
 **JAPAN MEDIA
HIGHLIGHTS**

Morning Alert - Tuesday, December 5, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning news

All TV networks led with reports on a string of cases in which unidentified wooden boats that appeared to have been from North Korea have washed ashore on the Japanese coast along the Sea of Japan. NHK reported that nine of the ten members that were on the boat that was found in waters off Hokkaido on Nov. 28 still remain inside the boat, saying that police are investigating them on charges of stealing electronic appliances from a building on a Japanese uninhabited island they had temporarily landed.

Main front-page items in national dailies included the planned income tax code reform for FY2018, a major overhaul of college entrance exams designed to test students' abilities to "think deeply," and the Abe administration's policy package on "human resources reform" centering on making child education free.

INTERNATIONAL

Japan dismisses U.S. call for meeting of UN Command on North Korea

Sankei front-paged the revelation from several GOJ sources that the Abe administration allegedly relayed its displeasure to the USG and the Canadian government over the proposed convening this month of a meeting of the United Nations Command that will include South Korea and Japan, intended to discuss how the global community can counter North Korea's "threat to international peace." The proposal was made public right after the DPRK fired an ICBM on Nov. 29 by Secretary of State Tillerson, who said in a statement that the U.S. and Canada will cohost a meeting. According to the article, Japan has turned down an idea of holding such a meeting in December

because it was proposed by the Secretary, whom Tokyo views as overly conciliatory toward Pyongyang. The GOJ reportedly suspected that the idea of holding a UN Command meeting was not conveyed to President Trump before it was announced by the Secretary. The daily said Tokyo is perplexed by the Secretary's proposal in the belief that it may undermine global unity to apply "maximum pressure" on the defiant regime, quoting an unnamed senior MOFA official as saying: "It is harmful and futile."

North reacts sharply to U.S.-ROK military exercise

All papers reported on North Korea's strong opposition to the commencement on Monday of five-day U.S.-South Korea air training involving a range of state-of-the-art aircraft such as F-22s and F-35s, quoting a Workers' Party organ as writing: "It represents the two nations' clear intent for invasion.... We will never sit idle and instead will respond resolutely to the reckless measures to provoke war." The dailies said some 230 planes will participate in the drill called "Vigilant Ace," explaining that the two militaries plan to display their overwhelming air capabilities to strike and destroy enemy bases with the goal of reining in North Korea's relentless provocations.

In a related story, Asahi reported from Seoul on the disclosure by several informed DPRK sources that the Kim regime elected to test a long-range ballistic missile on Nov. 29 for the first time in more than two months after concluding that the Trump administration's hostility toward it had not changed at all despite the 75-day pause on provocations. The DPRK side reportedly told Chinese President Xi's special emissary who visited Pyongyang in late November that it would "never succumb" to international pressure. The regime turned down's the envoy's request for a meeting with Kim Jong Un.

Influential U.S. politician says U.S. families should leave South Korea

Monday evening's Mainichi reprinted a Kyodo piece reporting remarks made to the media on Sunday by Sen. Lindsey Graham that he believes it's time to start moving the dependents of U.S. service members out of South Korea as North Korea pushes the U.S. closer to a military conflict. The U.S. lawmaker said Washington is running out of time and that war has become more likely, adding: "If there's an underground nuclear test, then you need to get ready for a very serious response by the United States."

This morning's Nikkei focused on press remarks made yesterday by Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga, who dismissed the Senator's view by stressing that the present situation does not warrant the immediate evacuation of Japanese citizens in South Korea. The government spokesman said: "We don't think it is necessary to issue an advisory on travel to or evacuation from South Korea."

Upper House adopts unanimous motion to condemn DPRK

Most papers wrote that the House of Councilors unanimously adopted a resolution yesterday to denounce North Korea's test-launch of an ICBM last week calling it an "outright provocation to the international community." The Lower House is expected to adopt a similar motion today.

Kono having difficulties arranging trip to China this year

Tokyo Shimbun wrote that although Foreign Minister Kono is extremely keen to visit Beijing this month for talks with his Chinese counterpart Wang to arrange a tripartite summit in Japan with South Korea at an early date, the Chinese side appears to be hesitant to host the top Japanese diplomat anytime soon by citing Wang's extremely tight schedule. Kono is reportedly willing to reschedule his proposed visit to Israel and the Palestinian territory in late December if Wang chooses to meet with him around that time.

UN chief to visit Japan

Mainichi took up a UN announcement yesterday that Secretary General Guterres will visit Tokyo next week and attend an international conference on universal healthcare. The UN leader is also expected to hold a meeting with Prime Minister Abe to discuss such topics as UN reform and sustainable economic development. The top UN official will also probably underscore the importance of resolving the DPRK nuclear and missile standoff peacefully.

SECURITY

U.S., Japan conduct air drills

Yomiuri and Sankei wrote that the U.S. military and the ASDF on Monday carried out two sets of drills, one near Okinawa and the other in the Sea of Japan, to deter North Korea's provocations, noting that two USAF F-35s that are being deployed at Kadena AB temporarily conducted a mock air battle with Japanese fighters in airspace off Okinawa.

USS Ronald Reagan returns to Yokosuka

Yomiuri reported that the nuclear aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan returned to Yokosuka yesterday, explaining that the CVN had conducted a range of exercises to deter North Korea's provocations near the Korean Peninsula during a three-month mission. Commanding Officer Capt. Donnelly reportedly told the press upon return: "The mission was a great success, as we were able to enhance interoperability with U.S. allies."

Japan to enhance capabilities to intercept missiles on "lofted trajectory"

Nikkei wrote that the Defense Ministry plans to upgrade an existing missile warning/interception system to calculate more quickly the speed and angle of incoming DPRK ballistic missiles that are put on a "lofted trajectory", with the goal of intercepting them without fail. The ministry is also planning to renew the present Japan Aerospace Defense Ground Environment (JADGE) mechanism in order to detect multiple ballistic missiles more accurately.

NTA to be returned to landowners

Sankei wrote that the GOJ will convene a ceremony on Dec. 25 to transfer to landowners a chunk of land in the Northern Training Area in Okinawa that was returned to Japan a year ago, noting that Defense Minister Onodera will attend the event.

ECONOMY

U.S. corporate tax cuts to prompt Japanese firms to make greater investment

Nikkei reported on the growing likelihood of congressional approval of the tax overhaul centering on hefty cuts in corporate taxes, projecting that it may induce Japanese companies to increase their direct investment in the U.S. market. Keidanren Chairman Sakakibara reportedly said: “The tax legislation has a considerable impact. It will bring direct benefits to corporations operating in the United States.” A Japanese lawyer specializing in international mergers and acquisitions explained that the tax reform, if implemented, would put America in a more advantageous position vis-à-vis its neighbors when Japanese firms consider investing in North America.

EDUCATION

Japanese students steer clear of U.S.

Monday evening’s Asahi ran a prominent front-page story on the steady decline in the number of Japanese students studying in the United States, echoing concerns that trans-Pacific ties may eventually be eroded due to dwindling exchanges at a grassroots level. The daily speculated that in addition to the Japanese youths’ “inward looking” orientation, Japan’s rapidly aging population, the recruiting cycle of Japanese companies, high tuitions and living expenses at American schools, and concerns about the safety situation appear to be major factors that discourage local students from choosing America. The article took up an event on studying on U.S. campuses held at the U.S. Embassy in late June, quoting an unnamed consular officer as saying: “As there are many options on studying abroad other than the United States, we would like to highlight the appeal that only U.S. schools can offer.”