



Morning Alert - Tuesday, January 23, 2018

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## HEADLINES

### Morning news

All networks gave top play to reports that the Tokyo region received its heaviest snowfall in four years yesterday, with 24 centimeters of snow being recorded in central Tokyo.

Top stories in national dailies included the snowfall in Tokyo (Asahi, Yomiuri); Prime Minister Abe's desire to conduct Diet debate on constitutional amendment (Mainichi); a plan by the Land Ministry to promote the idea of "compact cities" (Nikkei); and South Korea's announcement at the Vancouver Foreign Ministers' Meeting of its intention to resume humanitarian assistance to North Korea (Sankei).

## INTERNATIONAL

### JMSDF patrol plane notices contact between North Korean, Dominican tankers at sea

Asahi wrote that several GOJ sources disclosed on Monday that a JMSDF P-3C patrol plane spotted suspicious transfer of goods between North Korean and Dominican Republic tankers in waters off Shanghai on Saturday. The GOJ suspects that the move is in violation of the UN Security Council's sanctions resolution on the DPRK. JMSDF vessels and patrol aircraft have been patrolling international waters near Japan to ensure the thorough implementation of the sanctions resolutions since the end of last year. The paper quoted a MOFA source as saying that the items being transferred between ships could be refined petroleum products and the Dominican tanker may be connected to a Chinese firm. Mainichi ran a similar report, adding that the GOJ has shared the information with the U.S. military and plans to submit photos of the scene to the UN Security Council.

## **Foreign Minister Kono to visit China**

Yomiuri wrote that it has learned from several GOJ sources that Foreign Minister Kono has decided to visit China on January 27-28 to hold talks with his Chinese counterpart Wang. The paper speculated that the two officials will discuss such issues as North Korea, a possible trilateral summit with South Korea, a possible meeting between Prime Minister Abe and President Xi, and a Chinese submarine's operations near the Senkaku Islands.

Mainichi ran a similar report, adding that National Security Secretariat Secretary General Yachi is planning to visit Beijing in late February to hold talks with State Councilor Yang Jiechi.

## **Abe decides not to attend Davos Conference**

Nikkei wrote that Prime Minister Abe and other cabinet ministers will not attend this year's World Economic Forum, also known as the Davos Conference, because they are expected to attend Diet interpellation sessions during that time. According to MOFA, this will be the first time since 2005 that no Japanese cabinet minister will attend the international conference. The GOJ plans to send Special Advisor to Prime Minister Sonoura to the conference.

## **SECURITY**

### **Abe says in policy speech that SDF escorted U.S. military aircraft**

Yomiuri wrote that during a policy speech at the Diet on Monday, Prime Minister Abe reportedly stated that the SDF conducted operations to escort a U.S. military vessel and aircraft last year based on Japan's new security-related laws. The paper wrote that although the GOJ has disclosed that an MSDF vessel protected a U.S. Navy refueling ship last May, this was the first time for it to reveal that the SDF has escorted U.S. military aircraft. Asahi, Mainichi, and Tokyo Shimbun ran similar reports.

### **Defense Ministry claims U.S. military aircraft mishaps increased in 2017**

Asahi wrote that Defense Minister Onodera disclosed on Monday the results of an independent study by the Defense Ministry showing that in 2017, there were 25 incidents and problems involving U.S. military helicopters and airplanes, more than twice as many as the 11 cases that occurred in 2016. Onodera reportedly told the press that when he was told by PACOM Commander Admiral Harris earlier this month that the number of U.S. military aircraft accidents has been on the decline, he felt uncertain. Yomiuri and Mainichi ran similar reports.

### **Ruling coalition becoming nervous about upcoming elections in Okinawa**

Yomiuri wrote that the ruling coalition is becoming increasingly nervous about the Nago mayoral election in February and the gubernatorial election in the fall since its candidate was defeated by a candidate backed by Governor Onaga in the mayoral election in Nanjo, Okinawa, on Sunday. The paper wrote that the Nago mayoral election will be another proxy war between the ruling coalition and the governor. Asahi and Mainichi ran similar stories.

## **U.S.-Japan joint military drills suspended**

Yomiuri wrote that the Ministry of Defense announced on Monday that the JASDF's planned joint drills with the U.S. Air Force at Hyakuri Base in Ibaraki Prefecture on January 22-26 have been suspended following a notification from the U.S. military of the cancellation of the exercises due to U.S. government funding issues. The paper wrote that the U.S. Air Force's Misawa-based F-16s and the ASDF's Hyakuri-based F-4s were scheduled to participate in the drills. Mainichi ran a similar report.

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