



Morning Alert - Tuesday, February 20, 2018

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HEADLINES

Morning news

All networks led with reports on Japanese athletes' performance at the PyeongChang Olympics.

Major front-page items in national papers included proposed GOJ legislation on promoting offshore wind power generation and updates on Prime Minister Abe's retraction of flawed data he had presented earlier at the Diet regarding the amount of overtime put in by Japanese workers.

INTERNATIONAL

FM Kono expresses understanding for U.S.-North Korea preliminary talks

Monday's Nikkei reported that Foreign Minister Kono did not deny the necessity for the U.S. to hold preliminary talks with North Korea before entering full-fledged negotiations on the North's nuclear and missile programs. The daily quoted Kono as telling reporters in Munich: "Contact is significant in the sense that it tells [North Korea] to abandon its nuclear and missile programs and come to the table for dialogue." At the same time, Kono reportedly stressed the importance of applying pressure on Pyongyang, saying: "Japan, the U.S., and South Korea share the view that nothing can be gained through dialogue at this stage."

ROK leader did not call for additional measures on comfort women agreement

Saturday morning's Mainichi and Sankei reported that Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Nishimura appeared on a BS-Fuji program on Friday and said that during the Japan-ROK summit held on Feb. 9 in PyeongChang, President Moon told Prime Minister Abe that there are "no conditions attached" to the Japan-ROK agreement on the comfort women. Sankei wrote that according to Nishimura, the ROK leader did not ask for Japan to take any additional measures, such as apologizing to the former

comfort women, and also said he will neither renegotiate nor nullify the agreement.

GOJ to provide training to schoolteachers on abduction issue

Monday morning's Nikkei reported that a GOJ source disclosed on Sunday that the government has decided to start from this fall providing training to elementary, middle, and high school teachers on the issue of Japanese nationals abducted by North Korea. The paper said the GOJ made the decision in light of the results of an opinion survey conducted last fall by the Cabinet Office, which found that young people are not very interested in the abduction issue. The paper said the move is also aimed at demonstrating to North Korea Japan's determination not to forget the abduction issue.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga issues warning to South Korea

In relation to the possibility of ROK President Moon visiting North Korea for an inter-Korea summit, Saturday morning's Sankei quoted Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga as saying to reporters on Friday that it's important to be fully aware that past dialogue with North Korea has not led to its denuclearization. The paper interpreted Suga's comment as a warning to South Korea, since it is leaning toward holding dialogue with the North.

Japanese, Russian foreign ministers to meet in Tokyo on Mar. 21

Saturday morning's Nikkei, Sankei, Mainichi, and Yomiuri reported on a meeting between Foreign Minister Kono and his Russian counterpart Lavrov in Munich, Germany, on Friday. The two ministers reportedly agreed to hold another meeting in Tokyo on Mar. 21. Sankei wrote that they are expected to exchange views on North Korea and joint economic activities in the Northern Territories. The two ministers are expected to lay the groundwork for PM Abe's planned visit to Russia in May. Noting that President Putin is set to be reelected in the upcoming presidential race on Mar. 18, the paper said the Japanese side is hoping to move forward the talks on joint economic activities by holding a foreign ministerial immediately after Putin's reelection. According to Sankei, Kono also lodged a protest against the Russian government's release of a cabinet order to make a private airport on Etorofu Island serve as a dual-use airport. He also called for Russia's understanding for the need to maximize pressure on North Korea.

LDP Secretary General Nikai mulls Russia trip

Monday's Nikkei reported that LDP Secretary General Nikai is considering visiting Russia as early as April for meetings with senior members of the Putin administration. The paper said the visit is aimed at laying the groundwork for PM Abe's visit to Russia in May. Sankei carried a similar report.

