



Morning Alert - Monday, January 22, 2018

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HEADLINES

Morning news

Most networks gave top play to reports that heavy snowfall is expected in the Kanto-Koshin region this afternoon, saying that it could affect commuters. Fuji TV led with a report that a sumo wrestler called Osunaarashi allegedly caused a traffic accident while driving without a license on Jan. 3.

Top stories in national dailies included a report on the current situation in Mosul, Iraq (Asahi), a Ministry of Finance policy to delete official emails after 60 days (Mainichi); a plan by Tokyo prosecutors to conduct voluntary questioning of construction company employees regarding suspected bid-rigging for a maglev project (Yomiuri); and a delay in pay hikes in Japan (Nikkei).

INTERNATIONAL

U.S.-Japan alliance deepens under Trump administration

Saturday's Sankei wrote that the GOJ has worked in concert with President Trump over the past year in ratcheting up the pressure on North Korea based on the strong relationship of trust between the President and Prime Minister Abe. Foreign Minister Kono commented at a press briefing on Friday on the first anniversary of the launch of the Trump administration by reportedly saying that the U.S.-Japan alliance has become stronger than ever. The paper noted that the two leaders met five times, spoke by phone 17 times, and played golf twice over the past year. The paper also wrote that the United States and Japan have cooperated closely in urging China, Russia, and South Korea to step up the pressure on North Korea and that the President expressed his agreement with the "free and open Indo-Pacific strategy" advocated by Abe. The paper also wrote that despite Japan's concern over the possibility of "trade friction," no major issues have emerged as the two nations have been discussing economic issues in their economic dialogue led by Vice President Pence and Deputy Prime Minister Aso. Saturday's Nikkei and Yomiuri ran similar reports. However, Nikkei

added that differences exist between Washington and Tokyo over trade issues and Yomiuri claimed that there is dissatisfaction on the U.S. side over the trade deficit with Japan.

Ambassador Hagerty interviewed by NHK

NHK reported on Friday evening on its exclusive interview with Ambassador Hagerty. The Ambassador spoke about the strengthened U.S.-Japan relationship and his expectation for progress in bilateral trade talks. "Our national security partnership is deep and growing stronger every day, and we need to see our economic partnership continue to strengthen in the same direction," he was reported as saying.

China complains that U.S. Navy ship sailed near Scarborough Shoal

All national dailies wrote in their Sunday editions that China's Ministry of National Defense announced on Saturday that it spotted a U.S. missile destroyer sailing within 12 nautical miles of Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea, which is claimed by China and the Philippines. The ministry criticized the move for "undermining regional peace and stability." The Chinese Foreign Ministry issued a statement calling it a "provocation" and expressing strong displeasure. The papers wrote that the U.S. action probably was part of its "freedom of navigation" operations in the South China Sea.

Japan to support Indian Ocean nations' maritime security efforts

Sunday's Yomiuri wrote that the GOJ plans to provide support for efforts by nations on the rim of the Indian Ocean, including Sri Lanka and Djibouti, to enhance their maritime security capabilities. The paper speculated that the plan is intended to obtain the understanding of these nations for the free and open Indo-Pacific strategy advocated by Japan and the United States. Under the plan, the GOJ will dispatch coast guard officials to provide training and legal advice. The paper wrote that Japan will provide maritime security assistance for Indian Ocean nations in addition to Southeast Asian countries in response to their requests for Japan's support for their anti-piracy efforts and China's development of ports and other facilities in the region.

Japan, France to hold 2+2 meeting in Tokyo

Saturday's Yomiuri and Mainichi wrote that Defense Minister Onodera announced at a news conference on Friday that Japan and France will hold a 2+2 meeting of their foreign and defense ministers in Tokyo on Jan. 26. The papers speculated that the two nations will talk about putting pressure on North Korea and other issues.

In a related development, Monday morning's Nikkei wrote that the Japanese and French governments are making arrangements for President Macron to visit Japan in the spring for the first time since taking office and that the two nations will discuss the matter at their 2+2 meeting.

Japan, Russia aim to hold meeting of vice foreign ministers in February

Saturday's Mainichi wrote that the governments of Japan and Russia are making arrangements to hold a meeting of their vice foreign ministers in Tokyo in February to discuss the two nations' planned joint economic activities on the Northern Territories.

SECURITY

GOJ hopes alleged helicopter flight over school won't affect Nago election

Saturday's Sankei reported on remarks made by Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga at a news conference on Friday concerning the alleged flight last week by U.S. military helicopters over an elementary school near MCAS Futenma where a window fell onto the playground from a U.S. military helicopter last month. The paper quoted Suga as reportedly saying that he has been told that the Ministry of Defense has confirmed through video footage and reports from observers that the helicopters flew over the school. Pointing out that the Futenma base's relocation to Henoko, Nago, will likely be a major campaign issue in the Nago mayoral election to be held on Feb. 4, the paper speculated that the GOJ and the ruling coalition are hoping that the alleged helicopter flight will not have a negative impact on the election.

