion of the G7 confab, quoting him as saying: "The United States is the most open market in the world. It has the right to take protectionist actions in the event that trade with foreign nations is deemed unfair." Yomiuri said many participants in the G7 meeting voiced concern about the U.S. disrupting the G7's goal of pursuing free trade.

"Freedom of navigation" operation suspended for seven months

Sunday's Sankei wrote that the U.S. military's freedom of navigation operation in the South China Sea has been suspended since last October. The paper noted that on May 10 a group of U.S. senators sent to the White House a letter expressing concern about the suspension because the operation is "extremely critical to U.S. national security and peace and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region." Speculating that the Trump administration has suspended the operation out of deference to China in the hope that Beijing will exercise its influence with North Korea, the daily asserted that the prolonged suspension could turn the South China Sea into "China's sea."

UN panel calls for review of Japan-ROK accord on comfort women

All weekend papers reported on a recommendation issued to the South Korean government on Friday by the UN Committee on Torture that called for a review of the 2015 comfort women agreement with Japan on the grounds that the compensation, restoration of honor of the victims, and preventive measures specified in the agreement were insufficient. Yomiuri said although Japan is unhappy about the UN document since it "erroneously" describes the victims as "sex slaves during WWII," it may take a wait-and-see attitude since it was only addressed to Seoul. However, Tokyo is concerned that the UN report will trigger a resurgence of calls for a review of the bilateral pact in South Korea.

Sankei said that in its input submitted to the UN panel, the ROK government failed to mention that the GOJ contributed 1 billion yen in donations to the Reconciliation and Healing Foundation. The paper projected that the Moon administration will capitalize on the UN report to rekindle the comfort women dispute, adding that defense cooperation between Tokyo and Seoul may be disrupted as a result.

In a related story, NHK said this morning that South Korea's public broadcaster KBS reported Sunday evening that lawmaker Moon Hee-sang, who was appointed by President Moon as his special envoy to Japan, expressed his view that instead of calling on Japan to renegotiate the 2015 agreement on the comfort women, South Korea will seek an alternative measure such as having the

Japanese side release a new statement. The network said lawmaker Moon is expected to meet with President Moon on Tuesday, adding that attention will be focused on what kind of message the special envoy will deliver when he visits Japan in the future.

Meanwhile, Yomiuri's latest public opinion poll showed that three out five Japanese said the GOJ should not heed the Moon administrations' possible call for renegotiations of the comfort women agreement. Almost 58% said Japan-ROK relations will remain unchanged under the liberal government in South Korea.

Japan sends large delegation to major Chinese economic conference

Saturday morning's Nikkei said the Abe administration on Friday dispatched to Beijing a delegation led by LDP Secretary General Nikai to the "One Belt, One Road" conference held there over the weekend. The paper noted that Prime Minister Abe's top assistant Imai joined the delegation in addition to Keidanren Chairman Sakakibara and other leading businessmen and prefectural governors. The daily said Imai's participation reflects Abe's strong desire to improve ties with Beijing amid North Korea's escalated provocations. Given that Nikai maintains strong connections with senior Chinese officials, the article said Tokyo is hopeful that the team will be able to improve bilateral relations with Beijing.

Lower House to approve Japan-India civil nuclear cooperation treaty

Saturday morning's Asahi and Mainichi wrote that the Lower House is expected to approve this week a pact on Japan-India civil nuclear cooperation for deliberations by the Upper House. The papers noted that the Democratic Party and other opposition parties are opposed to the pact on the grounds that it will allow India to obtain Japan's advanced nuclear generation technology even though it is not an NPT signatory. The opposition bloc takes issue with the lack of a clause specifying the suspension of Japanese cooperation in the event of a nuclear test by New Delhi.

Rift remains between nuclear, nonnuclear powers after NPT conference

Saturday morning's Asahi took up the conclusion of the NPT review conference in Vienna on Saturday, noting that the five nuclear and the nonnuclear powers led by Brazil and others were sharply at odds over the proposed Nuclear Weapons Convention. The nuclear powers insisted that the proposed treaty would endanger global security by weakening the "nuclear umbrella," while the nonnuclear powers argued that the convention would complement the existing nonproliferation regimes, including the NPT.

GOJ publishes new documents on Senkakus, Takeshima

Most Saturday morning papers wrote that the GOJ released 30 documents on Friday that substantiate Japan's territorial claims to the Senkaku Islands and the Liancourt Rocks (Takeshima).

SECURITY

Two cases of computers being attacked by ransomware reported in Japan

All weekend and Monday papers reported on the rapid spread of computer ransomware called “WannaCry /WannaCrypt” around the world, with today’s editions highlighting the National Police Agency’s announcement yesterday that two instances of computers being attacked by the malware have been reported in Japan. One person and one hospital have notified the police that their personal computers were apparently hijacked by the ransomware, although hospital operations were reportedly not disrupted. Bracing for the possibility of more cases being reported when businesses return to regular operations today, the police are calling for local enterprises and individuals to take precautions to safeguard their computers.

Japan to procure Aegis Ashore platform instead of THAAD for cost reasons

Saturday morning’s Yomiuri claimed in its lead story that final coordination is underway by the GOJ to procure in several years a new Aegis Ashore land-based missile defense platform partly because it will be less expensive than a THAAD system. The GOJ is looking to purchase two Aegis Ashore systems at a cost of about 160 billion yen for deployment at locations facing the Sea of Japan to counter the North Korean missile threat. The daily said the GOJ is reluctant to purchase a THAAD system because it would cost over 700 billion yen in total and would trigger strong reactions from China and Russia on account of its advanced capabilities.