Japan to utilize ODA to promote "free and open Indo-Pacific strategy"

Monday's Nikkei reported on the contents of Japan's Official Development Assistance (ODA) White Paper 2017, saying that it specifies that the GOJ will utilize ODA to promote the Abe administration's "free and open Indo-Pacific strategy." The paper added that Japan plans to contribute to the development of the global economy by assisting developing nations through ensuring the safety of

sea lanes and improving legal systems. The daily said Foreign Minister Kono is expected to brief the cabinet on the white paper on Feb. 23.

FM Kono to meet with Mongolian counterpart in late March

Saturday morning's Yomiuri reported on the finding on Friday that Mongolian Foreign Minister Tsogtbaatar will visit Japan in late March to meet with Foreign Minister Kono. Noting that the Mongolian foreign minister visited North Korea and met with the North Korean foreign minister earlier this month, the paper said Kono and Tsogtbaatar are expected to discuss North Korea. According to the paper, Kono will probably seek Mongolia's cooperation in resolving the abduction issue.

G20 summit likely to be held in Fukuoka instead of Osaka

Saturday morning's Asahi reported that although the GOJ was initially considering holding the 2019 G20 summit in Osaka, it is now making final arrangements to hold it in Fukuoka. The paper said since the World Expo may be held in Osaka in 2025, the government decided that it would be preferable to hold the two events in different locations.

MOFA panel recommends "renewable energy diplomacy"

Tuesday's Yomiuri reported on a set of recommendations compiled by a MOFA blue-ribbon commission regarding the nation's diplomacy on climate change, saying that the panel recommended suspending coal-fired power plant exports and called for investing in and providing technology related to renewable energy sources such as solar and wind power. The ministry is hoping to boost Japan's influence in international negotiations on global warming by calling attention to its commitment to renewable energy. The daily added that METI and certain domestic industries may be displeased with the proposed discontinuation of coal-fired power plant exports.

SECURITY

PACOM commander says U.S. preparing for non-combatant evacuation operations

Saturday morning's Yomiuri reported that PACOM Commander Harris said during a congressional hearing on Wednesday that although the Trump administration prioritizes resolving the North Korea issue through diplomatic means by maximizing pressure, the U.S. is also preparing for non-combatant evacuation operations (NEO), which would be essential in the event of a contingency on the Korean Peninsula. According to the paper, Adm. Harris reportedly said the U.S. Army, Pacific, and others are currently confirming or making adjustments to the evacuation plan. The admiral also reportedly expressed the view that the U.S. will work closely with U.S. allies, saying: "Should a war begin on the Korean Peninsula, the evacuation of non-combatants will also be important for our friends, allies, and partners."

PACOM spokesperson comments on bilateral alliance with Japan

Tuesday's Nikkei published a written interview with PACOM Public Affairs Officer Benham, in which he explained the U.S. military's policy of further enhancing the U.S.-Japan alliance to counter the growing threat posed by North Korea's pursuit of nuclear and missile technology. Commenting on China's maritime advancement in the South and East China Seas, Commander Benham underscored that PACOM is strongly committed to ensuring freedom of navigation and international order based on the law.

Top U.S. general, Abe confirm trilateral coordination with ROK against DPRK provocations

All national papers except Mainichi reported today that U.S. Army Chief of Staff Milley paid a courtesy call on Prime Minister Abe at the Kantei on Monday, during which they agreed to step up trilateral coordination with South Korea so as to rein in North Korea's nuclear and missile programs. In response to the premier's statement emphasizing the importance of maintaining strong pressure on the DPRK, the U.S. general said: "The U.S.-Japan alliance is very strong.... We would like to deal with North Korea through trilateral coordination." General Milley met with Defense Minister Onodera earlier and stressed the importance of preparing for an "unforeseen event."

Osprey flights at Yokota AB more than doubled last year

Tuesday's Tokyo Shimbun wrote in a prominent inside-page story that according to data compiled by an anti-base group in Tokyo, the number of landings and takeoffs by USMC Ospreys at Yokota AB amounted to 122 in 2017, more than double the previous year. While attributing the sharp increase to the relocation of training drills from Okinawa to the Japanese mainland, the daily added that Yokota residents are worried about the safety of the MV-22s on account of the perception of frequent accidents involving the tilt-rotor planes that have occurred in Japan and abroad.