Saturday's Nikkei conjectured that although the GOJ will have no choice but to respond firmly to the U.S. ahead of the Nago election, Tokyo is actually hoping to avoid any quarrel with the United States amid tensions with North Korea. Mainichi quoted a senior SDF officer who used to be a pilot as commenting that the helicopters appeared to be turning by saying that it is possible that they were trying to avoid flying over the school. Quoting several senior Defense Ministry officials as saying that the views from the air and ground were perhaps different because the helicopters were probably flying at an altitude of several hundred meters, the paper conjectured that the GOJ is making every effort to quell the dispute. Asahi wrote that some in the GOJ believe that simply seeing the underside of the helicopters is not proof that they flew over the school and that the U.S. military's flight tracking data, if accurate, would lend credibility to its claim.

NHK's "News Watch 9" on Friday quoted Ambassador Hagerty as saying in an interview: "They used radar analysis to determine that the helicopters did not fly over the school.... I'm very optimistic that we will be able to improve the situation and that our friendship with the Okinawan people can continue to strengthen." NHK also reported on the Ambassador's comments in its 7 p.m. news on Friday

Onodera expresses willingness to strengthen U.S.-Japan alliance

Monday's Yomiuri wrote that Defense Minister Onodera on Sunday commented on the National Defense Strategy released on Friday by the Trump administration that mentions strengthened coordination with U.S. allies. The paper quoted Onodera as telling reporters that he wants to strengthen the deterrence and readiness of the U.S.-Japan alliance in a wide range of areas.

Defense Ministry mulls expansion of fighter units

Sunday's Sankei led with a report claiming that the Ministry of Defense is studying the idea of expanding the number of ASDF fighter units from the current 12 to 14. The paper wrote that the idea includes adding a new F-35A unit to Misawa Air Base in Aomori Prefecture. The paper speculated that if Japan decides to deploy another unit at Nyutabaru Air Base in Miyazaki Prefecture, it may consider introducing F-35Bs.

GOJ envisages joint use of MSDF flattop with U.S.

Sunday's Tokyo Shimbun led with a report saying that it has learned from several GOJ sources that the GOJ is envisioning the possibility of jointly operating the MSDF's Izumo escort ship with the United States in connection with the idea of transforming it into an aircraft carrier where fighter jets can land and take off. The paper wrote that the GOJ is considering allowing U.S. fighters to land on and take off from the Izumo in the event of emergencies and other situations and provide fuel and other support to the U.S. military. The paper wrote that the possession of an aircraft carrier might violate Japan's exclusively defense-oriented policy under Article 9 of its Constitution and that concern might emerge that the SDF's activities could, in effect, be integrated with the U.S. military's combat actions.

Number of incidents involving U.S. military aircraft in Japan increases

Monday's Mainichi wrote that an independent study by the Ministry of Defense claims that 25 incidents and problems involving helicopters and airplanes belonging to the U.S. Forces Japan occurred in 2017, more than twice as many as the 11 cases that occurred in 2016. The paper wrote that the ministry conducted a study in response to the remark reportedly made by Commander of the U.S. Pacific Command, Adm. Harris, at his meeting with Defense Minister Onodera in Hawaii on Jan. 9 that the number of U.S. military aircraft accidents has been on the decline.

Candidate backed by Governor Onaga wins Nanjo mayoral election in Okinawa

Monday's Asahi, Mainichi, Yomiuri, and Sankei reported that Chobin Zukeran, a former Lower House member supported by Governor Onaga, won the mayoral election held on Sunday in the city of Nanjo, Okinawa, by defeating the incumbent mayor backed by the LDP, the Komeito party, and Nippon Ishin by 65 votes. This is the first time for a candidate supported by Onaga to win a mayoral race since he took office in December 2014. Asahi and Mainichi wrote that the defeat of the LDP-backed candidate may affect the upcoming mayoral election in Nago on Feb. 4 and the gubernatorial election in the fall. Mainichi wrote that U.S. military bases were not an issue during the election campaign because there are no bases in Nanjo.

ECONOMY

U.S., Japan to hold working-level meeting of economic dialogue

Monday's Nikkei wrote that the governments of the United States and Japan will hold a working-level meeting of their economic dialogue on Jan. 24. The paper wrote that representatives of the Ministry of Economy Trade, and Industry and the Ministry of Agriculture will take part in the meeting from

Japan, while officials of the USTR will participate from the U.S. side. The paper wrote that the two nations will probably discuss specific issues such as agriculture and auto trade and coordinate their views ahead of future talks between Vice President Pence and Deputy Prime Minister Aso. The paper added that there is a possibility that the U.S. side will renew its call for FTA negotiations with Japan.

11 TPP members to hold chief negotiators' meeting in Tokyo

Monday's Yomiuri and Nikkei wrote that the chief negotiators of the 11 TPP nations will hold a two-day meeting in Tokyo starting today. Yomiuri wrote that attention will be focused on whether Canada will agree with the other member states to sign a new agreement at an early date. Sankei wrote that the GOJ has decided to pursue holding a signing ceremony in early March even without Canada's participation.

