



Morning Alert - Friday, November 24, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK gave top play to a report that eight people were taken into protective custody last night at a marina in Akita, saying that they claim to have come from North Korea. A wooden boat was found near the area. All commercial networks continued to give top play to reports on the alleged assault by sumo grand champion Harumafuji.

Top stories in national dailies included a sharp rise in costs for overseas heart transplants for children (Asahi); falsification of data on product quality by subsidiaries of Mitsubishi Materials (Mainichi); a plan by China to temporarily close a bridge at the North Korean border to restrict trade (Yomiuri), a plan by Japan and the UK to jointly develop air-to-air missiles (Nikkei); and Osaka's plan to end its sister city relationship with San Francisco over the city's acceptance of comfort women statues (Sankei).

INTERNATIONAL

Osaka to end sister-city relationship with San Francisco

All Friday morning papers wrote that in response to San Francisco Mayor Lee's signing on Wednesday a document formalizing the city's acceptance of a donation of comfort woman statues from a Chinese-American civic group, Osaka Mayor Yoshimura expressed his intention to end Osaka's 60-year sister city relationship with San Francisco by issuing a statement on Thursday saying: "The relationship of trust between the two cities has ended due to the action taken by Mayor Lee. I will begin administrative procedures to end the sister city relationship and complete these by the end of December." Sankei wrote that the LDP will hold an ad hoc meeting on the matter next week.

Foreign Minister Kono discusses evacuation of Japanese citizens from Korean Peninsula

Friday morning's Sankei front-paged its recent one-on-one interview with Foreign Minister Kono, during which he commented on the evacuation of Japanese nationals from South Korea in the event of a contingency on the Korean Peninsula by saying that Tokyo is making preparations in line with the U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation Guidelines and that Japan is cooperating with South Korea on the matter. The foreign minister indicated the possibility of Japan making preparations to take in evacuees other than Japanese, including Americans, by saying that Japan will study the options for accepting evacuees because the nation will inevitably become a shelter for them. However, Kono added that although there is a possibility of a contingency on the peninsula in theory, there is no doubt that North Korea would be completely defeated by the overwhelming power of the United States. He stressed the need to continue to apply pressure on the DPRK until it comes to the negotiating table. Kono added that there is no possibility of the U.S. shifting to dialogue with North Korea without consulting with Japan.

South Korean President Moon expresses willingness to visit Japan

Friday morning's Mainichi, Nikkei, and Sankei reported on Komeito Chief Representative Yamaguchi's meeting with South Korean President Moon on Thursday in Seoul, during which the ROK leader expressed his willingness to visit Japan at an early date. Yamaguchi delivered a letter to Moon from Prime Minister Abe. Yamaguchi and Moon agreed to pursue forward-looking relations between their nations and resolve the North Korean issue peacefully by urging the DPRK to come to the negotiation table by applying maximum pressure on the nation. Nikkei and Sankei wrote that the issue of comfort women was not taken up in the meeting between the two officials.

DPRK reacts strongly to re-designation as terror sponsor

Thursday's Asahi took up a statement released on Wednesday by a North Korean Foreign Ministry spokesperson calling the Trump administration's decision to put the Kim regime back on the list of state sponsors of terrorism a "a grave provocation and violent infringement." Stressing North Korea's intention to continue its nuclear and missile development, the statement also suggested the resumption of provocations.

U.S. determined to increase pressure on DPRK

All Thursday papers highlighted the Treasury Department's announcement on its latest economic sanctions on North Korea, including a freeze on financial assets owned by additional several Chinese companies, noting that Washington appears to be willing to press Beijing even harder to tighten the noose around its defiant neighbor. In a bid to obtain more cooperation from China, the Trump administration is also hinting at penalizing China's state-owned banks.

Asahi said doubts have emerged about the effectiveness of the latest punitive measures adopted by the Trump administration given that most Chinese companies involved in trade with the DPRK are small ones and North Korea can find replacements easily.

UN Security Council to hold ministerial meeting on North Korea next month

Thursday's Mainichi wrote that the UN Security Council plans to convene a ministerial meeting on the denuclearization of North Korea in New York in mid-December, noting that Foreign Minister Kono will chair the session as Japan is set to assume the presidency next month.

