



Morning Alert - Tuesday, January 9, 2018

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK gave top play to the forecast for blizzards in northern Japan today. All commercial networks led with reports that a rental kimono company suddenly closed for business on Monday, causing distress for hundreds of young women who were unable to wear kimonos for their once-in-a-lifetime Coming-of-Age Day ceremonies.

Main front-page items in national papers included South Korea's informal decision not to ask Japan to renegotiate the 2015 comfort women pact, alleged influence peddling by a secretary to an LDP Diet member, and a Mainichi piece on chromosomal aberrations detected in two North Korean residents who used to live near the Punggye-ri nuclear test site and defected to South Korea after underground nuclear tests were conducted there in 2006 and 2009.

INTERNATIONAL

Japan, U.S. wary of possible concessions by ROK in dialogue with DPRK

All Saturday papers reported extensively on the agreement reached on Friday between North and South Korea to hold a meeting between senior officials at Panmunjom on Jan. 9 to discuss the North's possible participation in the PyeongChang Winter Olympics and bilateral issues of mutual concern. The papers claimed that although the U.S. and Japan are outwardly supportive of a possible thaw in relations between the two Koreas, they are actually skeptical of Pyongyang's motives and concerned about Seoul possibly being tempted to make unwarranted concessions. All national dailies except Asahi and Nikkei said that U.S. Special Representative for North Korea Policy Joseph Yun spoke by phone with MOFA Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau Director General Kanasugi on Friday and emphasized the importance of applying maximum pressure to rein in North Korea's nuclear and missile ambitions.

Pointing out that some ROK officials are insisting that the annual Foal Eagle and Key Resolve exercises between the U.S. and South Korea be scaled down or merged with Freedom Guardian, which is typically held in the summer, on the condition that Pyongyang refrains from provocations during the Olympics, Asahi wrote that the Trump administration will likely not accept such a compromise. According to today's Asahi, the USG has pressed the ROK government not to address such issues as the North's nuclear and missile development and the planned U.S.-ROK military exercises. Saturday's Sankei said the USG is strongly committed to realizing the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, explaining that Washington has warned "pro-dialogue" Seoul not to condone North Korea's efforts to disrupt bilateral unity.

Meanwhile, Nikkei wrote that the postponement of the Foal Eagle/Key Resolve exercises until after the PyeongChang Paralympics has worked out well for the U.S. since the ongoing regular maintenance of the USS Ronald Reagan at Yokosuka will probably be completed by then, allowing the U.S. military to potentially have as many as three aircraft carriers operating in the vicinity of the Korean Peninsula by around April.

USG officials comment on inter-Korean talks

Sunday papers highlighted Secretary of Defense Mattis' press remarks on the upcoming inter-Korean dialogue made following his teleconference with his ROK counterpart on Friday. "Right now, it is only about the Games," he said. "The United States and South Korea are in complete lockstep." The papers also focused on Secretary Tillerson's remarks to CNN on Friday that it's too early to tell if the inter-Korea meeting will open the way for future talks involving the U.S.

Monday papers took up remarks made at Camp David on Saturday by President Trump, in which he commented on the inter-Korea dialogue by saying: "I very much want to see it work out between the two countries.... I would love to see them take it beyond the Olympics." He went on to say: "And at the appropriate time, we'll get involved." The President also suggested that he is open to speaking by phone with Kim Jong Un by saying: "I always believe in talking.... Absolutely I would do that, no problem with that at all."

PM Abe stresses pressure on North Korea

All Monday papers focused on Prime Minister Abe's remarks on a Sunday talk show, in which he emphasized the importance of stepping up the pressure on the DPRK by saying: "Dialogue for the sake of dialogue is meaningless. It is necessary to have North Korea commit to and take concrete actions for the complete, verifiable, and irreversible elimination of its missile and nuclear programs. Dialogue only makes sense when this is the goal." According to today's papers, MOFA Asian and Oceanian Bureau Director General Kanasugi held talks with a senior ROK diplomat in Seoul yesterday and called for the Moon administration to maintain pressure on the DPRK. Saturday's Asahi said Tokyo is concerned that some participants in the UN command meeting on North Korea scheduled for Jan. 10 in Vancouver may openly call for dialogue with the DPRK.

