



Morning Alert - Friday, March 10, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK led with a report that Osaka Prefecture may not to approve Moritomo Gakuen's application to establish a new grade school due to inconsistencies in figures for construction costs in the documents submitted. All commercial networks led with reports that the head of the school told reporters on Thursday that there were no inconsistencies in the documents.

Main front-page items in national papers included updates on the Moritomo Gakuen scandal and an ongoing drill in the East China Sea involving a U.S. carrier strike group and MSDF ships.

SECURITY

U.S., Japan conduct joint training in East China Sea

Yomiuri and Sankei reported on a finding that several MSDF destroyers have been carrying out joint naval training with the Carl Vinson Carrier Strike Group in the East China Sea since Tuesday, emphasizing that a joint drill involving a U.S. nuclear flattop and Japanese warships is unusual and that it is apparently intended to hold North Korea and China in check. The training will be completed today. Sankei said the joint drill signified the strength and deterrence of the U.S.-Japan alliance.

Diet debate to begin shortly on legislation on ACSAs with U.S., Australia, UK

Asahi and Mainichi reported that parliamentary deliberations on legislation approving acquisition and cross-servicing agreements with the U.S., Australia, and the UK will commence next Tuesday, noting that Prime Minister Abe will explain the outline of the legislation in the plenary session of the Lower House for further examination by ruling and opposition lawmakers.

Government spokesman says DPRK missile poses “real threat”

Yomiuri and Sankei reported on the GOJ's disclosure on Thursday that one of the projectiles that the DPRK launched on Monday landed in Japan's EEZ some 200 kilometers north of the Noto Peninsula in Ishikawa Prefecture, saying that the impact point was the closest ever to the Japanese territory. Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga told the press yesterday that the four missiles appeared to be Scud ERs, underscoring that DPRK missiles are becoming a “real threat,” as they cover western Japan.

In a related piece, Asahi and Nikkei wrote that a yawning gap remains between China and the U.S.-Japan-ROK bloc over pressure on North Korea, noting that although the four nations were in sync in issuing a UN Security Council press statement condemning the latest missile firing, the two camps were at odds over potential additional steps to deter further provocations. Asahi said Beijing is hesitant to step up pressure on its defiant neighbor and instead is urging the U.S. and South Korea to suspend an ongoing bilateral exercise to deescalate the tension.

New deputy leader assumes post in Okinawa

Asahi reported that Moritake Tomikawa, former President of Okinawa International University, officially assumed the post of vice governor in Okinawa on Thursday, noting that he will be responsible for base issues. Although his predecessor Ageda was reportedly good at conducting behind-the-scenes negotiations with the central government over Futenma relocation and other U.S. base issues, doubts remain among some prefectural officials over whether the new vice governor can do the same. Tomikawa told the press yesterday: “I am fully aware of the difficulty of the post. I'd like to find solutions while exchanging opinions [with the central government].” The daily said former Kin Mayor Katsuhiko Yoshida will be appointed as “policy coordinator” in charge of liaising with the Abe administration.

Tires fall from U.S. military chopper during training

Yomiuri wrote briefly in its city news section that tires fell from a UH-1 helicopter during external lift training in Okinawa on Wednesday, saying that they fell on a landing zone in Camp Hansen. No one was injured. The U.S. military is investigating the cause of the mishap. The Okinawa defense Bureau has asked for measures to prevent a recurrence.

“Ultra-leftists” involved in anti-base movement in Okinawa

Sankei reported on the disclosure by a senior National Police Agency official on Thursday at the Diet that some anti-base activists in Okinawa belong to “violent extreme leftist” groups. The daily said this was probably the first time for a central government official to openly acknowledge the involvement of radical leftists in the anti-base movement in Okinawa.

ECONOMY

National Trade Council chief to call on Japan to buy American products

NHK reported this morning that White House National Trade Council Director Navarro said in an interview with the Wall Street Journal on Wednesday that he will ask Japan to eliminate tariffs and non-trade barriers and buy U.S. products. He reportedly said: “Any country we have a significant trade deficit with needs to work with us on a product-by-product and sector-by-sector-level to reduce that deficit over a specified period of time.” Navarro reportedly named Japan and Germany, and stressed that he will urge them to buy U.S.-made products by saying: “Our trade deficit will be reduced if our trade partners buy a large amount of American corn or aircraft.” The network said U.S. pressure on Japan to expand the purchase of American products is expected to increase in the future.

Senior bureaucrats to visit U.S. today to propose agenda for new economic dialogue

NHK reported this morning that vice-minister level officials of MOFA, the Finance Ministry, METI, and MLIT will visit the U.S. today and meet with senior White House officials to propose topics Japan hopes to discuss at the new economic dialogue. The network said the Japanese side will propose development of infrastructure such as railways, development of energy such as shale gas, and robotic technology development in the economic cooperation sector, and also propose cooperation in measures against the practice of mass producing goods using subsidies and exporting them at an unreasonably low price. The network said the two governments are making arrangements to hold their first economic dialogue in mid-April in Tokyo.

In a related story, Yomiuri front-paged a GOJ idea to export in cooperation with America infrastructure hard- and software to developing nations in Latin America to help the U.S. reduce its trade deficit and increase jobs at home. The Abe administration plans to put forward the idea to the Trump administration today so that details can be discussed in the planned economic dialogue in Tokyo in April. By proposing a “win-win” initiative for the two nations, under which Japanese companies can assist such U.S. firms as GE in exporting their infrastructure knowhow on railway and port construction in the Third World, Japan is reportedly hoping to deflect a potential U.S. focus on specific disputes such as the auto trade imbalance.

Nobel laureate to advise GOJ officials

Nikkei wrote that the GOJ’s Council on Fiscal and Economic Policy plans to invite Columbia University Professor Joseph Stiglitz next week to hear his opinions on economic growth and income disparity, speculating that since the Nobel laureate has stressed the importance of investment in education to narrow the gap in wealth, Prime Minister Abe appears eager to capitalize on the famed economist’s input to promote his administration’s initiative to commit additional money for higher education.

INTERNATIONAL

Prolonged absence of Japanese envoy in Seoul

Asahi and Nikkei wrote that more than two months have elapsed since the Abe administration recalled Ambassador to South Korea Nagamine “temporarily” in protest of the erection of a comfort woman statue in front of the Japanese Consulate General in Busan. Concern is growing about the prolonged absence of the top diplomat in Seoul potentially having adverse effects on other diplomatic issues of mutual concern, such as North Korea’s latest missile provocations. The Abe administration is in no mood to allow the return of Nagamine to Seoul anytime soon, with an unnamed senior MOFA official saying: “The ball is in the ROK’s court. We have not decided on a timeline [for his return].” Nikkei projected that the diplomatic standoff may become further prolonged, as Seoul apparently has no effective tools to prompt the local government in Busan to remove the monument.

In a related development, Sankei wrote that a ceremony was held on Wednesday in Germany’s southeastern municipality of Wiesent to unveil a statue symbolizing comfort women, noting that it was the first memorial of its kind built in Europe.

Abe to visit Belgium during European tour

Yomiuri wrote that final arrangements are being made for Prime Minister Abe to travel to Belgium, in addition to Germany, France, and Italy, during his European tour that will begin on March 19. In Brussels, the premier is expected to hold talks with European Council President Tusk and European Commission President Juncker to confirm mutual efforts for an early conclusion of bilateral EPA talks.

Saudi to post defense attaché in Japan

Nikkei reported on Saudi King Salman’s visit to Japan starting on Sunday, noting that the kingdom has decided to post a defense attaché in Tokyo as part of bilateral efforts to deepen security collaboration.

