



Morning Alert - Thursday, January 18, 2018

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK gave top play to a report on the launch of an Epsilon-3 rocket from the JAXA Uchinoura Space Center in Kagoshima this morning. NTV led with a report on problems related to tickets for the figure skating events at the PyeongChang Olympics. TBS gave top play to a report that the Koreans have agreed to field a joint women's ice hockey team in the Olympics. TV Asahi reported that sumo grand champion Hakuho has already suffered two losses in the New Year Grand Sumo Tournament. Fuji TV led with a report that many subway train cars in Tokyo have recently been defaced with graffiti.

Top stories in national dailies included an agreement between the Koreans to field a joint women's ice hockey team for the Olympics (Mainichi, Yomiuri); a labor standards inspection office's discovery of inappropriate labor-management agreements at a hospital (Asahi); moves by some local municipalities to scale back public facilities in response to the declining population (Nikkei); and final arrangements by the 11 nations discussing a TPP agreement to freeze 22 items (Sankei).

INTERNATIONAL

Ministers agree at Vancouver meeting to strengthen pressure on DPRK

All national dailies ran front-page reports in their Wednesday evening editions on the Foreign Ministers' Meeting on Security and Stability on the Korean Peninsula held in Vancouver on Tuesday, saying that the participants agreed to continue and strengthen the pressure on North Korea through sanctions and diplomatic measures until Pyongyang takes decisive steps to denuclearize. The foreign ministers reportedly agreed on the need to prevent the DPRK from engaging in illicit ship-to-ship transfers of refined petroleum products. They reportedly called on China and Russia to fully implement UN Security Council sanctions by saying these nations have an important and special responsibility in resolving North Korean issues.

Asahi quoted Secretary of State Tillerson as stating at the Vancouver conference that the goal of the pressure campaign is to cut off the sources of funding that the DPRK uses to finance its illegal nuclear and ballistic missile programs. The Secretary was also quoted as saying that the object of negotiations is the complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearization of North Korea. Concerning North Korea's illicit ship-to-ship transfers, the Secretary was quoted as saying that the move is undermining UNSC sanctions.

Mainichi quoted the Secretary as stating: "We cannot and will not accept North Korea as a nuclear state," while Yomiuri quoted him as saying: "We must increase the cost of the Kim regime's behavior to the point that North Korea comes to the table for credible negotiations.... We will not allow North Korea to drive a wedge through our resolve or solidarity." Nikkei quoted the Secretary as saying: "The purpose of our meeting today is to improve the effectiveness of the maximum pressure campaign and combat North Korea's attempts to evade sanctions."

All national dailies ran follow-up analytical articles on Thursday morning. Asahi wrote that while welcoming the inter-Korean dialogue, the foreign ministers demonstrated solidarity in the pressure campaign led by the United States and Japan, including strengthened monitoring of North Korea's attempts to evade the sanctions through smuggling at sea. Foreign Minister Kono reportedly welcomed the outcome of the meeting by telling reporters after the meeting that there was absolutely no hint of a conciliatory mood toward Pyongyang at the meeting. Mainichi wrote that although the foreign ministers agreed to put continued pressure on the DPRK, including against smuggling, a statement by the co-chairs did not include concrete measures. Yomiuri speculated that the agreement at the Vancouver meeting to prevent North Korea's evasion of sanctions is intended to further tighten the international coalition against Pyongyang, which is apparently trying to drive a wedge into the trilateral cooperation between the United States, Japan, and South Korea and into the global community. Yomiuri wrote that Kono welcomed the outcome of the meeting by telling reporters that the conference was very meaningful. Nikkei wrote that there appear to be high hurdles to clear to increase the effectiveness of the sanctions because it remains to be seen how China and Russia will react to the agreement reached at the Vancouver meeting. Sankei expressed a similar view.

Secretary Tillerson comments on comfort women issue

Wednesday evening's Nikkei and Yomiuri wrote that during a news conference held in Canada on Tuesday, Secretary of State Tillerson commented on the comfort women issue by reportedly saying that the role of the United States has been to encourage Japan and South Korea to deal with the issue wisely and not let it stand in the way of dealing with greater security threats. Cabinet Secretary Suga commented on the remarks by the Secretary at a regular press briefing on Wednesday by reportedly saying that Japan believes that the United States consistently supports the 2015 agreement.