Pyongyang desperate to court Seoul to ease pressure

All weekend papers speculated that Pyongyang's latest overtures toward Seoul are intended to deflect international pressure by driving a wedge into trilateral cooperation between the U.S., Japan and South Korea and buy time to complete the development of a nuclear-armed long-range ballistic missile that can reach the U.S. mainland. They projected that during the Jan. 9 talks with the South, the North will perhaps demand the cancellation of the Foal Eagle/Key Resolve exercises and the suspension of B-52 and other U.S. military flight operations around the Korean Peninsula

China limits oil exports to North Korea

All Saturday papers reported that starting on Jan. 6, the Chinese government began restricting petroleum exports to the DPRK in line with a relevant UN Security Council resolution, noting that Beijing is apparently anxious to counter criticism from President Trump and others that Chinese entities have been involved in smuggling refined oil products to the Kim regime.

ROK unlikely to seek renegotiation of comfort women pact

All papers reported from Seoul that the South Korea government has decided not to seek renegotiation of the 2015 comfort women agreement with Japan despite President Moon's negative assessment of it perhaps based on the judgment that doing so would deal a serious blow to its relations with Tokyo. An official announcement on the matter will probably be made today. However, the Moon administration is likely to ask Japan to take additional measures voluntarily to alleviate the suffering of the elderly victims, such as sending a letter to them from Prime Minister Abe voicing "apology and remorse," in line with the accord's reference to implementation. The papers said the GOJ is bound to reject such a request, with Yomiuri quoting an unnamed senior MOFA official as saying: "Japan will never adopt additional measures." MOFA Asian and Oceanian Bureau Director General Kanasugi met with his South Korean counterpart in Seoul yesterday and called for the faithful implementation of the accord.

Foreign Minister Kono's South Asian tour intended to hold China in check

Sunday's Yomiuri reported that Foreign Minister Kono on Saturday wrapped up his tour of Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Maldives, saying that by promising greater support for their infrastructure development, the Japanese official underscored to his counterparts the importance of creating a "free and open Indo-Pacific" with the goal of holding China's growing presence in the region in check.

In a related development, today's Mainichi reported Kono's remarks yesterday, in which he stressed that Japanese diplomacy is confronted with paramount challenges in view of China's rapidly growing presence around the world.

PM Abe to visit Baltic states and Eastern Europe

Saturday morning's Mainichi wrote that on Jan. 12 Prime Minister Abe will leave Japan on a trip to Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Serbia, and Romania. This will be the first time for any Japanese leader to visit these countries. Since Bulgaria holds the presidency of the EU Council for the first half

of this year, Abe is hoping to confirm the stepping up of international pressure on North Korea in his meeting with the Bulgarian president.

Presence of National Security Secretariat grows rapidly

Monday's Yomiuri reported on the fifth anniversary of the launch of the National Security Secretariat on Jan. 7, noting that its presence in the Abe administration's foreign policy decision making has grown considerably. Prime Minister Abe has strong confidence in Secretary General Yachi, who has built strong bonds with key diplomatic officials abroad, including the top deputies to the Chinese, South Korean, and Russian presidents. The daily added that some GOJ officials argue that the administration needs to identify and train a successor as soon as possible since Yachi is 74 years old.

Number of Russian visitors to Japan soars

Tuesday's Mainichi wrote that some 71,500 Russians visited Japan during the first 11 months of last year, up almost 40% from a year ago, attributing the surge to the relaxation of visa requirements that Prime Minister Abe agreed upon with President Putin in December 2016. A MOFA source expressed hope that increased exchange between the two peoples will help build mutual confidence and lead to the conclusion of a bilateral peace treaty and the reversion of the Northern Territories.

SECURITY

USMC helicopters make unscheduled landings in Okinawa

All papers reported over the weekend and on Monday that a USMC helicopter based at MCAS Futenma made a precautionary landing on a beach on Ikejima, Uruma, on Saturday afternoon, as a warning light in the cockpit indicated that the main rotor was moving at an abnormal speed. None of the four crewmembers were injured. The UH-1 landed at a spot about 100 meters from the nearest residence. The papers underscored that this is the latest in a series of accidents and incidents involving U.S. military aircraft in Okinawa in the past year or so, noting that a separate Futenma-based helicopter made an unscheduled landing on the same island almost a year ago. Today's dailies said the helicopter was airlifted by a CH-53 to the White Beach Naval Facility yesterday.