Russia's top military official to visit Japan

Friday morning's Mainichi wrote that Russia's Chief of the General Staff Gerasimov will visit Japan in mid-December. The paper wrote that although Gerasimov is on the list of individuals subject to EU sanctions over Ukraine, Japan has decided to host the Russian general because he held talks with Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Dunford in February. The paper speculated that Tokyo is hoping to learn about Russia's intention for building military bases on the Kuril Islands, including the Northern Territories. This will be the first time in seven years for a top Russian military officer to visit Japan and the first visit by Gerasimov. He is expected to meet with Defense Minister Onodera and SDF Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff Kawano during his stay in Tokyo.

SECURITY

Three individuals still missing following crash of carrier-borne airplane in Pacific

All Thursday dailies reported that three individuals were missing after a C-2 transport plane belonging to the USS Ronald Reagan crashed in the Pacific on Wednesday, explaining that the aircraft carrier was conducting joint training with MSDF vessels at the time of the accident. The Navy reportedly told the Defense Ministry that the cause of the mishap appeared to be an engine malfunction. Eight of the 11 on board the aircraft were rescued. Defense Minister Onodera told the press that he has asked the U.S. side to ensure safe operations of military aircraft in view of the frequent aviation mishaps of late.

Osprey deployment in Saga becoming difficult

Thursday's Asahi front-paged a finding that the GOJ is looking for a location to deploy a fleet of GSDF Ospreys to be introduced in the near future based on the judgement that the current plan to locate them at Saga Airport is likely to be derailed due to strong local opposition. Several alternative sites are under consideration, including GSDF facilities in Kumamoto and Nagasaki and GSDF Camp Kisarazu in Chiba. Some GSDF officials are insisting on the need to base the tilt-rotor planes in Kyushu in order to transport troops to a Japanese version of a Marine Corps unit to be established in Sasebo shortly.

U.S., Japan keen to coordinate military operations to deter North Korea

Thursday's Nikkei took up increased coordination of late between the U.S. military and the SDF as evidenced by recent joint drills involving three U.S. aircraft carriers and B-52 strategic bombers, speculating that the two nations are eager to display coordinated military operations to deter North Korea's provocations. Referring to these operations as a "flexible deterrent option," the daily said they appear to be working as Pyongyang has refrained from conducting nuclear and missile tests over the past two months.

Japan, UK to collaborate on missile development

Friday morning's Nikkei gave top play to a report saying that Japan will team up with the UK to develop an air-to-air missile in Tokyo's first defense equipment project with a partner other than the U.S. and a potential turning point in the country's arms export policy. The governments of Japan and the U.K. will conclude an agreement on the project and include it in a joint statement to be issued at their 2+2 meeting of foreign and defense ministers to be held in London on Dec. 14. The new missile is probably intended for the F-35 stealth fighter to be used by the ASDF.

Abe vows to increase Aegis warships as soon as possible

Thursday's Sankei reported on remarks made at the Diet on Wednesday by Prime Minister Abe, who said that his administration will expedite the plan to double the number of Aegis warships capable of intercepting ballistic missiles by FY2020. Japan currently has four of these vessels.

Nagasaki Prefecture holds first drill to prepare for possible missile attack

Thursday's Asahi reported on the first-ever training held in Unzen, Nagasaki Prefecture, on Wednesday to prepare for the possibility of a ballistic missile attack. Policemen, firefighters, SDF personnel, and some 30 local residents took part in the drill that was based on the scenario of a projectile landing without exploding. Pointing out the lack of sufficient underground facilities to shelter evacuees across Japan, the daily expressed concern that practical measures to protect residents from missiles are inadequate.

Okinawa attorneys criticize local paper's editorial on ex-base worker's trial

Thursday's Asahi and Yomiuri reported that the Okinawa Bar Association released a statement on Wednesday voicing concern about a Ryukyu Shimpo editorial that criticized Franklin Shinzato, a former Kadena AB base employee who is on trial for murder, for maintaining silence during a recent hearing. The lawyers' association took issue with the editorial, arguing that it disregarded the defendant's right to a fair trial.

SCIENCE

Washington Convention to discuss Japan's research whaling

Friday morning's Yomiuri wrote that Secretary-General John Scanlon of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species and Wild Fauna and Flora, also known as CITES or the Washington Convention, told a news conference held at the United Nations Office at Geneva on

Wednesday that CITES will discuss Japan's catch of sei whales through research whaling at its standing committee meeting to start on Nov. 27. The paper wrote that this will be the first time for the committee to discuss Japan's research whaling, speculating that the panel will discuss the validity of Japan's stance on its research whaling and its compliance with the convention.

