



Morning Alert - Thursday, February 15, 2018

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## HEADLINES

### Morning news

All networks and national papers except Nikkei gave top play to Japanese athletes' strong performance at the PyeongChang Olympics.

## INTERNATIONAL

### U.S., Japanese leaders in sync in applying maximum pressure on DPRK

All national dailies wrote that Prime Minister Abe and President Trump spoke by phone last night for about 75 minutes and agreed on the need to increase the pressure on North Korea to the maximum extent. They also reportedly agreed that any dialogue with Pyongyang should be premised upon denuclearization. The premier told the press afterward: "Dialogue for the sake of dialogue is meaningless. Both Japan and the United States believe that it will be impossible to hold meaningful dialogue unless it is premised upon complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearization.... The U.S.-Japan alliance will not be shaken at all. Our two nations will continue to coordinate closely."

Asahi said according to a post-call briefing by the Japanese side, the President and Abe confirmed that there is no difference of opinion between him and Vice President Pence on dialogue with Pyongyang. Mainichi and Sankei wrote that the two leaders agreed on the importance of carrying out U.S.-ROK military exercises after the conclusion of the PyeongChang Paralympics. Nikkei conjectured that in his latest conversation with President Trump, the prime minister was keen to align the two countries' approaches toward the Kim regime since some Japanese officials are worried that Washington, along with Seoul, will respond positively to Pyongyang's recent peace overtures.

According to Yomiuri, in response to the President's explanation of his tax code reforms during the longest-ever teleconference between the two, the premier said: "They will help promote U.S.-bound investment by Japanese companies." Sankei claimed that the President and Abe also exchanged views on the bilateral economic dialogue. According to Mainichi, the prime minister told the President that "very productive discussions are continuing" in the economic dialogue. Nikkei wrote that the two leaders did not discuss the TPP or Japan's trade surplus with the U.S.

### **Senior USG official comments on communications with North Korea**

Nikkei highlighted a regular daily press briefing on Tuesday by State Department Spokesperson Nauert, who was asked by reporters to clarify Vice President Pence's comments on dialogue with North Korea that he made in a recent interview with the Washington Post. The spokesperson reportedly mentioned the need to hold a preliminary session with Pyongyang before launching full-fledged talks. She was quoted as saying, "You may have to have a preliminary chat about what the discussion would look like....At some point, we may sit down and talk," adding that the goal was denuclearization of the Korean peninsula.

### **North Korea showed no willingness to talk to Vice President in PyeongChang**

NHK reported this morning that according to U.S. and Japanese diplomatic sources, although South Korean President Moon urged Vice President Pence to talk with the North Korean delegation during the opening ceremony of the PyeongChang Olympics on Feb. 9, the Vice President did not speak to the North Koreans since they showed no readiness to talk. The network conjectured that the Vice President left the pre-ceremony reception hosted by President Moon after about five minutes because the North Koreans did not show a willingness to hold dialogue.

The network also said that the USG had reportedly notified the GOJ in advance that if a dialogue were held with the North Koreans, the U.S. would tell the North that it would not agree to serious talks if North Korea failed to abandon its nuclear and ballistic missile programs and the U.S. would continue to maximize pressure unless this promise were kept. The network added that PM Abe probably held a brief conversation with Kim Yong Nam, the President of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly of North Korea, because the premier did not want the abduction issue to be overlooked.

### **Abe warns ROK leader against proposed trip to North Korea**

Yomiuri took up remarks at the parliament on Wednesday by Prime Minister Abe, who commented on a DPRK invitation to ROK President Moon to visit Pyongyang by saying: "The important thing is to produce results.... [President Moon] should closely analyze what happened" after his predecessors Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun separately visited the DPRK capital in the past. The daily interpreted Abe's statement as warning the South Korean leader against being taken in by the Kim regime's charm offensive.

As for Vice President Pence's remarks reportedly hinting at flexibility about dialogue with the DPRK, the prime minister said: "Both the Vice President and I are in complete agreement on the need to apply maximum pressure. I have confirmed with USG officials that there has been no change to this policy."

### **SDF photos show suspected illicit ship-to-ship transfer involving DPRK vessel off Shanghai**

All national dailies reported on a MOFA announcement yesterday that an MSDF patrol aircraft spotted a Belize-flagged tanker apparently transferring goods to a DPRK cargo ship in international waters in the East China Sea on early Tuesday morning. As the North Korean vessel, Rye Song Gang 1, is subject to UN sanctions, the GOJ has informed the Security Council of the incident in the belief that it probably constitutes a violation of relevant sanctions resolutions.

### **Two ROK cabinet ministers to attend Geneva conferences on human rights**

Asahi wrote that South Korea's cabinet ministers for foreign affairs and gender equality and family will travel to Geneva to attend separate UN conferences on discrimination against women and human rights, respectively, later this month, projecting that both officials will probably mention the comfort women issue.

## **SECURITY**

### **President Trump criticizes Japan for not allocating sufficient money for defense**

Sankei highlighted remarks made during a White House meeting on trade on Tuesday by President Trump, who reportedly expressed frustration with Japan and other nations for not spending enough on national defense. He was quoted as saying: "We defend Japan. We defend South Korea. They pay us a fraction of what it costs. And we're talking to all of those countries about that because it's not fair that we defend them, and they pay us a fraction of the cost of that defense." Pointing out that the U.S. budget deficit is bound to grow under the proposed FY2019 budget proposal, the daily speculated that the Trump administration may ask its allies to take on a greater defense burden.

## **POLITICS**

### **Ruling, opposition parties resume discussions on casino legislation**

All papers reported that selected ruling and opposition party members held a meeting on Wednesday to discuss a proposed bill on gambling addiction, one of two pieces of legislation that have to be enacted before casinos can be opened, which became possible following the passage of a relevant law in 2016. While the participants discussed the need to "merge" two bills on gambling addiction that were submitted separately to the Diet last year by the ruling and opposition blocs, the Constitutional Party of Japan and the Japanese Communist Party are negative about the idea in the belief that enacting legislation on gambling addiction will lead to the opening of casinos. Nikkei speculated that if the passage of the other bill, on casino implementation, is delayed as a result of a

setback for the gambling addiction legislation, the proposed opening of casino facilities in the early 2020s may become difficult.