



Morning Alert - Friday, September 30, 2016

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK, NTV, and Fuji TV gave top play to reports on an accident in which a commuter train crashed into Hoboken Terminal in New Jersey on Thursday morning, killing one person and injuring 114 others, including Japanese nationals. Other networks continued to carry follow-up reports on problems at the new fish market in Toyosu, saying that high levels of toxic substances were found in groundwater samples.

Main front-page items in national papers include the detection of toxic substances in groundwater samples at Toyosu fish market; a report prepared by a Tokyo metropolitan government taskforce calling for a drastic review of massive spending planned for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics; and the results of a national scholastic aptitude test administered by the Education Ministry pointing to improved performance by students in some prefectures.

POLITICS

Lower House likely to be dissolved early next year for snap election

Yomiuri wrote that speculation is rife within the ruling coalition that Prime Minister Abe will dissolve the House of Representatives in early January for a snap election by capitalizing on his planned summit with Russian President Putin in December and the apparent failure on the part of the opposition camp to fully prepare for a general election. The fact that the ruling LDP, which usually holds its annual convention in January, has decided to hold the convention in March next year, has prompted many LDP legislators to wonder if the party leadership is inclined to go along with Abe's possible plan to hold a general election around February. Secretary General Nikai on Thursday urged his faction members to be constantly prepared for a snap election. However, some party

politicians are cautious about the possible political gambit given that there is no guarantee that Putin will make concessions on the Northern Territories, which the Abe may be hoping to highlight during an election campaign.

LDP panel member resigns over remark calling for railroading TPP bills

All papers reported that LDP Diet member Teru Fukui on Thursday stepped down from the Lower House special panel on the TPP to take responsibility for a remark he made to his party colleagues, in which he reportedly said: "I will do my utmost to fulfill former Agriculture Minister Nishikawa's wishes by ramming the TPP legislation through the current Diet session." The politician later clarified his statement by saying that he was referring to the prime minister's strong desire to put the bills to a vote in the ongoing Diet term. Diet debate on the bill is bound to be prolonged because the opposition bloc has reacted sharply to the controversial remark.

In a related development, Nikkei and Mainichi reported on a speech delivered yesterday by the GOJ's TPP chief negotiator Oe, who expressed hope for the enactment of the TPP legislation in the current Diet session "no matter what." He reportedly wants the Lower House to pass the bills before the U.S. presidential election on Nov. 8, adding that Tokyo's failure to enact them this year would probably prompt other TPP member states to delay their parliamentary approval. Oe warned that delayed Diet deliberations could mislead the U.S. by giving it false expectations that Tokyo might be open to renegotiation.

Meanwhile, Nikkei front-paged remarks made in Tokyo on Thursday by visiting Singaporean PM Lee, in which he strongly urged Japan and the United States to ratify the regional free trade pact at an early date. He also underscored that the TPP should be open to new members, including China.

Politicians confirm intention to resume Diet debate on casino bill

Asahi reported that a suprapartisan parliamentary group aimed at legalizing gambling held a meeting yesterday and agreed to seek the resumption in early November or later of deliberations at the Diet of its legislation to allow casinos in Japan. The daily projected, however, that the swift resumption of deliberations is unlikely due to strong opposition from Komeito, with its leader Chief Representative Yamaguchi telling the press on Thursday: "There is no need to think about the bill since it hasn't been discussed within our party at all."

INTERNATIONAL

Congress adopts motion calling for probe into suspected abduction of American by DPRK

Sankei front-paged the unanimous adoption on Wednesday by the U.S. House of Representatives of a resolution urging the executive branch to launch an investigation into the possible abduction of American David Sneddon by North Korean agents while he was travelling in Yunnan Province China

in August 2004. While claiming that the State Department has been cautious about investigating the case in the absence of clear evidence of kidnapping, the article said the congressional action will force the State Department, the CIA, and other USG entities to launch investigations. As Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga on Thursday welcomed the adoption of the resolution by the U.S. legislature, the daily expressed strong hope for closer coordination between Tokyo and Washington to resolve the abduction of Japanese nationals by North Korea. The ruling LDP is reportedly considering inviting Congressman Chris Stewart, who sponsored the motion, to Japan so as to deepen parliamentary cooperation for addressing North Korea's wrongdoings.

U.S. investigating Chinese firms in connection with trade with North Korea

Asahi took up congressional remarks on Wednesday by State Department's Coordinator for Sanctions Policy Daniel Fried, who suggested that the U.S. is investigating several Chinese companies on suspicion of violating the sanctions that the USG has imposed unilaterally on North Korea by saying: "We are actively looking at a number of targets." On the recent financial sanctions imposed on a Chinese firm for breaching UN punitive measures, the USG official said: "Clearly our actions indicate that we are willing to sanction Chinese companies who are evading U.S. and U.N. sanctions."

South Korea urges Japan to take "additional steps" to console comfort women

Tokyo Shimbun wrote from Seoul on press remarks on Thursday by a South Korean Foreign Ministry spokesperson, who called for Japan to take additional measures to "heal the suffering" of the former women. By mentioning additional steps, the ROK official was apparently calling for letters of apology from PM Abe, which were not mentioned in the bilateral comfort women accord reached late last year. The paper added that some Japanese officials are displeased with what they call Seoul's attempt to "move the goal posts."

China faults Japan for delayed launch of military communication mechanism

Asahi took up a press conference on Thursday by a Chinese Defense Ministry spokesperson, who commented on the delayed launch of a communication mechanism with Japan intended to head off inadvertent developments at sea and in the air by saying: "The Japanese side has purposely fabricated an obstacle by taking up the issue of the mechanism's geographical scope. We would like to establish it by urging the Japanese side to remove the impediments."

SECURITY

Police bind and remove protestors from helipad construction site in Okinawa

Tokyo Shimbun wrote that the Okinawa police used ropes to bind several protestors and remove them from the helipad construction site in the Northern Training Area on Wednesday. The police took the unusual action because some 30 demonstrators entered the off-limits area and refused to leave. The base opponents reacted strongly by saying that the police treated them "like cargo."