U.S. military to improve incident notification procedure

Saturday morning's Mainichi reported that following the incident in which a part from a USMC Osprey was found drifting near Ikei Island in Uruma, Okinawa, on Feb. 9, Defense Minister Onodera disclosed to reporters on Friday that the U.S. side has explained that it will continue to improve the procedure for notifying the Japanese government of such incidents. The paper wrote that the U.S. Marines failed to report the incident to the USFJ headquarters even though a U.S. commander is supposed to notify the local defense authority, police, Japan Coast Guard, and USFJ headquarters based on a Japan-U.S. Joint Committee agreement.

GOJ mulls increasing subsidies for Nago

Sunday morning's Nikkei reported that the GOJ is mulling an increase in subsidies for the city of Nago, Okinawa, following the Feb. 4 defeat of the incumbent mayor who was opposed to the Futenma relocation plan by new Mayor Toguchi. The paper said the GOJ will support Toguchi by providing subsidies and grants based on the assessment that it will now be easier for the government to obtain local cooperation for the Futenma relocation work.

Today's Sankei said Defense Ministry officials will visit Nago later this week for talks with Mayor Toguchi with the goal of obtaining his official support for the FRF initiative, which will be a requirement for increasing central government subsidies.

Okinawa governor approves transplanting of rare coral

Saturday morning's Yomiuri reported that Okinawa Governor Onaga has approved for the first time a request by the Okinawa Defense Bureau to transplant rare coral from Henoko to another location. Noting that continuing the relocation work will be a requirement for transplanting the coral, the paper said the governor's approval is likely to provoke local opposition.

According to today's Tokyo Shimbun, the governor told the press yesterday that he remains determined not to allow the FRF construction in Henoko.

Japan to expand amphibious unit to strengthen defense of Nansei Islands

Saturday morning's Yomiuri wrote that the GOJ has decided to expand the GSDF's amphibious rapid deployment brigade to be launched this spring in order to strengthen the defense of the Nansei Islands. According to the paper, although the brigade will initially consist of two regiments, an additional regiment will be added from around FY2021 to boost the defense of the remote islands.

GOJ to extend peacekeeping activities in South Sudan

Yomiuri reported on Saturday that the Abe cabinet decided on Friday to extend by three months the dispatch of SDF officers to the UN peacekeeping mission's command in South Sudan.

ECONOMY

U.S. Department of Commerce proposes import curbs on steel, aluminum

All weekend papers reported that the Commerce Department has recommended that President Trump impose steep curbs on steel and aluminum imports from China and other nations. Sunday's Nikkei wrote that the Trump administration began examining the proposal on Friday on the grounds that the increase in steel and aluminum imports is becoming a security threat. The paper said President Trump will decide by April whether to adopt the recommendations, adding that although the main target is China, Japan would also be subject to the import curbs. The daily wrote that if the U.S. restricts imports for security reasons, it would give other nations a reason to take countermeasures, adding that it could develop into a trade war.

In a related story, Tuesday's Yomiuri and Mainichi took up a comment released on Monday by Japan Steel and Iron Federation Chairman Shindo, who voiced opposition to the proposed U.S. penalties on steel imports from Japan. "Steel products from Japan are indispensable to the U.S. economy," he said. "They do not constitute a threat to U.S. national security. We hope President Trump will make a correct and careful decision."

Turkish ambassador eager to conclude Japan-Turkey EPA

Saturday morning's Sankei reported on its exclusive interview with Turkish Ambassador to Japan Mercan, who expressed eagerness for the conclusion of the Japan-Turkey Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) negotiations by September. Prime Minister Abe and Turkish President Erdogan agreed to accelerate the EPA talks when they met in New York last September.

