



Morning Alert - Tuesday, August 23, 2016

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK gave top play to a report that after bringing heavy rain to the Kanto region, Typhoon Mindulle made landfall on Hokkaido. Most commercial networks also led with reports on the damage caused by the typhoon in the Kanto region. TV Asahi reported on the closing ceremony of the Rio Olympics, at which Tokyo Governor Koike and PM Abe promoted the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. Reports on property damage caused by Typhoon Mindulle and the closing ceremony of the Rio Olympics also dominated newspaper headlines.

INTERNATIONAL

Japan, China, ROK to hold trilateral foreign ministerial tomorrow

All papers reported on the MOFA announcement yesterday that Chinese Foreign Minister Wang and his South Korean counterpart Yun will visit Tokyo today for trilateral talks with FM Kishida on Wednesday, noting that they will probably discuss such issues as North Korea, a trilateral FTA, and international terrorism. Attention will be focused on whether the three top diplomats will be able to arrange a trilateral summit for the top leaders in Japan this year. Kishida will host a dinner for his two counterparts tonight. He is also expected to hold individual meetings with Wang and Yun to exchange views on China's escalated patrol operations near the Senkakus and the usage of Japan's 1 billion yen contribution to the comfort women foundation.

The dailies said China became less reluctant to hold a trilateral session at the last minute after PM Abe and other key cabinet ministers decided not to visit Yasukuni Shrine on Aug. 15. According to the papers, China may be anxious to enlist cooperation from its immediate neighbors ahead of the

G-20 summit scheduled for early September in Hangzhou. While projecting that FM Kishida will try to arrange a summit between Abe and Xi on the margins of the G20 conference, the papers said China may not endorse the idea readily.

In a related piece, Mainichi quoted a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson as saying on Monday that although FM Wang will travel to Tokyo to take part in the trilateral meeting, it should not be treated as a visit to Japan.

Japan, South Korea to convene treasury dialogue this weekend

Asahi wrote that Finance Minister Aso plans to visit Seoul to conduct treasury dialogue with his ROK counterpart on Saturday, noting that the Japanese government is hopeful that Seoul will agree to reinstate a bilateral currency swap accord designed to strengthen safeguards against financial market turbulence. It has become possible to hold the first treasury dialogue in 18 months on account of growing rapprochement between Tokyo and Seoul following the comfort women pact last December.

Prime minister's wife visits Pearl Harbor

Most papers reported that Japanese First Lady Akie Abe disclosed on her Facebook account yesterday that she offered flowers and prayers at the USS Arizona Memorial at Pearl Harbor. She reportedly visited Hawaii to take part in an international conference on the marine environment. Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga declined to comment on the matter on Monday because Mrs. Abe visited Hawaii in her personal capacity, adding that there is no plan for PM Abe to travel to Hawaii.

Iran denies detaining Japanese envoy

Tokyo Shimbun printed a Kyodo piece from Tehran saying that an Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman on Monday dismissed the GOJ's allegation that despite his diplomatic immunity, Japanese Ambassador Kobayashi was briefly detained and questioned by local security authorities in late April when he attended a party sponsored by an Iranian contact. The Iranian official said "A misunderstanding arose because the ambassador was not carrying his diplomatic ID. The security officials thus questioned him for a while."

Defense Minister Inada meets with top Thai military official

Sankei took up yesterday's meeting between Defense Minister Inada and visiting Thai Chief of Defense Forces Sommai Kaotira, during which they discussed the rising tension in the South China Sea. In response to the Japanese official's remarks that it is important for ASEAN to become united and emphasize the need to settle territorial disputes based on international law, the Thai commander simply stated that they should be resolved through dialogue.

SECURITY

F-35 deployment to increase security burden on Iwakuni residents

Tokyo Shimbun gave top coverage to a meeting yesterday between two senior MOD officials and Iwakuni Mayor Fukuda, during which the municipal leader was informed of the U.S. military's plan to deploy a fleet of 16 F-35s at MCAS Iwakuni starting in January 2017. Japan will become the only country other than the U.S. to host the state-of-the-art stealth fighters, which will replace the present squadrons of FA-18s and AV-8s.

The MOD officials stressed that the F-35 deployment is not part of U.S. force realignment since it is meant to update the existing fleets. As Iwakuni is also expected to accommodate almost 60 carrier-borne aircraft from NAF Atsugi, local residents are concerned that they will have to bear a greater security burden. The daily said the regional tension may mount because China and North Korea will react strongly to the F-35 deployment.

In a related development, the paper also wrote that construction work began yesterday on the U.S. military's Iejima Auxiliary Airfield in Okinawa to expand landing zones for carrier-borne airplanes, saying that local residents are afraid that the base will be used by the Iwakuni-based F-35s.

Police detain journalists covering Northern Training Area protest

Tokyo Shimbun carried a prominent inside-page story noting that an Okinawa Times reporter and a Ryukyu Shimpo reporter were briefly detained by police when they covered demonstrations staged by local activists protesting against helipad construction at the Northern Training Area last Saturday. The Okinawa Police said they were removed from the scene to ensure security and the police were not able to identify them as journalists. The Ryukyu Shimpo reporter explained that this was the first time she had been removed by police when covering protests and that riot policemen from Tokyo apparently played a key role in the crackdown on demonstrators.

POLITICS

Kantei, LDP at odds over when to convene autumn Diet session

Sankei wrote that the Kantei and the ruling LDP are engaged in a "tug of war" over when to convene the extraordinary Diet session. The Kantei is insisting on Sept. 13 with the goal of enacting the FY2016 supplementary budget and ensuring parliamentary approval of TPP legislation at an early date. The LDP leadership led by Secretary General Nikai, on the other hand, has proposed that the session be started on Sept. 26 out of consideration for the DP presidential election to be held on Sept. 15 so as to allow the new opposition leader to better prepare for Diet debates. Nikai is hoping to take a conciliatory line toward the largest opposition party in the belief that obtaining cooperation from the DP will be essential to pass key legislation. The paper added that there may be little difference between the two options in terms of holding substantive parliamentary discussions because PM Abe plans to travel to New York and Cuba in late September.



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