



Morning Alert - Tuesday, May 30, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning News

NHK and TBS gave top play to reports on the missile launch by North Korea on Monday morning. NTV and Fuji TV led with reports that professional golfer Tiger Woods was arrested on DUI charges in Florida. TV Asahi gave top play to a report that two men suspected of stealing gold bars in Fukuoka last year were arrested in Nagoya.

Top items in national papers include updates on the latest DPRK missile launch, a former top MEXT official's remarks alleging that the Kantei put pressure on the ministry to quickly approve the launch of a veterinary school by a close friend of Prime Minister Abe, the GOJ's goal of making preschool education free, and proposed legislation on abdication that may include a resolution allowing the creation of female branches of the imperial family.

INTERNATIONAL

DPRK launches missile

All Tuesday morning papers reported extensively on North Korea's missile launch early Monday morning, noting that the projectile flew some 450 kilometers and landed in Japan's exclusive economic zone in the Sea of Japan some 300 kilometers north of the Oki Islands in Shimane Prefecture. Prime Minister Abe condemned North Korea's third missile launch in three weeks by telling the press: "We cannot accept the fact that North Korea has ignored the international community's repeated warnings and continued provocations." The premier said Japan will take "concrete actions in coordination with the U.S.," but he stopped short of specifying what actions Japan plans to take. Foreign Minister Kishida and Secretary Tillerson spoke by phone yesterday and

agreed to enhance mutual coordination to apply greater pressure and take “concrete actions” to improve the nation’s defense capabilities. Sankei speculated that such actions include plans for Japan to acquire an Aegis Ashore missile defense platform.

North Korea ignores G7 warning

The papers wrote that the fact that the Kim regime fired a missile into Japan’s EEZ only two days after the G7 Taormina Summit showed that it was displeased with Prime Minister Abe’s taking the lead the G7 discussions on North Korea at the summit, at which the assembled leaders agreed to enhance pressure on Pyongyang. According to the papers, North Korea may have decided to provoke the international community in response to the U.S.’s plan to ratchet up the military pressure by deploying multiple aircraft carriers. Nikkei wrote that Pyongyang is stepping up provocations probably based on the assessment that China and Russia are hesitant to apply greater pressure on it.

U.S. reaction to missile launch

The papers reported that President Trump denounced the launch by saying in a tweet: “North Korea has shown great disrespect for their neighbor, China, by shooting off yet another ballistic missile...but China is trying hard!” Yomiuri said the Trump administration is likely to press China even harder to exercise leverage over North Korea, speculating that when the two nations hold bilateral strategic dialogue on June 21, Secretary of State Tillerson, Secretary of Defense Mattis, and other U.S. participants will ask their Chinese counterparts to deliver by July “accomplishments,” including a pledge from North Korea to come to the negotiating table.

Yomiuri said some GOJ officials are afraid that the Trump administration may be tempted to start dialogue with North Korea to deflect mounting criticism at home over “Russiagate,” adding that Tokyo is anxious to confirm that it will take a synchronized approach with Washington by holding a 2+2 meeting in Washington in mid-July.

Trump, Abe agree to increase pressure on North Korea

All Saturday morning papers reported that President Trump and Prime Minister Abe met on Friday morning for about 50 minutes ahead of the opening of the G7 Leaders’ Summit in Taormina, Italy, saying that the two leaders confirmed they will increase pressure on North Korea and agreed to take concrete actions to enhance the U.S.-Japan security arrangements. At the onset of the meeting, President Trump reportedly said: “The issues presented by North Korea are a world problem and it will be solved at some point.” According to the papers, the two leaders also reaffirmed the importance of the role of China, which wields a great deal of influence over North Korea, and agreed to strengthen cooperation with South Korea and the UN Security Council in order to step up pressure on the DPRK. The two leaders also confirmed the importance of “free and fair trade.” In

addition, they agreed on the importance of holding dialogue with Russia in order to resolve the North Korea and Syria issues.

U.S.-Japan “2+2” meeting to be held in mid-July

Monday morning’s Sankei said it learned from a GOJ source that the governments of the U.S. and Japan are making arrangements to hold a “2+2” meeting of foreign and defense ministers in Washington in mid-July. This will be the first such meeting under the Trump administration. The paper said the two governments will coordinate policies on North Korea’s ongoing development of nuclear weapons and missiles. The ministers are also expected to exchange views on how to respond to China’s maritime advancement and measures to boost U.S.-Japan defense capabilities.

Senior USG official voices alarm at possibility of Japan, ROK developing nuclear weapons

Saturday morning’s Yomiuri reported that The Australian carried an interview with Australian Foreign Minister Bishop on Friday in which it reported that in an informal meeting between him and senior U.S. and ROK government officials in New York, a senior USG official expressed concern that if North Korea continues its nuclear and missile development, “neighboring nations such as Japan may embark on developing nuclear weapons.”

