



Morning Alert - Friday, October 21, 2016

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK gave top play to the third presidential debate between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump on Wednesday in Las Vegas, saying that there is growing criticism of Trump over refusing to say whether he will accept the result of the presidential election if he loses. TBS, Fuji TV, and TV Asahi led with reports on the ongoing efforts by the Tokyo government to select a rowing/canoe sprint facility for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics. NTV led with a report that PM Abe bestowed the People's Honor Award on wrestler Kaori Icho on Thursday.

Wednesday's U.S. presidential debate and Philippine President Duterte's summit with Chinese President Xi in Beijing were two of the front-page items in the national papers.

INTERNATIONAL

Japan perplexed by rapprochement between Manila, Beijing

Asahi reported on yesterday's China-Philippine summit, during which the two leaders agreed to reopen dialogue on the bilateral South China Sea territorial dispute by shelving the Permanent Court of Arbitration's ruling dismissing Beijing's territorial claims to most of the South China Sea, noting that the GOJ is puzzled by Manila's growing overtures to Beijing made ahead of the Philippine leader's trip to Japan next week. Although Prime Minister Abe is likely to underscore the importance of respecting the PCA decision in his meeting with Duterte out of deference to the U.S., it is still unknown whether Abe will take up the top Philippine official's draconian war on drugs. A GOJ source said: "Ideally, Japan should serve as a middleman between Washington and Manila. But a direct message such as 'Be friendly toward the U.S.' may backfire."

Nikkei ran a similar story, stating that the GOJ is alarmed by China-Philippine reconciliation out of concern that Manila's soft line may embolden China to step up the militarization of the South China Sea and its aggressive approach toward the Senkaku dispute with Japan. Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga told the press yesterday: "The South China Sea is an extremely important issue that has a direct bearing on regional peace and prosperity. It is a matter of mutual concern for the international community, including Japan. We would like to deal with the issue in close coordination with the Philippines and others."

Local academics to put together policy recommendation for new U.S. administration

Nikkei wrote that a group of Japanese opinion leaders led by Tokyo University political scientist Akihiko Tanaka plan to draw up a policy package for the next U.S. administration in which they will urge Washington to continue the Obama administration's rebalance to Asia initiative in the belief that America appears to be increasingly inward looking. Many of the panel members have participated in Mt. Fuji Dialogue, a forum to discuss the current and future relationship of Japan and the United States.

SECURITY

Policemen's abusive remarks continue to make waves

Most papers continued to cover the repercussions caused by derogatory epithets hurled at Okinawa base opponents by riot policemen from Osaka, highlighting Osaka Governor Matsui's comments apparently condoning the use of the offensive language and a "profound apology" offered to Governor Onaga by the chief of the Okinawa prefectural police, who promised that he will conduct a thorough review of ethical education for police officers. Asahi wondered if the offensive statements may reflect deep-rooted prejudice held against Okinawa by some people in the mainland. On the other hand, a Sankei reporter, who covered protests at the Northern Training Area recently, wrote that some demonstrators hurled equally offensive and even threatening language toward riot policemen at the site.

Trilateral naval exercise to be held tomorrow

Asahi wrote that a tripartite naval drill among the U.S., Japan, and South Korea will be held on Saturday in international waters off Cheju Island with the goal of highlighting defense cooperation among the three partners to deal with North Korea's escalated provocations.

MOF panel urges realignment of defense industry

Yomiuri reported that a Finance Ministry panel on Thursday called for the Defense Ministry to exercise leadership so as to reorganize the nation's defense industry in order to slash defense equipment procurement costs in the belief that the existence of a multiple number of defense contractors is responsible for the steady rise in procurement costs and dwindling international

competitiveness of domestic defense technology. MOF is expected to ask MOD to put together a concrete plan on industry restructuring, such as the integration of corresponding business sections among rival contractors.

POLITICS

Rift deepening over TPP legislation

All papers wrote that the largest opposition Democratic Party and the second-largest Japanese Communist Party are in no mood to relax their confrontational position toward the ruling coalition over the TPP legislation based on the judgment that the Abe administration may attempt to railroad the bills at the special Lower House committee, as hinted by Agriculture Minister Yamamoto. The two parties plan to boycott today's session in order to press the ruling coalition to abandon its goal of passing the legislation in the lower chamber this month.

Largest labor union distrustful of DP

Yomiuri reported on the growing schism between the DP and the Japanese Trade Union Confederation (Rengo), its biggest supporter, over the opposition party's election coordination with the JCP. Rengo officials are extremely displeased with DP President Renho having campaigned in Sunday's Niigata gubernatorial election for Ryuichi Yoneyama, who defeated the LDP-backed rival who was also supported by the trade union. Rengo leaders are upset because the DP leadership supported the winner only at the last minute even though it was initially hesitant to do so in part because the candidate was also backed by the JCP. Rengo has been critical of the largest opposition party's policy of deepening electoral cooperation with the communists.

In related stories, Asahi and Sankei wrote that the DP is running into difficulties formulating its stance on nuclear energy, as Rengo-backed lawmakers are opposed to the leadership's apparent moves to embrace an "exit from atomic energy." Given that an anti-nuclear energy candidate won in the Niigata gubernatorial race by a wide margin, many senior DP officials, including President Renho, have come to the conclusion that the party may be able to win more support if it trumpets an anti-nuclear stance. However, DP politicians backed by utility unions cannot accept abandoning nuclear energy.