Today's papers highlighted a similar mishap involving a Futenma-based AH-1 aircraft on Monday afternoon, explaining that the attack helicopter made a precautionary landing at an industrial waste disposal facility in Yomitan after a warning light indicated a mechanical problem. The landing site was about 300 meters from the nearest residence and no injuries were reported. Defense Minister Onodera told the press last night that he has strongly asked the U.S. military to conduct thorough inspections and maintenance of its aircraft and take effective measures to prevent a recurrence. According to Sankei, the minister added that he will visit Hawaii in the near future to press PACOM Commander Harris to ensure the safety of military flights. According to Okinawa Vice Governor Tomikawa, Okinawa Area Coordinator Nicholson apologized over the phone last night for the two

incidents. The prefectural government is set to ask the Okinawa Defense Bureau today to suspend all U.S. military flights.

Some 40% of defense hardware specified in five-year plan underfunded

Saturday's Nikkei wrote that about 40% of the planned defense equipment procurement and modernization specified in the present five-year Medium-Term Defense Program (MTDP) that runs through FY2018 has not been fully funded. Concern is growing among GOJ officials that the delayed procurement and modernization of such equipment as multipurpose helicopters, C-2 transport planes, and F-15s may undermine the SDF's surveillance and reconnaissance operations as well as remote island defense in the face of China's maritime advancement and North Korea's provocations. Only 13 of the 23 major weapons systems that the Defense Ministry plans to acquire during the current MTDP have been fully financed, including two Aegis destroyers and 28 F-35As. The daily attributed the delay in part to a surge in development costs and other expenses for the advanced defense equipment.

Proposals for acquisition of "offensive" weapons systems will likely provoke fierce debate

Saturday morning's Mainichi took up growing calls among some LDP politicians and Defense Ministry officials for converting the MSDF destroyer Izumo into an aircraft carrier and introducing electronic warfare aircraft, projecting that these ideas will spark fierce debate when the GOJ begins a full review of the current National Defense Program Guidelines by the end of this year. Although the proponents say the proposals are aimed at countering China's military rise and North Korea's nuclear and missile programs, others are cautious since the two systems can be used as "offensive weapons," which Japan is prohibited from possessing under the Constitution. The daily expressed concern that if these proposals are adopted, they could undermine the nation's exclusively defense-oriented policy.

NSC to be responsible for procurement of major weapons systems

Sunday's Tokyo Shimbun wrote that the Abe administration has decided that instead of the SDF, the National Security Council will take the lead in deciding which defense equipment to introduce, noting that the GOJ is eager to end the "compartmentalization" of the defense budget that has been typically disbursed in accordance with requests filed by each SDF branch. By allowing the NSC to have a greater say in defense budget allocation, the administration is hoping to earmark more funds for such areas as cyber and space defense and electronic warfare. The NSC will take the initiative in defense budget allocation beginning when the GOJ updates the five-year Medium-Term Defense Program in December.

Mass production of anti-ship missiles to begin

Sunday's Mainichi wrote that the Defense Ministry plans to launch the mass production of ASM-3 anti-ship missiles in FY2019, noting that following the investment of some \$350 million during the 15-

year development period, the ultrasonic missiles can reach speeds in excess of Mach 3. While predicting that the ASDF's F-2s will be equipped with the missiles for remote island defense, the article said the ministry is keen to upgrade other existing missiles to counter China's maritime advancement.

Artificial intelligence to be used for cyber defense

Sunday's Sankei reported on a MOD plan to introduce around FY2021 artificial intelligence for safeguarding SDF computer and telecommunications networks from cyberattacks, noting that funding will be allocated starting in FY2018 for research and development of software to enable AI to detect unidentified computer viruses and predict cyberattacks involving malware.

JAXA to develop new radar to pinpoint small space debris

Monday's Yomiuri front-paged a JAXA decision to produce a high-performance radar that can detect and monitor space debris as small as 10 centimeters in diameter so as to prevent it from colliding with satellites. In operating the new radar beginning in FY2023, the space agency is hoping to collaborate with the Defense Ministry, which plans to operate a similar radar of its own, to ensure that Japanese satellites can be safeguarded in space without relying on the space debris surveillance system managed by the U.S.

ECONOMY

Trade minister to visit Mexico

Saturday's Mainichi reported that Trade Minister Motegi plans to visit Mexico from Jan. 8 through 12 to discuss with his counterpart the conclusion of the TPP talks by the present 11 members. The Japanese official is anxious to mediate between Mexico and Vietnam, which are at odds over labor protection, one of the two remaining sticking points impeding the conclusion of the landmark regional free trade pact.

