



Morning Alert - Wednesday, December 6, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning news

Most networks led with reports that the International Olympic Committee has decided to ban Russian athletes from participating in the Pyeongchang Olympics in February 2018 due to allegations of state-sponsored doping at the 2014 Sochi Olympics. TBS gave top play to a report on the alleged assault by sumo grand champion Harumafuji.

Major front-page items in national papers included Shogi master Habu's historic achievement in becoming the first-ever professional shogi player to win a seventh lifetime title, an informal GOJ decision to procure new types of cruise missiles, and a GOJ plan to establish a 10-day national holiday in late April through early May in 2019 to celebrate Crown Prince Naruhito's accession to the throne.

INTERNATIONAL

Mixed expectations for UN "intervention" in Korean Peninsula crisis

All papers highlighted UN Under Secretary General for Political Affairs Feltman's four-day visit to North Korea beginning on Tuesday, with Asahi asserting that expectations are mounting worldwide for the trip to achieve a breakthrough in the DPRK standoff. While quoting an unnamed State Department official as saying: "We are paying close attention to the UN's exchanges with North Korea," the daily said the USG apparently conducted close coordination on the visit with Feltman, a former U.S. diplomat. However, Nikkei wrote that the Trump administration does not appear to be very enthusiastic about the UN's diplomacy, quoting a spokesperson for the U.S. mission to the UN as saying: "We will continue to look for a peaceful diplomatic solution, but the truth is that North Korea has shown no interest in dialogue." Sankei said the USG and the GOJ did not voice

opposition to Feltman's mission because the purpose of his trip is to convey to Pyongyang the global consensus on strictly enforcing sanctions on the Kim regime and seeking the "complete and irreversible" denuclearization as set forth in relevant UN Security Council resolutions.

The papers said the senior UN official's visit was organized in response to an invitation from North Korea, noting that the Kim regime is desperate to avoid further international isolation in light of the stricter implementation of UN economic sanctions. Pointing out that Feltman plans to hold talks with Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho, the articles said attention is focused on whether President Kim Jong Un will agree to meet with the UN diplomat. The papers added that depending on the outcome of Feltman's mediation efforts, UN Secretary General Guterres may decide to make a visit to Pyongyang.

Japan rejects UN Command meeting on DPRK

All papers took up press remarks on Tuesday by Foreign Minister Kono, who disclosed that Japan turned down a proposal made jointly by the U.S. and Canada on holding in December a meeting of the United Nations Command that would include South Korea, Japan, and other nations to discuss North Korea's nuclear and missile provocations. Kono said Japan rejected the offer on the grounds that such a meeting would overlap with the UN Security Council ministerial meeting on North Korea that Japan plans to chair on Dec. 15. The GOJ is reportedly doubtful about taking a conciliatory approach toward Pyongyang as advocated by Secretary of State Tillerson and his Canadian counterpart Freeland, expressing concern that the proposal could disrupt the international community's consensus on maximizing pressure on the defiant regime. Kono suggested that a UN Command meeting would not be appropriate since some of its members, such as Ethiopia and Colombia, are not direct parties to the Korean Peninsula situation geographically. Mainichi speculated that a UN command meeting may be convened in January or later.

SECURITY

Defense Ministry to procure new air-to-surface missiles

All papers reported that the Defense Ministry has decided to earmark funds in FY2018 for procuring new air-to-surface missiles for the purpose of taking back remote islands occupied by an enemy during a contingency. The Joint Strike Missile (JSM), which is currently being developed by a Norway-led consortium, will be mounted on ASDF F-35s, and the Joint Air to Surface Standoff Missile-Extended Range (JASSM-ER) will be loaded on F-15s, which will need to be modified for the new missiles.

While noting that Japan's deterrence against North Korea will be enhanced considerably as a result of the planned procurement, the dailies said due to their high performance enabling them to hit targets from a distance of 1,000 km, the new missiles will technically enable the nation to strike enemy bases, which is prohibited under the war-renouncing Constitution. Nikkei added that the GOJ

is hoping that the Trump administration will be pleased with Japan's purchase of these missiles since the JASSM-ER is manufactured by Lockheed Martin, and Raytheon is involved in the production of the JSM.

GOJ concerned about possible infiltration by DPRK spies using boats

Nikkei highlighted the many North Korean wooden boats that have washed up on Japanese along the Sea of Japan, saying that the GOJ is worried that DPRK agents may be trying to infiltrate the country disguised as fishermen. Politicians are calling for the GOJ to enhance border controls at sea since small boats are hard to detect by radar. However, some experts reportedly insist that it is inconceivable that North Korea would send its operatives into Japan using boats.

USS McCain arrives in Japan

Asahi and Yomiuri reported that the USS McCain, which was involved in a fatal collision off Singapore in August, was transported to Tokyo Bay yesterday aboard a gigantic barge, noting that the Aegis warship will undergo major repairs at Yokosuka Naval Station.

POLITICS

Cabinet support strong in Western Japan

Nikkei reported on a trend analysis of public approval of the Abe cabinet, saying that support for Prime Minister Abe is stronger in Western Japan than Eastern Japan. The approval rate is reportedly highest in Abe's hometown of Yamaguchi at 50%, followed by Toyama (47%), Ishikawa (44%) and Wakayama (44%). Approval is lowest in Okinawa at 28%, followed by Tottori, Nagano, Yamagata, and Iwate. The paper said support for the opposition bloc is relatively strong in Eastern Japan because labor unions have been active there for decades. It also speculated that support for the ruling LDP has been relatively weak in Hokkaido and Tohoku where agriculture is the primary industry on account of the Abe administration's policy of promoting the TPP.