



Morning Alert - Wednesday, February 14, 2018

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## HEADLINES

### Morning news

NHK led with a report on the record snowfall in the Hokuriku region. All commercial networks reported on the PyeongChang Olympics, including Japanese figure skater Yuzuru Hanyu's first public practice session yesterday.

Main front-page stories in national papers included updates on the cryptocurrency theft on the Coincheck digital currency exchange, Japanese athletes' performance in the PyeongChang Olympics, and the potential use of artificial intelligence by China and Russia in launching cyberattacks.

## INTERNATIONAL

### Tokyo reaction to Vice President Pence's remarks on dialogue with DPRK

Nikkei and Sankei reported on local reactions to Vice President Pence's remarks to the Washington Post reportedly hinting at Washington's flexibility about holding dialogue with the North Korean regime. Nikkei said the GOJ is reportedly anxious to ascertain the real intention behind his comments, quoting Prime Minister Abe as saying at the Diet yesterday: "Mr. Pence and I aligned the two government's policies very closely even while in PyeongChang. We are completely in sync in stepping up the pressure to the maximum extent." An unnamed senior MOFA official commented on the Vice President's statements by saying: "Remarks by senior USG officials tend to vacillate, but the latest exchange of views [between the Vice President and the prime minister] didn't show any change in the U.S.'s basic approach [toward North Korea]." Mainichi quoted Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga as telling the press on Tuesday: "When the Vice President visited Japan, we spent many hours closely coordinating our views. We will apply maximum pressure on North Korea by employing all

means available.” Defense Minister Onodera stressed that the Trump administration’s position on North Korea has not changed.

### **Secretary Tillerson comments on dialogue with North Korea**

Kyodo highlighted press remarks made in Cairo on Monday by Secretary of State Tillerson, who was asked by a reporter about the possibility of holding dialogue with the DPRK. The Secretary was quoted as saying: “It’s really up to the North Koreans to decide when they’re ready to engage with us in a sincere way, a meaningful way. They know what has to be on the table for conversations.”

In a related development, Yomiuri and Sankei focused on remarks made on Tuesday by South Korean President Moon, who said during his meeting with the visiting Latvian president that the United States views inter-Korean dialogue positively and that it has expressed readiness to hold dialogue with North Korea. The dailies speculated that the ROK leader made this comment with Vice President Pence’s recent interview with the Washington Post in mind. Yomiuri quoted an ROK government source as saying: “The U.S.’s attitude is growing very close to ours.” Sankei suspected that by emphasizing Washington’s “pro-dialogue” posture, the South Korean leader appears to be aiming to further boost the momentum for reconciliation with Pyongyang. Mainichi wrote that the Abe administration is alarmed by South Korea’s accelerated rapprochement with its northern neighbor.

## **ECONOMY**

### **President Trump hints at imposing retaliatory duties on certain trading partners**

Tuesday evening’s Nikkei and Mainichi reported from Washington on remarks made to state governors and others at the White House on Monday by President Trump regarding unfair practices by certain trading partners. The President reportedly stated that the administration will impose a “reciprocal tax” on countries that take advantage of the United States, including what he referred to as “so-called allies.” He reportedly expressed frustration with the trade deficits that the U.S. has logged by saying: “We lose vast amounts of money with China and Japan and South Korea and so many other countries.”

Today’s Yomiuri filed a similar story, highlighting his separate remark that China, Japan, and South Korea “have gotten away with murder for 25 years.” The daily conjectured that the President may have used the extreme language to emphasize that American workers have sustained severe economic damage from what he called unfair trading practices by these nations.

## **SECURITY**

### **Abe meets with new mayor of Nago**

All papers reported on newly-elected Nago Mayor Toguchi’s courtesy call on Prime Minister Abe at the Kantei on Tuesday, during which the premier promised “full-scale assistance” in helping the municipal leader deliver on his campaign pledges to increase childcare support and revitalize the

local economy. Asked by reporters about his position on the FRF construction initiative off Camp Schwab, the mayor stated simply that he is carefully monitoring the situation since the central and prefectural governments are at odds over the issue.

### **PM Abe mentions need to study possibility of converting MSDF's Izumo**

Asahi took up remarks made at the Diet on Tuesday by Prime Minister Abe, who was asked by an opposition lawmaker about an alleged Defense Ministry idea to convert the MSDF's Izumo into an aircraft carrier. While underscoring that no concrete studies have ever been conducted on the idea, the prime minister said: "I am aware that the Defense Ministry has been conducting basic research and collecting information regarding the future use of the warship." The daily interpreted his remarks to mean that the ministry is mulling the procurement of F-35B stealth fighters for deployment to the Izumo.

## **SCIENCE**

### **Japan undecided on whether to continue to support ISS**

Asahi highlighted the Trump administration's proposal to terminate its funding for the International Space Station (ISS) program in 2025, noting that the GOJ has not yet decided whether it will continue to support the international space collaboration project after the U.S. withdrawal. Pointing out that Tokyo has contributed some \$325 million annually to the ISS, the article quoted Education Minister Hayashi as telling the press on Tuesday: "We would like to gather information and hold discussions" with U.S. officials when the International Space Exploration Forum is held in Tokyo in March.