



Afternoon Alert - Monday, March 6, 2017

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## HEADLINES

### Noon news

NHK and all commercial networks led with reports that North Korea launched four ballistic missiles toward the Sea of Japan this morning, three of which landed within Japan's exclusive economic zone (EEZ). According to the networks, the South Korean military said it is unlikely that the missiles were ICBMs.

## INTERNATIONAL

### Secretary Tillerson, FM Kishida speak by phone on North Korea

NHK reported online that Foreign Minister Kishida held separate phone conversations with Secretary of State Tillerson and ROK Foreign Minister Yun this morning in response to North Korea's launch of four ballistic missiles this morning. Kishida told reporters afterward that he expressed Japan's position that it can't approve of the missile launch that was a clear provocation to the region and the international community. Kishida added that he confirmed with his U.S. and ROK counterparts that the three nations will express their firm positions on the DPRK and strongly demand Pyongyang not conduct further provocations but to abide by UNSC resolutions. Kishida also said that he agreed with Secretary Tillerson to seek a strong UNSC message condemning Pyongyang.

In its noon news, NHK reported that North Korea fired four ballistic missiles at around 7:34 a.m. today, saying that three of them landed within Japan's exclusive economic zone (EEZ). Prime Minister Abe told an Upper House Budget Committee session this morning that the launch, which clearly shows that the level of threat posed by North Korea has entered a new stage, is a serious

provocation to Japan's security. The premier added that the launch, which clearly violated UNSC resolutions, was totally unacceptable and that Japan has lodged a strong protest with Pyongyang.

According to the Ministry of Defense, the missiles, which were fired from the western city of Tongchang-ri, flew some 1,000 km at an altitude of about 270 km and fell into waters about 300 to 350 km west of the Oga Peninsula in Akita Prefecture about 10 minutes after they were launched. There have been no reports of damage to ships or aircraft in the area.

A report from Washington said that the Trump administration apparently takes North Korea's escalating provocations seriously. The network said that Secretary of State Tillerson will probably discuss with his counterparts in Japan, South Korea, and China how to deal with Pyongyang during his envisaged visits to these three nations later this month.

The network also reported that Secretary General Yachi of the National Security Secretariat spoke by phone with National Security Advisor McMaster today and agreed that the U.S. and Japan will continue their close cooperation against provocations by North Korea. According to NHK, McMaster told Yachi that President Trump has expressed his clear support for Prime Minister Abe's position on North Korea.

In addition, MOFA Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau Director General Kanasugi spoke by phone with Special Representative for North Korea Policy Joseph Yun this morning and agreed that they will closely coordinate bilaterally as well as multilaterally with South Korea and the United Nations to urge North Korea not to conduct any further provocations.

Takushoku University Professor Hideshi Takesada told the network that North Korea probably fired the missiles at this juncture out of strong concern over the joint military exercise between the U.S. and the ROK that began on March 1 and in an effort to deflect international criticism from Pyongyang's alleged involvement in the murder of Kim Jong Nam.

- [Top US diplomat to visit Japan this month](#) (Nikkei Asian Review)
- [FM Kishida says Secretary Tillerson's visit signifies importance of Japan-U.S. alliance](#) (Jiji)
- [Asia remains major focus of US diplomacy](#) (Nikkei Asian Review)
- [New Tokyo Conference urges G7 leaders to firmly oppose protectionism](#) (Mainichi)
- [Editorial: North Korea's chemical weapons a cause for world to be vigilant](#) (The Japan News)

## POLITICS

### **[Abe calls for better explanations on Moritomo Gakuen scandal](#)**

NHK took up remarks at the Diet this morning by Prime Minister Abe, who acknowledged that insufficient explanations by government officials have been responsible for growing public distrust over the administration's handling of the Moritomo Gakuen scandal centering on the hefty discount that the school operator obtained when purchasing state-owned land. While categorically dismissing speculation that he or his wife was involved in the dubious land transaction, the premier said it is only natural for the public to become distrustful of the administration's response to the controversy since the explanations of the business deal that government officials have provided thus far have been unconvincing. He reiterated that he will step down if it is shown that he or his wife was involved in the land deal.