Chinese State Councilor Yang visits Japan

All Tuesday papers reported Secretary General Yachi of the National Security Secretariat met with China’s State Councilor Yang Jiechi in Tokyo on Monday. They agreed to make mutual efforts to improve bilateral ties with the goal of arranging a summit between Prime Minister Abe and President Xi on the margins of the G20 summit in Hamburg in July. During the five-hour meeting over dinner, the Japanese official reportedly urged the Chinese visitor to apply greater pressure on North Korea. The two officials also exchanged views on China’s maritime advancement in the South and East China Seas. The senior Chinese official in charge of diplomatic affairs is expected to meet with Foreign Minister Kishida and Prime Minister Abe during his stay in Japan through Wednesday.

G7 leaders agree to fight protectionism, fail to reach consensus on climate change

All Sunday papers reported on the G7 Taormina Summit that ended on Saturday, saying that the leaders adopted a communique pledging “to fight protectionism.” Nikkei said while the G7 leaders demonstrated unity on North Korea and terrorism, there was a gap between President Trump and European leaders over trade and global warming. The papers said while President Trump agreed in the end to include the pledge to fight protectionism in the communique, the G7 leaders failed to reach agreement on the Paris accord because President Trump refused to commit to the climate treaty despite pressure from other nations.

Mainichi wrote that President Trump’s G7 debut highlighted the deep divisions between the President and other leaders on policies and values that had been shared between the G7 nations in

the past, adding that the unity and raison d'être of the G7 are becoming weaker as a result. Yomiuri said President Trump disturbed the unity of the G7 by repeatedly advocating his "America First" policies during discussions on trade and climate change. The paper wrote that while the U.S. took a hard line against anti-protectionism throughout the summit, President Trump softened his stance in the end after the phrase "all forms of" was omitted from the expression "to fight against all forms of protectionism" since this will allow the U.S. to take countermeasures against "unfair trade." The paper added, however, that the G7's rejection of protectionism suffered a setback at the summit. The paper said the G7 leaders apparently prioritized adopting a communique that allows various interpretations just for the sake of playing up G7 unity.

Gaps emerge between Japan, UN over Abe's meeting with UN chief

Asahi reported today on a statement issued by a UN spokesperson regarding Secretary-General Guterres' meeting with Prime Minister Abe on the sidelines of the G7 Taormina Summit on Saturday, noting that the UN's takeaway from the session on the Japan-South Korea comfort women accord and Japan's anti-conspiracy bill was inconsistent with the GOJ's explanation. The UN spokesperson dismissed Japan's narrative that Guterres voiced support for the comfort women pact. The spokesperson also denied Japan's allegation that Guterres told Abe that UN Special Rapporteur Cannataci's report on Japan's controversial anti-conspiracy legislation does not necessarily reflect UN consensus.

Philippine leader cancels visit to Japan

Monday morning's Asahi wrote that Philippine President Duterte has cancelled his visit to Japan scheduled for early June in order to address the ongoing conflict between government troops and Islamic armed forces in Mindanao, where martial law was declared on May 23. Duterte was supposed to give a speech in Tokyo on June 6 and meet with Prime Minister Abe.

Vietnamese prime minister to visit Japan from June 4 to 8

Saturday morning's Asahi reported that Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga announced on Friday that Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc will pay an official visit to Japan from June 4 to 8. The Vietnamese leader is expected to hold talks with Prime Minister Abe and pay a call on the Emperor.

SECURITY

SDF conducts joint drills with U.S. military

Most papers reported today on an ASDF announcement that two F-15 fighter jets carried out a joint drill with USAF B-1 strategic bombers in airspace over Kyushu on Monday, speculating that it was intended to hold North Korea in check. Monday morning's Mainichi and Sankei also reported that the MSDF announced on Sunday that the Izumo and Sazanami held joint military exercises with the USS Dewey, a guided missile destroyer, from May 26 to 27 in the South China Sea.

USS Nimitz Strike Group to be deployed to Western Pacific

Yomiuri reported on Sunday that PACOM announced on Friday that it will deploy the USS Nimitz Strike Group to the Western Pacific for about six months from June 1. Noting that the USS Carl Vinson and USS Ronald Reagan are already deployed around the Korean Peninsula to keep North Korea in check, the paper said the USS Nimitz is likely to replace the USS Carl Vinson. Asahi and Sankei carried similar stories.

U.S. to carry out first ICBM intercept test

Sunday's Yomiuri and Sankei reported that the U.S. military will carry out an ICBM intercept test for the first time on May 30 in response to North Korea's apparent rapid development of ICBMs. According to the papers, the Missile Defense Agency will launch a guided missile from the Ground-based Midcourse Defense (GMD) system set up in an underground silo at Vandenberg Air Force Base in California to intercept a mock ICBM launched from a U.S. military facility on the Marshall Islands.

