



Morning Alert - Monday, March 27, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning news

Most networks gave top play to reports that sumo wrestler Kisenosato won his second Emperor's Cup on Sunday despite a shoulder injury. TBS led with a report that the body of a nine-year-old girl was found in Chiba on Sunday.

Major front-page items in national papers included the apparent murder of an elementary school girl in Chiba, Toshiba's plan to file for Chapter 11 bankruptcy for Westinghouse, a possible lawsuit to be filed by the central government against the Okinawa governor seeking financial compensation for delayed FRF construction, and the Emperor's intention not to perform any public duties once he abdicates.

SECURITY

Okinawa Governor Onaga vows to revoke approval for landfill work at Henoko

All Sunday morning papers reported that Okinawa Governor Onaga said on Saturday that he will revoke his predecessor's approval of landfill work for the relocation of MCAS Futenma to Henoko. He reportedly made the comment while attending for the first time a protest rally held in front of Camp Schwab. Yomiuri wrote that the GOJ is planning to begin bank protection work in April and quietly move forward with the relocation plan given that Okinawa has limited means to prevent the landfill work. The paper said the GOJ is planning to continue the work without seeking an extension of a permit for destroying rock reefs that expires at the end of March, based on the judgement that another permit will not be necessary because the local fishermen have already relinquished their fishing rights in the area.

In a related story, Sankei wrote today that in the event that Onaga cancels the landfill permit, the GOJ may consider filing a lawsuit seeking compensation for financial damage caused by the delayed construction on account of “abuse of authority.” The central government may call for Onaga to pay hundreds of millions of yen using his personal funds.

Joint memorial held on Iwo Jima

Sunday morning’s Mainichi reported that a U.S.-Japan joint memorial service was held on Iwo Jima on Saturday to remember the victims of the battle in the final stages of the WWII. About 300 people, including war veterans, bereaved family members, and government officials of both nations, attended the ceremony.

POLITICS

Moritomo Gakuen scandal has little impact on public assessment of Abe cabinet

Today’s Nikkei published the results of its latest public opinion survey that put support for the Abe administration at 62%, up 2 points from a month ago, and nonsupport at 30%. Three out of four were not satisfied with the explanations given at the Diet by Prime Minister Abe concerning his and his wife’s involvement in the Moritomo Gakuen scandal. The daily said the ruling LDP was pleased that the political controversy appears to be having little impact on public support for the Abe cabinet, speculating that many voters may be skeptical about the trustworthiness of the Democratic Party and other opposition parties.

Kyodo’s latest poll put support for the cabinet at 52.4%, down 3.3 points from two weeks ago, and nonsupport at 32.5%, up 1.8 points.

Democratic Party having difficulty obtaining voter approval

Monday’s Yomiuri reported on the first anniversary of the launch of the Democratic Party today, noting that the largest opposition party is still struggling to recover its support base despite desperate efforts by its leader Renho. Party officials are deeply concerned about the party’s failure to increase its public support even though more voters have apparently become distrustful of the Abe administration recently over the Moritomo Gakuen scandal. Renho’s critics claim that the fact that seven candidates who had planned to run in the Tokyo metropolitan assembly election in the summer have left the DP to join the political group led by Tokyo Governor Koike shows that the No. 1 opposition party is bound to suffer major losses in the key race. They project that calls will mount among disgruntled lawmakers for the resignation of the embattled leader after the Tokyo election.

INTERNATIONAL

Hagerty nominated as next U.S. ambassador to Japan

All Saturday morning papers carried extensive reports on the White House announcement on Thursday that President Trump will nominate William Hagerty as the next U.S. ambassador to Japan. Asahi wrote that Hagerty is well-versed in economic issues and Japanese affairs. He is reportedly expected to act as a mediator between President Trump and Japan for the U.S.-Japan economic dialogue set to begin in April, during which the two nations will probably be at odds over such issues as automobiles and agriculture. The papers wrote that Hagerty lived in Tokyo for three years when he was working for the Boston Consulting Group. Noting that he has been involved in investment negotiations with Japanese firms, Asahi speculated that Hagerty was chosen because of his negotiating skills and knowledge about Japanese corporations. Yomiuri wrote that Hagerty has broad connections within the Republican Party and will be able to communicate directly with the President, White House staff, and members of the cabinet. The paper added that Hagerty is a long-time acquaintance of Secretary Tillerson because they are both involved in Boy Scouts of America activities. Asahi pointed out, however, that he has no experience in security issues and it remains to be seen how much influence he will be able to exert on matters involving North Korea and China. Nikkei said a diplomatic source pointed out that Hagerty's nomination reflects the Trump administration's intention to deepen economic relations with Japan. The paper also quoted Akihiko Yasui of the Mizuho Research Institute as saying that the relatively early announcement of the nomination by the Trump administration shows that "U.S.-Japan relations have gotten off to a fairly good start."

