



Afternoon Alert - Thursday, December 22, 2016

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HEADLINES

Noon news

NHK and NTV led with reports that the Abe cabinet decided this morning on next year's budget, which amounts to a record 97.45 trillion yen. Fuji TV gave top play to a report that more than half of the Northern Training Area in Okinawa was returned to Japan today, saying that Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga and Ambassador Kennedy will attend a ceremony later today. TV Asahi led with a report that in 2016 the number of children born in Japan will drop below 1 million for the first time.

AMBASSADOR

- [Interview with Amb. Kennedy: NTA return “an important step”](#) (JJI)
- [Amb. Kennedy dedicated to promotion of Japan-U.S. reconciliation](#) (JJI)
- [Romance dance routine featuring Santa-clad Ambassador Kennedy an instant online hit](#) (The Japan Times)

SOCIAL MEDIA

Embassy Tokyo’s “koi dance” video goes viral

A video clip created by the U.S. Embassy Tokyo, in which Ambassador Kennedy in a Santa Claus outfit and embassy staff perform the "koi (falling in love)" dance routine aired in a popular Japanese TV comedy series, went viral after it was uploaded to YouTube on Wednesday. The video was viewed more than 2.6 million times as of 3 p.m. on Thursday. In addition to various social media, the

Embassy's video was also reported as top news on TBS's regular evening news program "News 23" on Wednesday, and Fuji TV's "Hodo Station" and "Tokudanel!" also reported on the video on Wednesday and today. BuzzFeed interviewed Embassy Tokyo Press Officer Marrie Schaefer, who was quoted as saying: "We thought it was a wonderful opportunity to participate in Japan's exciting pop culture, the 'koi dance.'" She also reportedly said it was Ambassador Kennedy's idea to wear the Santa Claus outfit, adding that the Ambassador has a good sense of humor and was enthusiastic about the video. She also reportedly said she hopes that people will get to know more about the Embassy through the video.

While there were some critical comments, such as about the timing of the video right after the Osprey incident in Okinawa, comments were overwhelmingly positive, including: "What is this...If I were to describe this video in one word, it's 'peace'." Another commented: "This is incredible. Looking at this video, you never think about war. We should really be nice to each other internationally. Peace is the best." Other messages included: "I really love America! We should continue to get along with America!"

SECURITY

SDF's new mission to protect U.S. vessels begins today

NTV reported that the GOJ convened a meeting of the National Security Council today and the council decided to start today the SDF mission to protect U.S. military vessels made possible by new security legislation. The network quoted DM Inada as telling reporters this morning: "The SDF will be allowed to protect [U.S. and other vessels] from aggression short of military attacks. This will enhance the deterrence and response capability of the U.S.-Japan alliance, further ensuring Japan's peace and security." DM Inada also stressed the significance of the start of the new mission by saying: "The ability to protect what we can protect is conducive to strengthening the U.S.-Japan alliance."

Okinawa papers say NTA return means heavier burden for some

This morning's two major Okinawa papers reported on the reversion of a large portion of the Northern Training Area today, noting that Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga, Ambassador Kennedy, and other officials will take part in a ceremony marking the return to be held in Nago City this evening. Both papers insisted that some local residents may be forced to take on an "additional burden" because the newly built helipads in the remaining portion of the exercise field will be used by Ospreys. A prefectural government official was quoted by the Okinawa Times as saying: "GOJ officials do not understand local residents' anxiety about Osprey flights." Explaining that CCS Suga had been a very strong proponent of returning the NTA by the end of the year, Ryukyu Shimpo wrote that he will "lose face" if Okinawa Governor Onaga and other local politicians boycott the ceremony as planned.

P-8 aircraft involved in “Class A” accident at Kadena AB

Thursday’s Ryukyu Shimpo and Okinawa Times both gave top play to a “Class A” accident involving a P-8 surveillance aircraft at Kadena AB on the morning of Dec. 19, emphasizing that the U.S. military initially called it a “minor mishap.” Local officials reacted strongly to the latest accident, suspecting that together with the recent “crash” of a Futenma-based Osprey and the “belly-landing” of another tilt-rotor plane, it may point to the collapse of the institutional discipline of the U.S. military. They were suspicious that U.S. military authorities may have tried to downplay the magnitude of the accident.