Confrontation between Okinawa and central government continues over U.S. bases

Most Monday papers reported that today marks the 45th anniversary of Okinawa’s return to Japanese administration, noting that there is still a deep schism between the southernmost prefecture and the central government over the continued presence of the U.S. military. Liberal papers said that if the Abe administration’s high-handed approach of implementing the FRF construction despite strong local opposition with the goal of enhancing the U.S.-Japan security alliance may backfire by enraging local people and making it even more difficult for the U.S. military to maintain a stable presence in Okinawa.

GOJ establishes new subsidy system for Okinawa

Sunday’s Sankei front-paged a report on a new subsidy system for Okinawa that was established by the GOJ last month to support local communities that are cooperating with the planned transfer and consolidation of U.S. military facilities south of Kadena AB. A total of 1 billion yen has been earmarked for four municipalities, including Nago, Okinawa, and Urasoe. The funds will be provided if the leaders of these communities express support for such realignment projects as Futenma relocation and the return of Makiminato Service Area.

Japan Coast Guard to conduct training with Vietnam, Philippines

Sunday’s Asahi front-paged a plan by the Japan Coast Guard to carry out separate joint drills with its counterparts from the Philippines and Vietnam in June in the South China Sea. The paper noted that

the patrol boats of the two ASEAN members that will take part in the exercises used to belong to the JCG. The training is intended to counter China's maritime advancement in the region.

Japan Coast Guard to build more patrol boats for deployment near Senkakus

Saturday morning's Sankei led with a plan by the Japan Coast Guard to construct nine small patrol boats for deployment in the vicinity of the Senkaku Islands by FY2018. Three of the boats have already been built and put into operation. Noting that the new boats represent a significant increase in the JCG's patrol assets, the article stressed that the quick and agile vessels will be used to detect and track down Chinese trawlers operating around the disputed outcrops.

ECONOMY

Japan braces for hardline policies of new U.S. trade chief

Most Saturday morning papers took up the Senate confirmation of new USTR Lighthizer, noting that the GOJ is very concerned that the "tough negotiator" who has in-depth knowledge of Japan and international trade will ratchet up the pressure to open up the Japanese market, particularly in the agricultural sector. Yomiuri predicted that Lighthizer will probably be at the forefront of bilateral trade negotiations based on a strategy formulated by Secretary of Commerce Ross. Mainichi voiced concern that the Trump administration's protectionist tendency will grow under Lighthizer's leadership of the USTR.

Japan concerned about U.S.-China trade deal

Several Saturday morning papers reported on a U.S.-China agreement on opening up China's market to American products as part of the Trump administration's efforts to rectify the bilateral trade imbalance. The articles predicted that Japan will perhaps be put in a difficult position since the U.S. may shift its trade target to Japan in view of growing rapprochement between Washington and Beijing. Noting that Tokyo has been looking to deflect potential U.S. trade pressure by forging an accord on having China comply with international rules, Asahi said the trade accord between the U.S. and China upsets Japan's plans. Sankei quoted a trade source as saying that Tokyo may be forced to come up with a "gift" for the U.S. to head off increased trade pressure, just as China did under the "100-day action plan."

TPP joint statement to stress unity among 11 members

Saturday morning's Yomiuri front-paged a draft of a joint statement to be released by the trade ministers of the 11 TPP members when they gather in Vietnam on May 21, noting that the participants will highlight their strong commitment to effectuating the regional free trade pact "as soon as possible." The assembled officials are also likely to confirm that the member states will draft procedural arrangements by the APEC leaders' meeting in November to encourage the United States to return to the trade liberalization framework.

Sunday's Nikkei claimed in a front-page item that the GOJ is likely to propose at the ministerial meeting in Vietnam that the leaders of the TPP member states establish a basic consensus for the effectuation of the TPP accord when they hold a summit in November on the margins of the APEC confab. The daily added that Japan needs to persuade Malaysia and Vietnam to agree to swiftly effectuate the TPP without U.S. participation.

U.S., Japanese funds hoping to purchase Toshiba's semiconductor unit

Saturday morning's Asahi wrote that the Innovation Network Corporation of Japan (INCJ) and U.S. equity fund KKR plan to forge a partnership to acquire the flash memory division to be deconsolidated by Toshiba. The paper noted that the two partners are asking Fujitsu, NEC, Apple Inc., and other companies to join them to counter a separate bid offered by Taiwan's Foxconn. Noting that the INCJ and KKR are planning to borrow some 800 billion yen to compete with the Taiwanese rival, the daily said the INCJ-KKR consortium appears to be the "most promising" buyer from Toshiba's viewpoint since the partnership has been orchestrated behind the scenes by METI.

POLITICS

Majority support Abe's call for legitimizing SDF through constitutional revision

Monday's Yomiuri front-paged the results of its latest public opinion survey that put support for Prime Minister Abe's idea of adding a clause to Article 9 of the Constitution to specify the legitimacy of the SDF at 53% and opposition at 35%. While support outnumbered nonsupport in all age brackets, it remained relatively low among respondents in their 60s and 70s. A plurality of 47% endorsed the premier's proposal on implementing the revision in 2020, while 38% were opposed to it. Approval for the Abe cabinet stood at 61%, up 1 point from a month ago. About 53% voiced support for the "anti-conspiracy" legislation, down five points.

EDUCATION

Japanese students steer clear of U.S., Europe for fear of terrorism, anti-immigration policies

Friday evening's Yomiuri published a prominent inside-page story saying that many Japanese students are choosing not to study in the U.S. and Europe and instead opting for Canada, Australia, and New Zealand probably on account of the Trump administration's stricter immigration policy and the frequent terrorist incidents in Europe. The daily added that the Japanese government is concerned about the decline in interest in studying abroad among local youths.

