



Morning Alert - Monday, October 31, 2016

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK gave top play to a report on a political scandal involving South Korean President Park, who reportedly showed classified documents to her long-time acquaintance. NTV led with a report that Japanese figure skater Yuzuru Hanyu finished second at Skate Canada on Saturday. TBS and TV Asahi gave top play to reports that Tokyo Governor Koike's new political study group opened on Sunday. Fuji TV reported on Halloween events in Tokyo.

Major front-page items in national papers included the launch of Tokyo Governor Koike's new political study group; the return of Japanese astronaut Takuya Onishi from spending 115 days on the International Space Station; a political scandal engulfing South Korean President Park; and a strong earthquake in central Italy on Sunday.

INTERNATIONAL

Ambassador Kennedy comments on DPRK denuclearization

Saturday morning's Asahi gave inside-page play to recent remarks made to the daily by Ambassador Kennedy, who expressed resolve to seek at the UN Security Council a strong sanctions resolution against North Korea in coordination with Japan. She was quoted as saying: "The denuclearization of North Korea is one of the top priorities of U.S. foreign policy.... We must clearly demonstrate to North Korea that there are consequences for its actions that threaten regional peace and stability." She reiterated the U.S. commitment to defending Japan and South Korea by saying:

President Obama has affirmed to Prime Minister Abe and President Park the U.S.'s unshakable commitment to defend its allies and provide deterrence with the full range of U.S. defense capabilities.”

GOJ strongly criticized for voting against nuclear arms ban resolution

All Saturday morning papers reported that non-nuclear powers, Japanese and foreign NGOs, and hibakusha groups strongly criticized the Japanese government for voting against a resolution seeking the conclusion of a treaty to ban the use of nuclear arms at a UN committee on Thursday. The Japan Confederation of A- and H-Bomb Sufferers Organizations sent a letter of protest to the GOJ saying that the Japanese vote “trampled on the wishes of hibakusha.” Mainichi took up the reactions of two people who exchanged greetings with President Obama at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park in late May. They both expressed distrust of the USG and the GOJ. Opposition parties also criticized the GOJ, with JCP Chairman Shii saying on Twitter that it is “pathetic for Japan to succumb to U.S. pressure.”

Prime Minister Abe said at the Diet on Friday that “it was not a decision that was made readily,” justifying the GOJ’s vote against the motion. Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga underscored that the resolution will “further deepen the schism between nuclear powers and nonnuclear powers.” Yomiuri said Japan is likely to take part in a conference on the proposed treaty that will be held in New York in March even though the nuclear powers will not attend. Foreign Minister Kishida said Japan will make its own case on banning nuclear weapons as the only nation to have experienced atomic bombing.

Japan worried about scandal engulfing ROK leader

Sunday’s Mainichi reported that the GOJ is deeply concerned about a plunge in public support for South Korean President Park in view of a major scandal, in which she allegedly leaked classified materials to her “personal advisor.” The GOJ is worried that if President Park becomes a “lame duck” as a result of the scandal, the growing mood for bilateral reconciliation following last year’s bilateral comfort women accord will suffer a major setback. An unnamed MOFA official stated: “Seoul will probably implement the pact as long as Ms. Park is in office. We hope she will be able to weather the scandal.”

ROK says GSOMIA with Japan to be concluded soon

Saturday morning’s Yomiuri took up a report sent to the South Korean parliament by the ROK Defense Ministry, in which it projected that negotiations with Japan for concluding a bilateral general security of military information agreement (GSOMIA) will not take very long. The ROK defense minister separately told the parliament that South Korea would benefit greatly from Japan’s intelligence assets.

In a related story, Monday's Sankei wrote that in entering GSOMIA negotiations with Seoul probably in November, the GOJ is set to call for the modification of a draft pact that was very close to being concluded in June 2012 so that Japan's secret protection law, which took effect in December last year, can be reflected in the formal agreement. The word "military" might also be removed from the title of the pact out of deference to public opposition in South Korea to concluding a military agreement with Japan.

