



Morning Alert - Monday, February 5, 2018

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK led with an extensive report on the Nago mayoral election on Sunday, saying that former Nago City assembly member Taketoyo Toguchi who was backed by the LDP and Komeito won, defeating the incumbent Mayor Inamine who pledged to block the Futenma relocation plan. The network said the result of the election, a virtual “proxy war” between the GOJ and Governor Onaga, will serve as a tailwind for the LDP in the Okinawa gubernatorial election in the fall. NTV led with a report on a fire that broke out in a house in Nagano on Sunday that claimed two lives. TBS and TV Asahi reported on the first game of the joint North-South female ice hockey team on Sunday. Fuji TV reported on an anti-North demonstration held in South Korea on Sunday ahead of the upcoming PyeongChang Olympics.

There were no papers published this morning because of a press holiday.

INTERNATIONAL

President Trump, PM Abe speak by phone

The Saturday editions of all national dailies wrote that Prime Minister Abe phoned President Trump on Friday night and they spoke for about an hour on such topics as the escalated tension on the Korean Peninsula and the recent series of mishaps involving U.S. military aircraft in Okinawa. According to a briefing by the GOJ afterward, the two leaders agreed to apply maximum pressure on the DPRK irrespective of the Kim regime’s recent “charm offensive.” They also agreed to enhance trilateral coordination with South Korea in dealing with the defiant regime’s nuclear and missile development. Abe reportedly explained to the President that when meeting with South Korean

President Moon on the margins of the opening ceremony for the PyeongChang Olympics on Feb. 9, he will firmly convey Japan's position on the bilateral comfort women pact.

With regard to the recent aviation incidents in Okinawa, the premier asked the President to take "thorough measures" to ensure flight safety. The President reportedly stated in reply that he will tell the appropriate officials to discuss how to respond to Japan's request. Nikkei wrote that the two leaders mostly discussed the Korean Peninsula situation and incidents involving U.S. military aircraft in Okinawa. Yomiuri speculated that the prime minister initiated the phone call to confirm Japan's coordinated approach with Washington ahead of his planned meeting with the ROK leader in PyeongChang so as to hold Seoul's conciliatory moves toward its northern neighbor in check.

U.S., Japan to issue joint document when Vice President Pence visits Tokyo

Sunday's Yomiuri front-paged the disclosure by several sources that final arrangements are being made by the USG and the GOJ for Vice President Pence and Prime Minister Abe to release a joint document affirming trilateral unity with South Korea in stepping up pressure on North Korea. When they meet in Tokyo on Wednesday, the two officials will probably confirm that their nations will not readily enter dialogue with Pyongyang on the issues of nuclear and missile development. They are also expected to agree on enhancing coordination to prevent the DPRK from evading UN sanctions resolutions. The daily speculated that the purpose of the envisaged joint document is to display to North Korea that the three partners will not compromise when it comes to denuclearization regardless of the Kim regime's recent peace overtures.

PM Abe to ask President Moon to hold joint U.S.-ROK drills right after Paralympics

Sunday's Sankei led with a speculative piece projecting that when Prime Minister Abe meets with South Korean President Moon in PyeongChang on Friday, he is likely to press for holding joint drills between the U.S. and the South Korean militaries without delay after the Paralympics end in mid-March. By making such a request, the premier is set to dissuade Seoul from being tempted to postpone the regular bilateral exercises again in view of North Korea's eagerness for dialogue.

Sankei also reported that GOJ officials have surveyed several shelters that South Korea has set up in and around PyeongChang for evacuating residents and visitors in the event of a DPRK missile attack. The Japanese side has reportedly held discussions with relevant South Korean authorities on how to evacuate Japanese citizens if such a contingency occurs during the Olympics.

Top LDP official calls for Japan's flexibility on comfort women pact with ROK

Saturday morning's Asahi took up remarks made on a TV show on Friday by LDP Secretary General Nikai, who commented on Prime Minister Abe's earlier statement that Japan will "not compromise one iota" on the comfort women agreement with South Korea. The senior LDP politician suggested

that Japan needs to compromise on the grounds that diplomacy requires concessions on both sides.

In a related piece, Sunday's Tokyo Shimbun wrote that comfort women memorials have been built in six locations in the U.S., Germany, and Australia since Japan and South Korea signed the comfort women pact in December 2015, noting that the GOJ is alarmed because its intense lobbying of local politicians against such statues has proven futile. The daily added that a total of nine comfort women statues were also constructed in the United States and Canada before the Japan-ROK agreement was reached.