Inada says plan for relocation of U.S. Marines to Guam has not changed

Saturday morning's Mainichi reported that in relation to the announcement by U.S. Marine Corps Commandant Neller that the plan to relocate the U.S. Marines in Okinawa to Guam might be reviewed, Defense Minister Inada expressed the view on Friday that there has been no change of plan for the Marines' transfer to Guam. She was quoted as saying: "Japan and the United States announced that the transfer to Guam will begin in the early 2020s and this remains unchanged. We will move forward with the plan."

U.S. might prohibit laptops on all commercial flights to and from U.S.

All Tuesday papers took up remarks on a TV show on Sunday by DHS Secretary Kelly, who disclosed that he is considering imposing a ban on passengers carrying laptop computers and similar electronic devices on all international flights to and from the United States in order to head off terrorist incidents. Nikkei wrote that if an across-the-board ban on laptops is indeed adopted, it would be devastating for Japanese and other business travelers. The paper added that if the ban also covers iPads and other tablets, it would even have more serious consequences for the business community and the airline industry.

Japanese GPS system to be used for defense

Monday's Sankei gave top play to a report that the GOJ will launch the Quasi-Zenith Satellite System Michibiki No. 2 satellite on Thursday from the Tanegashima Space Center in Kagoshima. The launch of the satellite will be the first step toward building a Japanese version of the Global Positioning System (GPS). The GOJ is also planning to launch the Michibiki No. 3 and 4 satellites within the year to establish a GPS system with a margin of error of 6 cm as opposed to the current 10-meter margin of error. The paper said the satellite is equipped with a high-level security system

that can prevent jamming by enemy states, such as North Korea, and when it becomes fully operational, will be able to function without relying on the U.S.

POLITICS

Former vice education minister insists Abe applied pressure regarding veterinary school

Asahi published an interview with former Vice Education Minister Maekawa, who disclosed that he was summoned to the Kantei by Special Advisor Hiroto Izumi on several occasions last autumn and urged to speed up the ministry's screening process so that Kake Educational Institution could open a veterinary school in a special strategic zone in Ehime prefecture. Izumi reportedly pressed Maekawa by saying: "I am speaking on behalf of the prime minister, who cannot ask you himself." Izumi has reportedly dismissed Maekawa's claim. Prime Minister Abe also denied involvement in the scandal by saying at the parliament yesterday: "It is absolutely untrue that pressure was applied. The designation of a strategic zone and the selection of a veterinary school operator were conducted in strict accordance with relevant statutes."

Abe becomes third longest serving prime minister

All Saturday morning papers reported that Prime Minister Abe has become the third longest-serving prime minister of Japan in the postwar era, with 1981 days in office on Sunday, surpassing the tenure of Junichiro Koizumi.

OPINION POLLS

51% express support for acknowledging SDF in Article 9

Monday's Nikkei carried on its front page the results of a joint opinion poll by Nikkei and TV Tokyo conducted from May 25 to 28, which found that 51% of respondents expressed support for adding language on the SDF to Article 9 of the Constitution, while 36% expressed opposition. Among male respondents, 59% of men supported the idea and 34% opposed it. Among women, 40% backed the idea and 38% were against it. Prime Minister Abe's goal of having a revised constitution take effect in 2020 was favored by 43% of respondents, while 39% expressed opposition. Public approval for the Abe cabinet fell 4 points from last month to 56%, while the disapproval rate rose 4 points to 36%, apparently due to the scandal involving the establishment of a veterinary school and the railroading of the anti-conspiracy bill through the Lower House.

ECONOMY

Top TPP negotiators to meet in Hakone

Saturday morning's Nikkei reported that the GOJ is making arrangements to host a meeting of top TPP negotiators from 11 nations in Hakone, Kanagawa, from July 11. The paper wrote that this is the first time for Japan to host a TPP meeting.

Japan, Canada agree on early effectuation of TPP

Saturday morning's Nikkei reported that Economic and Fiscal Policy Minister Ishihara met with visiting Canadian International Trade Minister Champagne in Tokyo on Friday. The paper said the two ministers agreed to work closely toward the early effectuation of the TPP.

Keidanren to appoint Toyota Vice President Hayakawa as chair of U.S. affairs committee

Saturday morning's Nikkei reported that Keidanren has decided to appoint Toyota Motor Vice President Shigeru Hayakawa as the chair of its committee on U.S. affairs. Noting that the Trump administration has been criticizing Japan's trade surplus with the U.S. as well as Japanese firms in Mexico, the paper wrote that Keidanren is hoping to utilize Toyota's influence and demonstrate to the USG and business community Japan's contribution to the U.S. in employment and investment.

Japan's net overseas assets increase for the first time in two years

Saturday morning's Yomiuri reported that the Ministry of Finance announced on Friday that the balance of Japan's net overseas assets at the end of 2016 grew 2.9% from a year ago to 349.112 trillion, saying that this is the first increase in two years. The paper said the latest figure makes Japan the world's biggest creditor nation for the 26th consecutive year. The paper added that the increase reflects active overseas investment by Japanese companies and individuals.

