



Morning Alert - Wednesday, December 21, 2016

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK and TV Asahi gave top play to reports on the deadly attack at a Christmas market in Berlin. NTV led with a follow-up report on an incident in which criminal papers were filed with prosecutors against a deceased man on charges of murdering a female university student in Shimane in 2009. Other top news included a follow-up report on Japanese singer ASKA, who was released after prosecutors decided not to indict him on charges of using stimulants due to a lack of evidence.

Major front-page items in national papers included the Supreme Court's ruling issued yesterday dismissing the Okinawa chief's cancellation of the landfill permit for the FRF construction and updates on a terror attack involving a truck in Germany.

SECURITY

GOJ to resume FRF construction work soon

All papers reported extensively on yesterday's Supreme Court ruling in favor of the central government regarding Okinawa Governor Onaga's rescindment of a landfill permit for the FRF initiative off Camp Schwab, projecting that the GOJ may resume relevant work by the end of this year. In dismissing the Okinawa leader's appeal, all four presiding justices concluded that there was nothing illegal about the landfill permit issued by his predecessor and that he was legally wrong in not abiding by the central government's instructions to recall the rescindment.

Most dailies explained that the bench found Onaga's rescindment illegal solely from the standpoint of examining the administrative process running up to the decision and hence effectively rectified the

“politically biased” ruling issued in September by the Naha Branch of the Fukuoka High Court declaring that the Henoko relocation initiative is the only way to remove the danger at MCAS Futenma.

In a press conference held after the ruling was issued, the Okinawa leader, while expressing “deep disappointment” with the top court’s judgment, stated that he will still honor the verdict and take necessary administrative procedures without delay to cancel the rescindment. However, the governor also underscored that he will do his utmost to derail the Futenma relocation plan. Defense Minister Inada released a comment saying: “We will resume construction work swiftly as soon as the rescindment is withdrawn.”

Prolonged confrontation likely

All papers forecast that even though the nation’s top court dismissed the Okinawa leader’s action as illegal, he is likely to invoke other elements of his administrative authority to thwart the FRF initiative, probably starting with refusing to renew the existing permit to destroy rock reefs that will expire in March next year. Onaga stressed yesterday that a “tug of war” with the central government will continue indefinitely unless both the USG and the GOJ give up on the Henoko relocation plan. Mainichi wrote that although Onaga was put on the defensive recently for his “misleading” remarks indicating his acceptance of the return of the Northern Training Area, the recent Osprey accident in Nago City has helped him regain solid political ground to put up resistance to Tokyo over Futenma relocation.

On its part, the central government is increasingly frustrated with the Okinawa governor’s continued defiance despite the Supreme Court’s ruling. Some GOJ officials are insisting on filing a lawsuit against the governor seeking compensation for financial damage caused by the delayed construction work. As for the construction work per se, MOD is likely to reinstall floats off Camp Schwab soon so as to demarcate the construction zone. Sankei projected that the ministry will then restart drilling and landfill work probably beginning around May.

U.S. welcomes top court’s judgment

Mainichi printed a Jiji piece from Washington saying that the USG welcomed the Japanese Supreme Court’s decision, quoting an unnamed DOS official as saying: “The construction of the FRF is the only solution to avoid the continued use of MACS Futenma.”

Onaga to boycott NTA ceremony

Tokyo Shimbun front-paged an announcement made yesterday by Governor Onaga that he will skip the NTA reversion ceremony to be held in Nago City tomorrow and instead take part in a protest rally against the recent Osprey “crash” to be convened in the same municipality the same day. The

Okinawa leader stressed that he will decline the offer of a meeting with Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga and other GOJ officials who are expected to attend the ceremony.

Osprey maintenance to begin in Chiba next month

Tokyo Shimbun wrote that the Kisarazu city government disclosed yesterday that the Defense Ministry plans to go ahead with a maintenance program for Futenma-based Ospreys at GSDF Camp Kisarazu starting in January as planned. The ministry reportedly justified the implementation of the regular maintenance program despite the recent accident in Okinawa by explaining that the mechanical safety of the tilt-rotor planes has been confirmed.

