



Morning Alert - Monday, February 26, 2018

The following information reflects the reporting of the cited news media and does not reflect the opinions of the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo. Japan Media Highlights is intended for USG use only and should not be forwarded. Visit the website [here](#). For more information, contact [TokyoMATT@state.gov](mailto:TokyoMATT@state.gov).

## HEADLINES

### Morning news

All networks led with extensive coverage of the PyeongChang Olympics, which ended on Sunday, reporting that Japan won a total of 13 medals, including four gold medals.

Major front-page items in national papers included the closing ceremony of the PyeongChang Olympics and a proposal by the Chinese Communist Party to end the term limit for the country's president. The dailies conjectured that the proposal is perhaps intended to allow President Xi to lead "for life."

## INTERNATIONAL

### U.S. imposes heavy sanctions on entities involved in trade with North Korea

All Saturday morning papers gave prominent coverage to the Trump administration's announcement on Friday on additional sanctions targeting the Kim regime of North Korea, explaining that the U.S. will sanction 27 entities, 28 vessels, and 1 individual from nations in Asia, Africa, and South America for their involvement in sanctions evasion schemes. According to Treasury Secretary Mnuchin, the latest unilateral punitive measures are "the largest set of sanctions ever imposed in connection with North Korea." The Secretary also said: "Today's actions will significantly hinder North Korea's ability to conduct evasive maritime activities.... Those who trade with North Korea do so at their own peril." Yomiuri speculated that the Trump administration made the announcement at this juncture to play up its resolve to maintain maximum pressure on the DPRK regardless of the mounting mood for reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula.

In follow-up reports, all Sunday papers highlighted a Reuters report on a USG idea to deploy its Coast Guard patrol boats in the Asia-Pacific region in coordination with Japan, Australia, Singapore,

and others to crack down on illicit trading at sea by North Korean ships. Yomiuri wrote that Washington appears to be determined to “eradicate” North Korea’s international smuggling of prohibited items. The dailies separately took up President Trump’s press remarks on Friday, in which he mentioned taking even tougher steps against the DPRK by saying: “If the sanctions don’t work, we’ll have to go Phase 2. Phase 2 may be a very rough thing.”

### **Japan welcomes U.S.’s toughest ever sanctions on DPRK**

Sunday’s papers reported on Defense Minister Onodera’s reaction to the latest round of U.S. sanctions on North Korea, quoting him as telling the press on Saturday: “We strongly support them because they are intended to step up the pressure on North Korea.... The cooperative relationship between Japan and the United States is very solid, as the U.S. decided to take the step based on information obtained by the MSDF” on suspicious ship-to-ship transfers involving North Korean and other vessels in the East China Sea.

In a related story, Monday’s Tokyo Shimbun wrote that the GOJ has asked the USG and the ROK government to cover some of the naval patrols that the SDF and the Japan Coast Guard have been carrying out in the East China Sea to deter ship-to-ship trade involving DPRK vessels. Noting that Tokyo is hoping to divide the East China Sea into three zones so that the three partners can each monitor one zone, the daily said Seoul has been reluctant to coordinate with the SDF.

### **Senior DPRK official mentions willingness to communicate with U.S.**

All Monday dailies wrote from PyeongChang that according to the Blue House, Kim Yong Chol, who headed the North Korean delegation for the Olympics closing ceremony, met with President Moon on Sunday and told him that Pyongyang is open to dialogue with the United States. The alleged remark was reportedly made following the ROK leader’s statement calling for swift communications between Washington and Pyongyang to improve inter-Korean relations and defuse the tension on the Korean Peninsula. The dailies said attention will be focused on whether and how the Trump administration will respond to the Kim regime’s latest move.

Yomiuri wrote that the GOJ is alarmed by North Korea’s renewed peace overtures in the belief that Pyongyang is keen to drive a wedge into the trilateral coalition of Washington, Tokyo, and Seoul. Although the Abe administration is reportedly committed to enhancing coordination with Washington to step up pressure on the DPRK, it is concerned that the Trump administration may be tempted to enter dialogue with the Kim regime if it agrees to discontinue its nuclear and missile provocations. Sankei conjectured that Washington will probably try to hold “preliminary talks” with Pyongyang to see whether the defiant regime is willing to discuss and move ahead with denuclearization.