In related stories, the two dailies wrote that a rally will be held this evening in Nago city in protest of the recent Osprey crash, noting that some 2,000 people, including Governor Onaga, are expected to assemble to demand the withdrawal of the tilt-rotor aircraft from MCAS Futenma.

- [Japan adopts new guideline to allow SDF to protect U.S. warships](#) (Kyodo News)
- [Japan defense outlay keeps rising in FY 2017 amid N. Korea threats](#) (Kyodo News)
- [Japan Coast Guard to have record budget in 2017](#) (Jiji Press)
- [Philippines commissions second of 10 new patrol ships from Japan](#) (Kyodo News)
- [Interview with cyberdefense specialist Toshio Nawa](#) (Nikkei)
- [Editorial: Nat’l gov’t should settle base relocation issue sincerely with Okinawa](#) (The Mainichi)
- [Editorial: Does Gov. Onaga intend to continue all-out resistance to Futenma move?](#)

INTERNATIONAL

USG invites former service members, veterans to Pearl Harbor event

NHK reported at noon that NSC Senior Director for Asian Affairs Krittenbrink held a press conference on Wednesday in Washington, during which he announced that the USG has invited former service members who were at Pearl Harbor when it was attacked and veterans of the war in the Pacific to the venue where PM Abe and President Obama will give remarks after laying flowers at the Arizona Memorial on Dec. 27. Krittenbrink reportedly expressed hope that the two leaders will be able to interact with the survivors. He was also quoted as saying: "This event is both a demonstration of the

strength of our alliance and also a powerful demonstration of how two countries can overcome a very painful history to become the closest of allies and friends."

- [Obama, Abe to stress “power of reconciliation” in Pearl Harbor remarks](#) (Kyodo News)
- [Abe to visit cemeteries for Japanese, U.S. soldiers in Hawaii](#) (Mainichi)
- [Commentary: Maintenance of Japan-U.S. alliance is still best](#) (Yomiuri)
- [Japan pledges \\$500 mil. in fresh aid for refugees](#) (Kyodo News)
- [Japan pays UNESCO dues frozen over Nanjing Massacre listing](#) (Kyodo News)
- [Japan foreign minister to visit France, Czech, Ireland from Jan. 5](#) (Kyodo News)
- [Gov’t-private sector panel affirms cooperation in strengthening Japan-Russia relations](#) (Yomiuri)
- [Abe, incoming U.N. chief discuss cooperation on N. Korea](#) (Kyodo News)
- [Indonesia soliciting Japan’s support for a railway project](#) (Yomiuri)
- [Japan, Indonesia to set up maritime forum](#) (Yomiuri)

OPINION POLLS

- [Japan, U.S. differ in perception of China and Russia, Yomiuri-Gallup poll](#) (Yomiuri)
- [60% in Japan say host nation support should be “maintained at current level,” Yomiuri-Gallup poll](#) (Yomiuri)
- [70% of Japanese, 50% of Americans say nuclear weapons “not necessary” for deterrence, Yomiuri-Gallup poll](#) (Yomiuri)

POLITICS

- [Prime minister’s schedule on Dec. 21](#) (Nikkei)
- [Aso, Kishida meet on possible merger of LDP factions](#) (Yomiuri)
- [Rift opening between LDP and Komeito](#) (Nikkei)

(The Japan News)

ECONOMY

- [Cabinet approves record-high 97.45 tril. yen budget plan for FY 2017](#) (Kyodo News)
- [CEFP to oversee drug pricing reform](#) (Nikkei)

EDUCATION

- [Japan panel recommends English as regular primary school subject](#) (Jiji Press)

SOCIETY

- [Japanese births set to drop below 1m in 2016](#) (Nikkei Asian Review)
- [Japan's government aims to help local airports attract foreign visitors](#) (The Japan Times)
- [National Police Agency plans to carry out a 'JK biz' probe in bid to end exploitation of teenage girls](#) (The Japan Times)