



Morning Alert - Friday, December 29, 2017

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## HEADLINES

### Morning News

All broadcasters led with the Japan Sumo Association's decision on Thursday to reprimand stablemaster Takanohana over his handling of the assault scandal that led to the retirement of grand champion Harumafuji.

Major front-page items in national papers included South Korea President Moon's statement yesterday concerning the 2015 comfort women accord with Japan, a follow-up report on a bid-rigging scandal involving the nation's top general contractors for a maglev project, Keidanren's plan to appoint Hitachi Chairman Nakanishi as its next leader, and the Justice Ministry's intention to amend relevant laws to require the registration of inherited real estate.

## INTERNATIONAL

### Japan reacts sharply to ROK leader's comment on comfort women accord

All papers wrote that the Japanese government filed a protest on Thursday with the ROK government to President Moon's controversial statement saying that the comfort women issue cannot be resolved with the 2015 bilateral agreement with Tokyo. Foreign Minister Kono reacted to this statement by telling the press yesterday: "If the South Korean government tries to change a pact that has already been concluded, bilateral relations will become unmanageable. We will never accept such a change." Tokyo conveyed to Seoul that the only option is for the two governments to uphold the pact. The Abe administration is bracing for the Moon administration to ask it to come up with additional measures, such as a letter from Prime Minister Abe to the former comfort women.

With the escalated tension over North Korea in mind, Tokyo is hoping that President Moon will choose to honor the pact so as to maintain close trilateral cooperation with the United States. However, the premier may decide not to attend the PyeongChang Winter Olympics in February or recall Japan's ambassador to South Korea if Seoul moves to dismiss the landmark agreement. Nikkei claimed that Abe is already inclined to skip the PyeongChang Olympics, quoting a GOJ source as saying: "It has become difficult for the premier to travel to South Korea. Nothing good would come out of such a trip at this juncture." The daily said the South Korean leader is in a "catch-22 situation" between Japan and the international community and his left-leaning supporters at home.

Asahi wrote that although the ROK leader stopped short of disclosing whether or not South Korea will continue to uphold the pact, the South Korean media called his statement a "de-facto declaration of abrogation." The paper speculated that as Moon has instructed relevant authorities to look into "follow-up measures" to address the suffering of the elderly victims, the president may announce what he plans to do with the pact around Jan. 10.

### **Three out of ten Americans support military action against DPRK**

Mainichi published the results of a public opinion poll on the North Korean situation conducted jointly by the University of Maryland and a Japanese NPO in the U.S. and Japan, saying that some 33% of American respondents voiced support for military action against the defiant Kim regime. The corresponding figure for the Japanese public was 21%. About 35% of Americans thought that the Six-Party Talks and other multilateral diplomatic efforts would be the most effective way to resolve the standoff, followed by China exerting greater leverage at 22%.

### **Senior ruling party officials meet with Chinese leader**

All papers reported from Beijing that LDP Secretary General Nikai and his Komeito counterpart Inoue paid a courtesy call on Chinese President Xi on Thursday and asked him to expedite improvement in Sino-Japanese relations by realizing reciprocal visits by the two nations' leaders. The Chinese president voiced hope for further rapprochement through various exchanges between the Chinese Communist Party and Japan's two ruling parties.

### **Russia warns against Japan's planned deployment of new missile defense platform**

Sankei wrote that a Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson told a local media outlet on Thursday that Tokyo's plan to procure Aegis Ashore batteries will have adverse effects on bilateral relations by undermining mutual efforts to conclude a peace treaty and build confidence in the security arena.

### **Foreign Minister Kono meets with Turkish leader**

Several papers reported that Foreign Minister Kono and Turkish President Erdogan held talks in Ankara on Thursday and exchanged views on Middle East peace. With Turkey's strong opposition to the recent U.S. decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israeli capital in mind, the Japanese diplomat

explained to the Turkish leader Tokyo's position of promoting dialogue between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Kono and Erdogan agreed to launch a bilateral security consultative committee to discuss the situation in East Asia and the Middle East. The first session by bureau directors-general will probably be held in late January.

In a related story, Asahi wrote that Kono plans to visit Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Maldives from Jan. 3 in order to discuss Japan's policy of creating a "free and open Indo-Pacific" region, in view of China's growing influence in the region.

## SECURITY

### **Incumbent mayor to face off with candidate backed by ruling coalition in Nago race**

Yomiuri wrote that the Okinawa chapter of the Komeito party decided on Thursday to endorse the candidacy of former Nago municipal assembly member Toguchi in the mayoral race scheduled for Feb. 4, noting that since the ruling LDP also supports his candidacy, the election will revolve around him and incumbent Mayor Inamine. Although the LDP considers Komeito's support critical to unseating Inamine, who is a staunch opponent of the FRF construction initiative, Komeito is being careful not to openly push for the realignment plan to avoid alienating voters. In endorsing Toguchi's candidacy, Komeito officials said: "The administrative authority of the Nago mayor does not affect the relocation initiative.... The upcoming election should not focus solely on U.S. bases."

Mainichi ran a similar report, explaining that the results of the mayoral election will have a considerable impact on the Futenma relocation initiative and the gubernatorial race planned for next autumn, in which Governor Onaga, another staunch opponent, is expected to seek reelection. The paper added that the central government is set to cut back its subsidies for Okinawa economic revitalization, apparently in order to show Okinawa voters that their economic outlook will be affected if they support the defiant governor.

### **Japan pays \$18 million per year in rent for vacant U.S. military housing units**

Tokyo Shimbun wrote that the Japanese government allocates about \$18 million annually to rent land for the U.S. military's Negishi housing area in Yokohama, noting that since almost all of the housing units have been vacant since 2015, critics are calling the expenditure a waste of taxpayer money. The article said that although the return of the housing complex was agreed upon in 2004 in exchange for the construction of new housing units in the city's Ikego district, the reversion has been stalled on account of strong local opposition to constructing new facilities at the Ikego housing area. At present, no Americans are living at the Negishi housing area. The land has been leased by the Japanese government in accordance with SOFA provisions.

## ECONOMY

## **Hitachi leader to become Keidanren chairman**

Nikkei and Yomiuri front-paged speculative reports that Hitachi Ltd. Chairman Hiroaki Nakanishi will be tapped as the next chairman of Keidanren. The top leader of the nation's electronics and engineering giant will replace current chair Sakakibara, who plans to step down on May 30 next year.

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