Nikkei said after the PyeongChang Olympics, the situation on the Korean Peninsula will largely be influenced by the situation surrounding the joint U.S.-ROK exercises that the two allies are aiming to resume after the Paralympics end in March. The paper wrote that another postponement or scaling

down of the drills would send the wrong signal to Pyongyang that the Moon and Trump administrations are ready to ease the pressure. Tokyo Shimbun speculated that Kim Yong Chol's message on dialogue was perhaps aimed at prompting South Korea and the U.S. not to conduct the joint drills.

### **White House releases press statement on North Korea's latest overture for talks**

NHK reported this morning that in relation to reports that the North Korean delegation to the PyeongChang Olympics closing ceremony told the ROK President Moon on Sunday that North Korea "has ample intentions of holding talks with the U.S.," the White House released a statement on the same day saying it would take a wait-and-see approach. According to the network, the statement said the Trump administration remains committed to achieving "the complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula" and that the maximum pressure campaign against North Korea must continue until it abandons its nuclear and missile programs. It also reportedly said that "there is a brighter path available for North Korea if it chooses denuclearization" and that the U.S. "will see if Pyongyang's message today, that it is willing to hold talks, represents the first step along the path to denuclearization."

### **Yachi meets with top Chinese official in charge of diplomacy**

All Saturday morning papers reported from Beijing that Secretary General Yachi of the National Security Secretariat and Chinese State Counsellor Yang held talks on Friday and agreed on making mutual efforts to further improve bilateral relations. The two officials apparently exchanged views on possible reciprocal visits by Prime Minister Abe and President Xi. They also discussed a proposed trilateral summit with South Korea in Tokyo sometime this year and the rising tensions on the Korean Peninsula.

## **SECURITY**

### **MSDF retrieves fragments of fuel tanks dropped into lake by U.S. fighter jet**

All national papers reported either in their Saturday evening or Sunday editions that MSDF personnel on Saturday recovered a large number of fragments of the fuel tanks that were jettisoned by a Misawa-based F-16 into a local lake near the installation. The retrieved items were handed over to the U.S. military based on the SOFA. Today's Sankei wrote that according to the U.S. military, the MSDF has retrieved some 75% of the fragments of the fuel tanks.

In a related development, Defense Minister Onodera reportedly met with Aomori Governor Mimura and other local officials on Saturday to discuss the incident. Onodera explained that the ministry will "respond in good faith" to a request filed by the local officials for financial compensation for the fishermen who were forced to suspend their operations at the lake after the tanks were dropped there last week.

According to Mainichi, Onodera told the press afterward that the U.S. military has informed his ministry that the mechanical problem that resulted in the dropping of the tanks was unique to the aircraft in question and is not common to other F-16s. The daily separately reported on Saturday that unspecified Misawa base officials met with local fishermen on Friday and apologized for “causing great inconvenience.”

### **Japan begins deploying F-35s**

Saturday morning's Asahi reported that the ASDF has begun deploying F-35As at its base in Misawa, Aomori Prefecture, noting that the Defense Ministry is hoping to strengthen Japan's aerial defense against China and Russia by capitalizing on the high performance of the stealth aircraft. The daily claimed, however, that the high cost of the aircraft is a major problem and attributed it to the yen's depreciation and the foreign military sales (FMS) arrangement with the U.S. government. The paper wrote that despite the high cost, the Abe administration is determined to procure more U.S. weapons systems through FMS based on the judgment that doing so is “extremely important to strengthen Japan's national defense.” An unnamed senior GOJ official also reportedly said that introducing the F-35s is in line with the Trump administration's “Buy American” campaign.

In a related development, Sunday's papers reported that a ceremony was convened on Saturday at the ASDF Misawa base to celebrate the arrival of the first F-35A in January. According to Asahi, GOJ and USG officials, including Defense Minister Onodera, attended the event. The minister said: “The F-35 deployment is very meaningful at a time when regional neighbors are modernizing and expanding their air forces rapidly.... The F-35As have high-level stealth technology and are the most advanced airplanes in the world. They can perform multiple functions, such as intelligence gathering, surveillance, and reconnaissance.” Sankei said a total of 42 F-35s will be introduced by FY2024, including nine in FY2018.