Putin rejects timeframe for peace treaty talks with Japan

On Russian President Putin's comment on Thursday expressing opposition to establishing a timeframe for the signing of a peace treaty with Japan, Saturday morning's Yomiuri and Nikkei speculated that the Russian leader made the remark to lower expectations in Japan for major progress on the bilateral Northern Territories dispute when he visits Yamaguchi Prefecture in December. The papers also conjectured that the comment was intended to prompt PM Abe to take a more independent line from the U.S., with Yomiuri adding that Putin may cancel the December trip at the last minute in response to domestic opposition to Russian concessions on the territorial dispute.

Mainichi wrote that a rift appears to be emerging between Tokyo and Moscow over the goals for Putin's upcoming trip to Japan. The GOJ is concerned that Russia may try to elicit economic support without offering anything in return on the territorial front. While noting that calls are mounting within the LDP for PM Abe to take a harder line by hinting at the cancellation of economic assistance unless Russia makes concessions, the daily said some Japanese firms are cautious about extending economic support to Russia since increased business with Russia may have adverse effects on trade with the U.S.

Japan mulls removing Northern Territories from scope of U.S.-Japan Security Treaty

Kyodo reported on Saturday on the disclosure by several sources involved in Russia-Japan relations that the GOJ is considering excluding the Northern Territories from the scope of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty if they are returned to Japanese administration. Tokyo believes that this idea would make it easier for Moscow to make concessions on the bilateral territorial dispute given that Moscow is extremely wary of U.S. military operations in and around Japan. The article speculated that Washington might not be pleased with the proposal.

In a related column, Nikkei senior writer Akita wrote on Sunday that European countries are taking a very critical attitude toward PM Abe's overtures toward President Putin at a time when their distrust of Moscow has deepened over the situations in Ukraine, Syria, and Iraq. Projecting that the U.S. approach toward Russia may become even more hardline if Hillary Clinton is elected president, the columnist warned the Abe administration against seeking swift rapprochement with Moscow at the expense of coordination with the U.S. and Europe.

Japan, DPRK held secret talks

Monday's Asahi reported that according to a source involved in Japan-DPRK relations, Japanese and North Korean diplomats apparently held secret talks either in Macau or Hong Kong in early October, noting that three out of the four Japanese participants attended a similar meeting held in Dalian, China, in early September. The Japanese side pressed the DPRK participants to resume investigations into the fate of the abductees and other "missing" Japanese nationals based on the 2014 Stockholm accord.

UN rapporteur on DPRK to visit Japan

Saturday morning's Sankei wrote that UN rapporteur on North Korean human rights issues Quintana will visit Japan in November to meet with GOJ officials and the families of the Japanese abductees, including the parents of Megumi Yokota.

Abe to visit Argentina next month

Sunday's Nikkei claimed that PM Abe is considering visiting Argentina in late November after he attends the APEC leaders' meeting to be held in Lima, Peru, on Nov. 19-20, in order to counter China's growing diplomatic presence in Latin America. Abe hopes to hold a summit with President Macri to discuss expansion of bilateral trade and investment.

SECURITY

Ambassador Kennedy pledges efforts to mitigate military footprint in Okinawa

In an interview with Asahi that was published on Saturday, Ambassador Kennedy explained U.S. efforts to reduce the base burden on Okinawa. While voicing U.S. gratitude to Okinawa for hosting U.S. bases, the Ambassador stressed that FRF construction off Camp Schwab is meant to reduce the burden on the island prefecture. "We would like to move forward. That is why we are working closely with the Japanese government to return nearly 9,000 acres of land in the Northern Training Area. This will reduce U.S. military facilities by 20%," she said.