### **[UH members discuss FY2017 budget, Moritomo Gakuen scandal, conspiracy bill](#)**

NHK's "Nichiyō Toron" Sunday debate show aired a discussion by House of Councillors members representing ruling and opposition parties. The Democratic Party panelist criticized the 2017 GOJ budget for being insufficient to support the young generation, and the discussants from the Japanese Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party insisted that the defense budget should be reduced to increase spending for social security. The lawmakers also discussed the recent scandal involving Moritomo Gakuen, an Osaka-based school operator that purchased land from the government at a fraction of its appraisal price. While the opposition bloc panelists stressed the need to summon school and other officials to testify at the chamber as sworn witnesses to investigate whether the purchase was appropriate, the ruling officials were lukewarm to the idea. The panelists also discussed the pros and cons of the GOJ-sponsored bill to criminalize conspiracy.

- **[Prime minister's schedule on March 5](#)** (Nikkei)
- **[Prime minister's schedule on March 4](#)** (Nikkei)
- **[Prime minister's schedule on March 3](#)** (Nikkei)
- **[Economy holds key to longevity of Abe administration](#)** (Mainichi)
- **[Diplomacy partly behind Abe's political strength](#)** (Nikkei)
- **[Moritomo Gakuen, Governor Koike, consumption tax form obstacles to Abe's 3rd term as LDP president](#)** (Yomiuri)
- **[Koizumi Jr. says Moritomo scandal cannot be dismissed as personal issue](#)** (Nikkei)

- [Opposition calls on LDP to summon school operator as scandal widens](#) (Kyodo News)
- [Editorial: Widening scandal casts doubt on school operator's qualifications](#) (The Mainichi)

## SECURITY

### [Governor, JCP leader confirm opposition to Henoko plan](#)

Okinawa Times wrote that Japanese Communist Party (JCP) Chairman Shii held a meeting with Governor Onaga at the governor's office on Sunday, saying that the two officials agreed to continue their efforts to prevent the construction of a new base at Henoko. Shii expressed his resolve to bring the campaign against the Henoko plan to the entire nation. He told reporters afterward that as part of such efforts, his party will seek as many as 10,000,000 signatures on a petition demanding the Henoko plan be abandoned.

### [Kadena sergeant arrested for allegedly failing to pay taxi fare](#)

Okinawa Times wrote that the Okinawa police arrested on Sunday a technical sergeant belonging to the Kadena AB on suspicion of fraud. The sergeant allegedly refused to pay 3,000 yen to the driver of a taxi she took from Chatan to Kadena at around 2:45 a.m. on Sunday. Although the driver took the service member to the Kadena police department, she fled from there. The police arrested her on a residential street some 300 meters from the police station. The service member has reportedly denied the charge by saying that she did not ride in the taxi.

- [Cartoon: Defense budget](#) (Asahi)

## ECONOMY

- [Yamato Holdings to retroactively pay unpaid overtime wages](#) (Kyodo News)
- [Bureaucrat held for allegedly taking bribe for Fukushima cleanup work](#) (The Mainichi)
- [For Japan, there's no escaping Fukushima Daiichi's shadow](#) (Nikkei Asian Review)

## SCIENCE

- [Toyota struts out new test vehicle for self-driving tech](#) (Nikkei Asian Review)
- [Fujitsu envisions AI that thinks outside the box](#) (Nikkei Asian Review)

- [Insights into the world/gov't reform key to 'super smart society'](#) (The Japan News)

### **Danger of undertow generated by tsunami**

Sunday's "NHK Special" reported that although almost six years have passed since the March 11 disaster, 2,556 people remain missing. The program reported on the danger of the undertow generated by tsunami, saying that this is believed to be the major reason why many people are still unaccounted for. The program reported on how undertow occurs and how it can drag people and debris far into the ocean, stressing the need to take countermeasures. The program said some families are still searching for their loved ones.

## **OPINION POLLS**

### **Public approval for Abe drops to 61%**

TBS reported at noon on the results of its opinion poll conducted over the weekend. Public approval for the Abe cabinet fell 4.4 points from last month to 61.0%, while nonsupport rose 3.9 points to 37.3%. In relation to the issue of the sale of state-owned land to Moritomo Gakuen at a steep discount, 78% of respondents said it was inappropriate for Prime Minister Abe's wife Akie to become an honorary principal of Moritomo Gakuen's elementary school, while 11% said it was appropriate.

- [Poll shows Abe is the top favorite to head the next administration](#) (Nikkei)

## **EDUCATION**

- [Tokyo student Shantanu Edgaonkar crowned winner of eighth Japan Times Bee](#) (The Japan Times)