### **Nago mayor preparing to officially endorse Futenma relocation**

Saturday's Sankei reported that coordination is underway between the Defense Ministry and newly-elected Nago Mayor Toguchi for the municipal leader to announce his official stance in favor of the FRF initiative possibly in mid-March because the provision of additional central government subsidies is premised on his support of the plan. The two sides are carefully studying the wording of his endorsement given that the mayor was evasive about his position during the election campaign on account of widespread opposition among the local electorate.

### **U.S. military aircraft flies over elementary school near Futenma**

All Saturday morning papers reported that a U.S. Navy helicopter flew over an elementary school adjacent to MCAS Futenma on Friday afternoon apparently in violation of the U.S. military's pledge not to fly aircraft over nearby educational facilities “to the greatest extent possible.” In a released statement, the USFJ reportedly expressed regret for the incident, adding that an investigation was immediately launched to determine the facts and circumstances surrounding it. According to Asahi,

the U.S. side apologized to the GOJ by saying that since the aircraft is not based at Futenma Air Station, the crew did not know that it should not fly over the school. The Japanese side strongly called for the U.S. military not to fly over educational facilities.

## **ECONOMY**

### **President Trump suggests return to TPP if offered “much better deal”**

All Saturday evening papers took up President Trump’s remarks on Friday indicating that the U.S. might return to the TPP if it is offered a “much better deal.” During a joint press conference with Australian Prime Minister Turnbull at the White House, the President said: “There is a possibility we would go in, but they will be offering us a much better deal. I would certainly do that.... TPP was a very bad deal for the United States. It would have cost us tremendous amounts of jobs, would have been bad.”

In a related story, Saturday morning’s Asahi reported on Prime Minister Abe’s meeting with Chilean President Bachelet on Friday at the Kantei, during which the two officials confirmed mutual cooperation for making the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) signing ceremony to be held in Santiago on March 8 a success.

Meanwhile, Nikkei wrote on Saturday that the 11 TPP members might not be able to achieve their goal of effectuating the trade liberalization deal in 2019 given the anticipated difficulty of swiftly obtaining parliamentary approval in some nations, including Japan, Mexico, and Canada.

### **ROK interested in joining CPTPP**

Saturday’s Sankei front-paged the disclosure by several GOJ sources that the South Korean government has conveyed to the GOJ its interest in joining the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), speculating that Seoul is afraid that it will be left out of the emerging gigantic free trade zone in the Asia-Pacific region. The daily added that the ROK’s participation will perhaps become possible only after the envisaged effectuation of the agreement in 2019.

## **POLITICS**

### **Cabinet approval remains steady**

Monday’s Nikkei published the results of its latest public opinion poll that put support for the Abe cabinet at 56%, up 1 point from last month, and nonsupport at 36%, down 1 point. On Prime Minister Abe’s desire to alter Article 9 of the Constitution, about 47% were in favor of his idea of adding a provision to make the existence of the SDF explicit, while 33% were opposed.

Mainichi’s opinion survey put support for the Abe administration at 45%, up 1 point, and nonsupport at 32%, down 6 points. Half of the respondents said it is not necessary for the Diet to initiate a

constitutional amendment this year, up 4 points from the previous month. About 58% were “not persuaded” by the GOJ’s positive appraisal of the Trump administration’s Nuclear Posture Review, while 22% said otherwise.

## **SOCIETY**

### **American man confesses to abandoning body of Japanese woman in Osaka**

All papers reported today that an American man who was arrested by the Hyogo police last week for the confinement of a Japanese woman in her 20s in Osaka has confessed to his involvement in the abandonment of what is believed to be her severed head that the police discovered at a lodging facility in Nishinari Ward in Osaka on Saturday. The 26-year-old suspect was seen on security camera footage walking into an apartment in the lodging facility, which he had rented, with the missing woman on Feb. 16. Although the man was also seen leaving and entering the lodging facility several times carrying a large suitcase afterwards, the woman was never seen leaving it. The police, who have been investigating the disappearance of the woman from Hyogo, allegedly found the head at the rental apartment. Mainichi suspected that the American man may have abandoned the dismembered body parts of the victim in several locations.

---