Okinawa assembly adopts resolution in protest of abusive remarks made by police

Most Saturday morning papers reported that the Okinawa prefectural assembly passed a motion on Friday addressed to the National Policy Agency (NPA) commissioner general protesting the recent offensive remarks directed toward base opponents by riot police at the Northern Training Area. LDP members voted against it.

In a related development, the NPA issued instructions on Friday to prefectural police headquarters across the nation to ensure that their police officers use proper language and respect human rights while on duty.

Japan, U.S., Australia agree to speed up exchange of defense intelligence

Several Saturday morning papers wrote that the defense authorities of the U.S., Japan, and Australia signed in Hawaii on Thursday a legal arrangement to speed up the mutual sharing of military information with the goal of enhancing trilateral security cooperation in order to deal with China's maritime advancement. This arrangement, which will be implemented when their troops carry out joint training and engage in disaster relief operations, complements the GSOMIAs that the three partners implement bilaterally.

GOJ to make decision on Nov. 11 on rescue operations for Sudan-bound SDF

Saturday morning's Mainichi led with a speculative report claiming that the GOJ is inclined to make an official decision on Nov. 11 on allowing South Sudan-bound SDF personnel to go to the defense of foreign troops and aid workers in the event that they come under attack. Defense Minister Inada, however, told the press on Friday that rescue operations may not actually be performed by Japanese troops even if a request for assistance is received under a severe situation such as the situation there in July when government and opposition troops engaged in fierce combat.

Okinawa sailor arrested for assault

Monday's Tokyo Shimbun reported briefly in its city news section that the Okinawa police on Sunday arrested a 22-year-old U.S. sailor belonging to Camp Foster on assault charges, explaining that he pushed a local man to the ground and choked him from behind on a public road in Chatan late Saturday night. The suspect was reportedly intoxicated when he was apprehended at the scene.

POLITICS

Momentum for Lower House dissolution for snap election dissipating

Saturday morning's Asahi and Nikkei highlighted press remarks made on Friday by the secretaries general of the ruling LDP and Komeito, who toned down their rhetoric on PM Abe's purported desire to dissolve the Lower House in January for a snap election. LDP's Nikai said: "I don't think the premier has such an idea in mind at present." The papers speculated that the two officials may have previously mentioned the possibility of a snap election repeatedly to remind junior lawmakers to be constantly prepared for such a possibility.

Tokyo leader starts study group with launch of new party in mind?

All Monday papers reported extensively that Tokyo Governor Koike on Sunday launched a study group for some 2,900 political aspirants, including students and housewives, speculating that the extremely popular leader may be looking to form a political party of her own to counter the LDP members of the Tokyo metropolitan assembly who are highly critical of her attempts to overhaul the metropolitan government. The LDP headquarters is reportedly keen to avoid friction with Koike out of fear that its Diet members will be defeated in future elections by candidates fielded by a possible Koike party.

OPINION POLLS

Majority opposed to constitutional amendment under Abe administration

Several Saturday morning papers published the results of a Kyodo opinion poll that put support for constitutional revision at 58% and opposition at 40%. However, some 55% expressed opposition to revising the nation's supreme law under the Abe administration, while 42% were in favor. Regarding Article 9, 49% said there is no need to alter it, while 45% felt otherwise.

ECONOMY

Congress may become more flexible about endorsing TPP

Sunday's Mainichi took up a report filed by a U.S. trade journal claiming that a difference of opinion between the Obama administration and a leading Republican lawmaker over one of the key disputes over the TPP accord may be dissipating. According to the article, Senator Hatch has now become sympathetic toward the administration's interpretation of the period for biomedical data protection. Reconciliation on this point will make congressional approval of the regional free trade agreement less difficult.

Meanwhile, Monday's Asahi wrote that if the GOP loses a majority in the Senate in the Nov. 8 election, congressional approval of the TPP may become even more difficult because the Republicans are primary proponents. A GOJ source said: "The [U.S.] TPP legislation may be shelved for at least two years until the next midterm election" in the autumn of 2018.

