



Morning Alert - Wednesday, February 21, 2018

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## HEADLINES

### Morning news

All networks gave top play to the Japanese athletes' performance yesterday at the PyeongChang Olympics.

Major front-page stories in national papers included a GOJ plan to host the G20 summit in Osaka next summer, a METI idea on easing regulations to allow electric cars to be recharged at gas stations, and medical data indicating a tendency for dementia patients to suffer from various other ailments.

## SECURITY

### Russian bombers fly along Japanese archipelago to Okinawa

Sankei and Yomiuri reported that two Russian TU-95 bombers flew along the Pacific side of the Japanese archipelago from Hokkaido to Okinawa and back on Tuesday, saying that although they did not intrude into Japan's territorial airspace, ASDF scrambled aircraft in response.

### U.S. military aircraft's dumping of fuel tanks raises concern in Misawa

All papers reported that a USAF F-16 jettisoned two fuel tanks into a lake following an engine fire shortly after takeoff from Misawa AB on Tuesday morning. The papers quoted Col. Jobe, the commander of the 35th Fighter Wing, as saying in a released statement that the pilot dropped the external tanks over an unpopulated area. The commander reportedly promised to conduct a thorough investigation to determine the cause of the incident in response to a request from the Defense Ministry for the U.S. military to take measures to prevent a recurrence and ensure the safety of aircraft using the base. Col. Jobe visited the local municipal office to offer an apology for "causing concern" among local people.

The dailies highlighted the anger and concern voiced by local residents and officials. About 10 fishing boats were reportedly operating in the lake when the tanks were dumped and they landed only 200 meters away from one of the boats. Several fishermen witnessed a plume of water rising nearly 15 meters where the tanks struck the lake. As the fishermen later found an oil slick nearby, they reportedly decided not to resume fishing until the tanks were recovered and fuel was cleaned up.

According to the papers, Prime Minister Abe commented on the mishap by saying during a Diet committee meeting: "U.S. military operations must be premised upon ensuring the safety of local citizens. We plan to press the U.S. side to identify the cause, take preventive measures, and conduct thorough safety maintenance." Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga also told the press that incidents like this must never happen. Nikkei said GOJ officials have become very nervous about local reactions to the recent series of mishaps involving U.S. military planes.

Asahi delved into the cause of the latest incidents involving U.S. military aircraft based in Japan, with an ex-ASDF jet fighter pilot conjecturing that what he called "institutional stress" triggered by intense training in response to the situation in North Korea and China's maritime advancement may be one of the root causes.

### **GOJ to produce leaflet warning against operating drones near U.S. bases**

Yomiuri and Sankei wrote that the GOJ plans to create a leaflet warning against operating drones around U.S. military facilities across Japan, explaining that a U.S. helicopter was forced to change its flight route at Camp Schwab in Okinawa following the discovery of a drone in its vicinity in November last year. The leaflet will reportedly state that drone operations may be deemed illegal if they interfere with the safe operation of U.S. military aircraft.

## **INTERNATIONAL**

### **G20 summit to be held in Osaka in summer of 2019**

All papers reported that the GOJ has decided to convene the G20 summit in Osaka in late June or early July next year, saying that although Fukuoka was apparently the strongest candidate to host the major diplomatic event, the GOJ has given up on holding the summit there because the city lacks sufficient lodgings to accommodate the 30,000 visitors, including foreign dignitaries, their staffs, and the press corps, who are expected to attend. Fukuoka will instead host a G20 meeting of financial ministers and central bank governors. An official announcement will be made shortly.

Nikkei speculated that the Abe administration selected Osaka to please Osaka Governor Matsui, who heads the Japan Innovation Party, and obtain his party's support for Prime Minister Abe's push for constitutional amendment. The administration will reportedly host the international conference just before an Upper House election in the hope that voters will approve of the premier's diplomatic leadership. Since Crown Prince Naruhito will have ascended to the imperial throne by then, the

administration is also hoping that the Japanese public will be pleased to see the new emperor greeting VIPs attending the G-20 summit.

### **Suspicious ship-to-ship transfer involving DPRK tanker spotted by SDF**

All papers reported on an MOFA announcement on Tuesday that an MSDF ship and patrol plane spotted an apparent illicit ship-to-ship transfer between a North Korean tanker and an unidentified small vessel off Shanghai in the East China Sea last Friday. The ministry has notified the UN Security Council of the incident in the belief that it constituted a violation of relevant sanctions resolutions. The small vessel bore on its hull Chinese characters indicating Ningde City in Fujian Province, China. The SDF has spotted similar incidents twice in the East China Sea previously.

### **Top LDP official to visit Russia**

Mainichi wrote that LDP Secretary General Nikai will visit Moscow in April to attend a seminar on bilateral relations, saying that the top LDP official is hoping to lay the groundwork for Prime Minister Abe's Russian trip scheduled for May. Russian Premier Medvedev is also likely to take part in the seminar and Nikai is aiming to hold a meeting with him.

## **ECONOMY**

### **Proposed U.S. penalties on steel imports trigger concern about global trade war**

Sankei carried a prominent inside-page article on Trade Minister Seko's press remarks on Tuesday, in which he commented on the Commerce Department's recent recommendation to President Trump to limit foreign steel imports, including Japanese products. The minister said: "I don't think that imports from Japan, which is a U.S. ally, affect U.S. national security." The daily said the GOJ and the domestic steel industry are bracing for the possibility of President Trump heeding the Commerce Department's advice and are concerned that this would disrupt free trade by prompting targeted countries such as China to take retaliatory measures. The GOJ is particularly alarmed by the fact that the Commerce Department cited national security concerns as a reason for the proposed import restrictions.