Kono rejects South Korea's call for additional measures for comfort women issue

All national dailies reported in their Wednesday evening editions on Foreign Minister Kono's meeting with his South Korean counterpart Kang Kyung-wha on Tuesday on the sidelines of the Vancouver Foreign Ministers' Meeting on Security and Stability on the Korean Peninsula. All of the dailies wrote that Kono rejected a request from the Moon administration that Japan take additional measures for the comfort women issue and called on South Korea to steadily implement the 2015 bilateral agreement. However, the two ministers reportedly agreed to advance the overall bilateral relations in a future-oriented fashion, while appropriately managing difficult issues for their nations. Mainichi and Yomiuri wrote that Kono and Kang also agreed to apply maximum pressure on North Korea to persuade it to take specific actions toward denuclearization. Yomiuri and Nikkei added that the two officials also agreed to ensure close coordination bilaterally and trilaterally with the United States in dealing with North Korea.

On Thursday morning Asahi ran a follow-up report saying that although differences remained between the two ministers over the comfort women issue, they avoided a head-on confrontation by agreeing to advance the bilateral relations in a forward-looking manner. Yomiuri wrote that it will probably take some time for Japan and South Korea to improve ties because Tokyo remains distrustful of Seoul's response to the bilateral comfort women agreement.

Minister in charge of abductions plans to visit U.S.

Asahi and Nikkei wrote that Minister in charge of abductions Kato told the press on Wednesday that he is planning to visit the United States during the Golden Week holidays in May or later to seek cooperation from the U.S. government and Congress in resolving the abduction issue.

Australian prime minister to attend Japan's NSC meeting

Nikkei wrote that ahead of his planned talks with Prime Minister Abe at the Kantei on Thursday, Australian Prime Minister Turnbull will be invited to attend a special meeting of Japan's National Security Council to discuss such issues as North Korea's nuclear and missile programs, China's maritime advancement, and defense cooperation between Japan and Australia. British Prime Minister May attended a similar meeting when she visited Japan last August.

SECURITY

Foreign Minister Kono, Secretary Tillerson discuss incidents involving U.S. military aircraft

Asahi and Yomiuri wrote that Foreign Minister Kono held talks with Secretary Tillerson in Vancouver on Tuesday. Yomiuri wrote that concerning the recent incidents involving U.S. military helicopters in Okinawa, Kono called on the U.S. to take measures to prevent a recurrence by reportedly saying that the Japanese people are increasingly anxious. Yomiuri wrote that the Secretary reportedly said in reply that although the precautionary landings were conducted with sufficient care, it was regrettable that the landings caused anxiety among local residents.

Japan, India conduct joint coast guard exercises

Asahi and Sankei wrote that the Japan Coast Guard and its Indian counterpart carried out joint exercises in waters off the southern Indian city of Chennai on Wednesday with the coast guards of Sri Lanka and Maldives participating as observers. This is reportedly the 16th time for Japan and India to conduct such exercises since 2000.

ECONOMY

Transportation Secretary Chao holds talks with Transport Minister Ishii

Wednesday evening's Nikkei wrote that Secretary of Transportation Elaine Chao held talks with Land and Transport Minister Ishii in Washington on Tuesday. According to a Japanese briefing, Secretary Chao gave high marks to Central Japan Railway Company's technical advice on a Shinkansen project in Texas. The paper quoted Ishii as reportedly telling the Secretary that the GOJ will provide support for the project as a symbol of U.S.-Japan cooperation in infrastructure development.

SOCIETY

Disaster drill held at Roppongi Hills with participation of U.S. Embassy personnel

Asahi wrote that a disaster preparedness drill was conducted at the Roppongi Hills commercial complex in Tokyo on Wednesday to mark the 23rd anniversary of the 1995 Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake with the first-time participation of U.S. and German embassy staff members.