In a related story, Kyodo published the results of an opinion survey showing that some 66% called for "careful" parliamentary deliberations" on the TPP legislation. The respondents expressed the view that the bills do not need to be enacted during the current Diet session. Nikkei's poll found that 38% supported the GOJ's goal of enacting the legislation during the present Diet term, while 35% did not. The daily said in a separate piece that the ruling coalition may postpone until Nov. 4 a Lower House vote on the legislation scheduled for Nov. 1 to heed the opposition camp's strong calls for additional debate.

Japan, China, South Korea hold trade ministerial talks

Sunday's Nikkei wrote that the trade ministers of Japan, China, and South Korea gathered in Tokyo on Saturday to discuss regional economy and trade. The ministers released a joint statement afterward in which they agreed to take measures "to counter every protectionist move." They also pledged mutual efforts to exercise leadership to accelerate regional trade liberalization talks, such as a trilateral FTA and Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.

SCIENCE

Japan remains steadfast in continuing research whaling

All Saturday morning papers reported on the conclusion of the International Whaling Commission conference in Slovenia on Friday, noting that Japan failed to reconcile its differences with anti-whaling members, which stepped up their criticism of Japan for continuing research whaling despite the 2014 ruling issued by the International Court of Justice. While noting that the anti-whaling members adopted a resolution making research whaling more difficult, Nikkei explained that the GOJ has no intention to discontinue the scientific program based on the assessment that concessions on the whaling front could embolden anti-whaling countries to seek similar bans on other marine resources, such as tuna.

Film on dolphin hunting in Japan to be released in U.S. shortly

Sunday's Yomiuri reported that a new film on dolphin hunting in Taiji, Wakayama Prefecture, directed by Keiko Yagi will be screened in the U.S. in November. In the film entitled "Behind the Cove," Yagi reportedly focused on the problems experienced by local fishermen after being criticized heavily by the controversial film "The Cove." Yagi reportedly interviewed the director of "The Cove" to make her film objective.

Upper House approves Paris Agreement legislation

All Saturday morning papers wrote briefly that the House of Councillors unanimously passed legislation on Friday to approve the Paris Agreement on climate change, noting that the GOJ is aiming to enact it at the Lower House by Nov. 7 when a related international conference begins in Morocco. However, sharpened conflict between the ruling and opposition blocs on deliberations on the TPP legislation may delay the enactment of the climate change bill.

AMBASSADOR

Ambassador Kennedy impressed by beauty of imperial villa in Kyoto

In Sunday's regular "Japan through Diplomats' Eyes" column published in Tokyo Shimbun's supplement, Ambassador Kennedy highlighted the Katsura Imperial Villa in Kyoto, which she said encapsulates the "beauty" of Japan. The column was accompanied by a color photo of the garden taken by the Ambassador, with a caption reading: "Can you find the four auspicious symbols of longevity in this beautiful garden? The 60,000 Japanese centenarians can!"

Ambassador Kennedy jogs with Rio Paralympics silver medalist

TBS reported on Saturday that Ambassador Kennedy jogged with Rio Paralympics silver medalist Misato Michishita at Ohori Park in Fukuoka earlier in the day. The network said the Ambassador wore a vest that said "guide runner" and ran 6 km, three laps around the park, with Michishita, who is visually impaired. After the run, the Ambassador reportedly expressed hope to create a world where

people with disabilities can realize their dreams. The Ambassador was given the rope that she and Michishita held while jogging. Yomiuri published a similar story online on Saturday evening, adding that the Kennedy family has been making vigorous efforts to enact laws on disability rights and to promote the holding of Special Olympics for intellectually disabled people. Yomiuri also noted that the Ambassador attended the opening ceremony of the Special Olympics in Fukuoka in 2014. The paper wrote that the Ambassador later invited Michishita to the U.S. Consulate in Fukuoka. Sankei's regional edition, as well as many regional papers and TV networks, also covered the event.