INTERNATIONAL

Both Japanese, Americans pessimistic about prospects of bilateral relations

Yomiuri published the results of a public opinion poll taken jointly with Gallup in both the U.S. and Japan that showed 57% of Japanese and 48% of Americans called present bilateral relations “good.” Both figures remained almost the same as last year. However, some 41% of Japanese, up 34 points, and 40% of Americans (up 26 points) projected that the trans-Pacific ties will worsen in the future. The daily attributed the two peoples’ pessimism to President-elect Trump’s repeated remarks dismissing the value of the bilateral alliance and the TPP. As for the next U.S. leader’s calls for Japan to pay more for stationing U.S. troops in Japan, three out of five Japanese said the present level of Japanese financial contribution is appropriate. On the other hand, Americans appeared to be divided, with 48% finding the current level proper while 42% said Japan should shoulder a greater share.

Abe comments on tour of Pearl Harbor

Yomiuri took up a speech on Tuesday by Prime Minister Abe, who commented on his upcoming trip to Pearl Harbor by saying: “It will demonstrate to the international community the power of reconciliation [between the U.S. and Japan]. I hope my tour of Pearl Harbor together with President Obama will prompt the phrase ‘Remember Pearl Harbor’ to take on a new meaning that signifies the power of reconciliation.” In a related piece, the same paper said that while in Hawaii Abe will visit the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, as well as a memorial commemorating the nine victims of the 2001 Ehime Maru incident.

Mainichi wrote that the White House plans to invite to the USS Arizona Memorial a representative of a U.S. veteran group when President Obama offers prayers there along with PM Abe on Dec. 27 with the goal of trumpeting bilateral reconciliation. An invitation will probably be extended to Jan Thompson, president of the American Defenders of Bataan and Corregidor Memorial Society. She earlier expressed pleasure with Abe’s decision on a Pearl Harbor tour and said: “I don’t think an apology is necessary. Instead, I am expecting that the premier will use meaningful language to

demonstrate how sincerely he and the Japanese government understand the history of WWII and its outcome.”

Cabinet minister comments on draft sanctions against South Sudan

Asahi took up recent criticism of Japan voiced by U.S. Ambassador to the UN Powers regarding Tokyo’s reluctance to embrace a draft sanctions resolution against South Sudan put forward by Washington. DM Inada commented on the motion by telling the press yesterday: “Japan should examine it from the standpoint of what is appropriate for peace and stability in South Sudan and what is most appropriate to ensure meaningful operations by SDF personnel there.” According to an unnamed senior MOFA official, Tokyo is hesitant about applying sanctions at this juncture out of deference to the South Sudan government’s efforts toward peace as evidenced by its recent decision to host some 4,000 UN peacekeepers.

Abe voices hope for visit to Russia early next year

All dailies focused on PM Abe’s speech on Tuesday, during which he expressed hope for traveling to Russia at an early date so as to accelerate bilateral peace treaty talks. He disclosed that during the summit meeting in Yamaguchi last week Russian President Putin invited him to visit Russia next year. Pointing out that Abe plans to visit Vladivostok next September, Yomiuri speculated that the Japanese leader may travel to Russia even before that.

In a separate story Yomiuri conjectured that the Japanese leader is looking to make a Russian tour at an early date in order to rebut mounting criticism that he failed to deliver any tangible progress on the Northern Territories dispute during Putin’s visit to Japan last week. It added that the Abe administration plans to launch an inter-ministry taskforce charged with implementing “joint economic activities” with Russia on the contested islands.

POLITICS

Komeito displeased with LDP over enactment of casino law

Several papers highlighted criticism of the Abe administration and the ruling LDP raised by senior Komeito officials during yesterday’s inter-party meeting, noting that the junior ruling partner was upset over the LDP’s moves to enact the casino legislation by extending the Diet session twice.

ECONOMY

Japan, EU to resume EPA talks next month

Yomiuri and Nikkei wrote that Foreign Minister Kishida spoke by phone with a senior EU official yesterday and agreed to hold another round of bilateral EPA talks in January. The two thus concluded that meeting the original goal of sealing a free trade deal this year has become

impossible. However, the EU politician reportedly stressed the importance of forging a consensus quickly given that a number of national elections are planned in many EU member nations in 2017.

