



Morning Alert - Tuesday, December 13, 2016

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK gave top play to a report that the current Diet session will end tomorrow. NTV, Fuji TV, and TV Asahi led with reports on a hit-and-run accident in which a car driven by comedian Yusuke Inoue struck a taxi, causing minor injuries to its driver. TBS gave top play to a report that Tokyo Governor Koike held a public hearing on Tokyo's budget formulation on Monday.

All national papers front-paged stories on the Supreme Court's likely decision to declare Okinawa Governor Onaga's cancellation of the landfill permit for FRF construction illegal.

SECURITY

Supreme Court to rule against Okinawa chief over landfill permit rescindment

All papers gave front-page play to a Supreme Court announcement on Monday that it will issue a final verdict on Dec. 20 regarding a lawsuit on Okinawa Governor's cancellation of the landfill permit for FRF construction off Camp Schwab. Since the top court has chosen not to hear oral arguments from the two conflicting parties, which are customarily held when it overturns a lower court judgment, the court is expected to uphold the Fukuoka High Court's ruling that supports the central government's argument that the governor's administrative decision was illegal. Given that both the plaintiff and the defendant have promised that they will honor the top court's decision no matter what, the Abe administration is likely to resume the construction, including landfill work, without delay. Mainichi projected the construction will probably be resumed early next year.

However, because the Okinawa leader has also stated that he is determined to employ every possible means to block the present Futenma relocation plan, the dailies predicted that the confrontation between Tokyo and Okinawa will probably continue for a while. The prefectural government has already identified 14 administrative procedures that can be used to delay the construction, including a permit issued by his predecessor to “destroy rock reefs” that expires next March. Onaga may choose to cancel or refuse to extend the permit.

The governor told the press yesterday: “It is extremely regrettable that the top court has decided against hearing oral arguments. I will explain my thoughts after hearing the court’s final judgment.” Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga said: “Both the central government and Okinawa are committed to abiding by the Supreme Court’s decision and cooperating with each other in good faith for Futenma relocation.”

The papers said the Supreme Court is expected to issue a ruling much sooner than expected, noting that many GOJ officials had anticipated that a final verdict would be announced in March at the earliest. According to Yomiuri, the central government is pleased that the court has decided against hearing oral arguments, quoting a GOJ source as saying: “The top court has concluded that there is nothing to argue about. The state will prevail without fail.” Asahi wrote the central government may file a lawsuit against Okinawa seeking compensation for the prolonged suspension of the construction work if the governor continues to sabotage the relocation plan. Nikkei conjectured that the FRF plan may be reviewed under the Trump administration, quoting University of Shizuoka security specialist Ogawa as saying: “As Secretary of Defense-designate Mattis is well versed in practical military operations, he may be displeased with the [limited] number of takeoffs and landing at the planned FRF at Henoko. He may insist on a review.”

Onaga to skip NTA reversion ceremony

Several papers reported that Okinawa Governor Onaga has decided not to take part in a ceremony marking the return of the Northern Training Area that will be held in Nago City on Dec. 22, quoting him as telling the press yesterday: “Many local residents feel the reversion agreement is unreasonable. I’ve decided not to attend after taking all aspects into consideration.” No prefectural government officials will be present at the event.

Coast Guard to be allocated record budget to protect Senkakus

Nikkei reported that the GOJ is expected to allocate the largest amount ever to the Japan Coast Guard of about 210 billion yen in the FY2017 budget to enable it to be better prepared for Chinese provocations in the vicinity of the Senkaku Islands. The central government will use the additional amount of 20 billion yen compared to the current fiscal year to construct more large patrol boats for the JCG to counter China’s announced plans to build and send more government ships to the East China Sea.

INTERNATIONAL

Ben Rhodes speaks on Obama diplomacy, including Hiroshima trip

Asahi carried a full-page telephone interview with Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes, describing him as the “architect of Obama’s foreign policy.” The senior White House official talked about the President’s landmark visit to Hiroshima in May, the administration’s “rebalance-to-Asia” initiative, the TPP, China, Cuba, and the Iran nuclear deal. The speechwriter for the President explained that the Obama administration has attempted to revitalize diplomacy so as to display U.S. leadership by addressing such matters as climate change, nuclear nonproliferation, and development policy, which he said had been largely disregarded by previous administrations.

Trump’s remarks on “one China” policy rattle East Asia

All papers reported on President-elect Trump’s interview with Fox News, in which he commented on China by saying: “I fully understand the ‘one China’ policy, but I don’t know why we have to be bound by a ‘one China’ policy unless we make a deal with China having to do with other things, including trade.” While speculating that this remark may be a bluff to achieve better trade deals with Beijing, the dailies said since the Chinese government will never allow its one China principle to be undermined by the U.S. or anyone else, the Xi administration may be prompted to take a tough line toward Taiwan. The papers expressed concern that such a scenario might roil East Asia.

POLITICS

LDP to enact casino legislation tomorrow

All papers projected that the ruling LDP is looking to enact the integrated resort legislation aimed at legalizing casinos at an Upper House plenary session tomorrow by circumventing a Cabinet Committee vote because the committee chairman, a Democratic Party member, is unlikely to agree to hold a committee vote on account of insufficient deliberations. Under the Diet Law, a committee vote can be omitted if a motion calling for an “interim report” on committee deliberations is adopted at a plenary session. On Monday, the DP dismissed an LDP request for holding a committee vote today. The DP and other opposition parties are likely to submit a no-confidence motion against the Abe cabinet in the event that the ruling party attempts to railroad the bill through the upper chamber.

ECONOMY

Japan, EU eager to reach rough accord on EPA this year

Yomiuri reported on the start in Tokyo today of a meeting between the chief negotiators of Japan and the EU on a proposed economic partnership agreement (EPA), explaining that the two sides are extremely anxious to cut a deal this year in view of the incoming Trump administration’s decision to withdraw from the TPP and general elections next year in many EU countries whose outcomes might complicate free trade negotiations. Although the two negotiating parties are hoping to reach a

“rough consensus” by year end, there are still wide gaps between them over such issues as import tariffs on Japanese autos and European cheese and wine, conflict resolution mechanisms, and government procurement. Instead of announcing a rough consensus, the two sides may end up declaring a “framework agreement” this year and hold additional discussions next year to work out the details later.

Other dailies filed similar stories, with Mainichi noting that Japan is extremely keen to conclude an EPA with the EU in order to reboot the momentum for free trade that was lost following President-elect Trump’s announcement on withdrawing from the TPP. Sankei said LDP politicians have already voiced strong opposition to substantial cuts in tariffs on EU pork and dairy imports.