Pyongyang earned \$2 billion in 2017 by circumventing UN sanctions

All Saturday evening papers took up a Reuters report on a finding by a UN Security Council panel that North Korea earned some \$2 billion in 2017 by exporting coal to Russia, China, Malaysia, and other nations in violation of UN sanctions resolutions. The panel also reportedly disclosed that North Korea is suspected of exporting ballistic missile technology to Myanmar

U.S. adopts new nuclear strategy

All dailies reported in their Saturday evening and Sunday editions on the Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) released by the Trump administration on Friday, noting that the U.S. is set to develop smaller nuclear weapons and nuclear-armed cruise missiles in order to counter enemy attacks using conventional weapons if necessary. Yomiuri and Sankei said that based on a realistic assessment of the current global security situation, the Trump administration has decisively bid farewell to President Obama's "idealism." Nikkei and Yomiuri speculated that the U.S. is alarmed by the nuclear arms expansion of China and Russia and North Korea's relentless pursuit of nuclear weapons.

While explaining that the NPR signals Washington's policy of pursuing "peace through strength," Mainichi said that Russia and China are bound to react sharply to the new U.S. nuclear policy. According to Yomiuri, President Trump called for support for his nuclear strategy by saying that "it is tailored and flexible to address the wide array of threats in the 21st century." In briefing journalists on Friday, Deputy Secretary of Defense Shanahan also underscored that the new nuclear policy is intended to "maintain effective deterrence to ensure the security of the United States, its allies, and partners."

As for Japan's reaction to the NPR, Foreign Minister Kono reportedly released a statement welcoming it by saying: "It signifies the U.S. commitment to extended deterrence for its allies, including Japan." He went on to say: "The security environment around Japan is deteriorating rapidly due to North Korea's pursuit of nuclear and missile development.... Japan plans to strengthen the deterrence of the U.S.-Japan alliance." Mainichi wrote that Kono's statement signifies Japan's reliance on the U.S. nuclear umbrella, noting that the opposition bloc is critical of the Abe administration's support for the NPR in the belief that it runs counter to the nation's ultimate goal of

nuclear disarmament. Atomic bomb survivors and peace activists are also reportedly concerned about the new strategy.

Russian military to use airport in Northern Territories

Saturday morning's Asahi and Sankei took up the disclosure by the Russian government on Friday that Prime Minister Medvedev has signed a decree authorizing the Russian military to use a commercial airport on one of the islands in the disputed Northern Territories. The GOJ reportedly lodged a protest against what it described as Russia's "military buildup on Japan's inherent territory."

Japanese technology to be used for urban development in Russian Far East

Sunday's Nikkei front-paged a GOJ plan to tap Japanese technology, such as a traffic light control system to reduce traffic congestion and a method to refurbish drainage systems without digging underground, to support the development Vladivostok and other cities in the Russian Far East. Tokyo is hoping that such economic cooperation will facilitate progress on the Northern Territories dispute.

SECURITY

Sasebo-based landing craft conducts nighttime training without prior notification

Saturday morning's Mainichi wrote in a brief report that a Sasebo-based U.S. Navy landing craft air cushion (LCAC) performed nighttime drills on Wednesday and Thursday, noting that the Sasebo municipal government reacted strongly because the U.S. military authorities failed to notify it of the training in advance.

Japan Coast Guard to install radar facilities on remote islands

Friday evening's Yomiuri front-paged a plan by the Japan Coast Guard to build radar facilities on 23 remote isles in Okinawa, Kagoshima, and Shimane to strengthen monitoring of maritime operations by the Chinese in the vicinity of the Senkakus and illegal fishing by North Korean fishermen in the Sea of Japan. The facilities will become operational in FY2019 at the earliest.

ECONOMY

Japanese firms to enjoy high profits thanks to U.S. tax cut

All Saturday morning papers reported on Honda's announcement on Friday that its net profits for the fiscal year ending in March will be about 1 trillion yen, up 60% from a year ago and reaching the highest level ever due mainly to the Trump administration's slashing the corporate tax. According to the articles, the Japanese automaker will earn some 346.1 billion yen due to the anticipated reduction in "deferred tax liabilities." Asahi and Nikkei said Toyota, Nissan, and other auto manufacturers will similarly enjoy significant increases in earnings thanks to the U.S. tax code overhaul, adding that such bumper profits will be a one-time occurrence.

SCIENCE

JAXA successfully launches small rocket

All Sunday papers reported on the successful launch by JAXA of a small rocket putting an ultra-small satellite into orbit, explaining that the launch demonstrated the Japanese space agency's ability to launch rockets at low cost. The papers explained that there is intense competition between industrialized countries to launch low-cost small rockets, which are regarded as crucial for the development of space for commercial purposes.