Yomiuri said the GOJ is pleased with Hagerty's nomination and is aiming to quickly build a relationship of trust with the new U.S. ambassador. The paper quoted Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga as telling reporters on Friday: "He is greatly trusted by President Trump and has experience living in Japan. We welcome the nomination." Noting that it has been pointed out that some members of the Trump administration seem to have misunderstandings about U.S. trade with Japan, the paper said the GOJ is hoping to call for U.S. understanding for Japan's efforts through Hagerty from now on. Nikkei said that Hagerty apparently has an affinity for Japan as he enjoys watching sumo wrestling and two of his children take karate lessons. The paper said he also frequently visits Japan with his family on vacation. According to the papers, Hagerty had been hoping to become the U.S. ambassador to Japan.

Preparations for DPRK nuclear test picking up momentum

All Monday papers reported that North Korea appears to be expediting preparations for conducting in the near future its sixth nuclear test, with Asahi claiming that the U.S. military plans to deploy over the Korean Peninsula a WC-135 Constant Phoenix aircraft to collect radioactive dust with the purpose of detecting and identifying a nuclear explosion.

Japan, Australia to hold 2+2 meeting

Today's Yomiuri wrote that arrangements are being made between Japan and Australia to convene a foreign and defense ministerial meeting in Tokyo in late April in order to reaffirm bilateral and

trilateral coordination with the U.S. to deal with North Korea's nuclear and missile development and China's militarization of the South China Sea. The participants are likely to discuss the implementation of the revised ACSA for enhanced mutual provision of ammunition and other military materials under various contingency scenarios.

State Minister of Internal Affairs Akama visits Taiwan

All Sunday morning papers reported that State Minister of Internal Affairs and Communications Akama visited Taiwan on Saturday to attend an opening ceremony for an event to promote Japanese culture and tourism in Taipei. The papers said Akama is the highest-level GOJ official to make an official visit to Taiwan since Japan ended its diplomatic relations with Taiwan in 1972, adding that China may react sharply to the visit. Nikkei wrote that Akama's visit to Taiwan is a manifestation of the Abe administration's policy to attach importance to Taiwan. According to Nikkei, Akama told reporters after the event: "The Japan- China relationship continues to be one of the most important bilateral relationships." He also reportedly said that Japan will maintain working relations at the private-sector level with Taiwan. Meanwhile, Nikkei said former Prime Minister Fukuda commented on Saturday on Akama's visit to Taiwan by saying: "Chinese ships sometimes approach our territorial waters near the Senkaku Islands. We must consider whether it is good or bad to provoke each other in such a manner."

GOJ to join talks on convention to abolish nuclear weapons

Saturday morning's Mainichi reported that several GOJ sources disclosed that the GOJ has decided to participate in the negotiations to conclude a convention to prohibit nuclear weapons, which will start on March 27 at the UN Headquarters in New York. The paper said the GOJ faced criticism from A-bomb survivors when it opposed the Nuclear Weapons Convention (NWC) last October. While Japan will reportedly maintain its position against the convention, it will join the talks in order to support constructive discussions between the nuclear powers and non-nuclear powers. Foreign Minister Kishida reportedly told reporters on Saturday: "If we join the talks, we must convey our position." He also stressed the need to promote nuclear disarmament in an effective manner with the participation of nuclear powers. Noting that the USG is unlikely to join the talks, the paper quoted a GOJ official as saying: "Japan is the only nation to have suffered a nuclear attack and is also a neutral nation. Our position is different from that of the U.S."

In a related development, Sunday morning's Mainichi reported that Japanese Communist Party leader Shii, who is currently visiting the U.S., met with UN Undersecretary General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Kim Won-soo on Friday at the UN Headquarters in New York. The paper said Shii handed Kim a letter calling for an early conclusion of a convention to prohibit nuclear weapons. Shii reportedly pointed out: "Making nuclear weapons illegal and labeling them as evil will motivate nuclear powers to relinquish their nuclear weapons." Kim reportedly responded: "We should continue to hold discussions because while everyone agrees on the goal, there are various ways to achieve it."

South Korean military planning to conduct training near Takeshima

Saturday morning's Sankei reported that it learned on Friday that the South Korean navy will conduct training in waters off Takeshima (known as Dokdo in South Korea) starting on March 27. The paper said the GOJ is already aware of the plan and has lodged a protest with the South Korean government through a diplomatic channel. Foreign Minister Kishida told reporters on Saturday: "It is regrettable and totally unacceptable considering our position regarding territorial rights over Takeshima." The paper said the training will be the first of its kind since Japan recalled its ambassador in protest of South Korea's failure to remove a comfort woman statue from in front of the Japanese Consulate General in Busan.

ECONOMY

Toshiba to file for Chapter 11 bankruptcy for Westinghouse

Monday's Nikkei claimed that Westinghouse plans to formally decide on Tuesday to file for Chapter 11 bankruptcy, predicting that the deconsolidation of the U.S. nuclear plant manufacturer will make it easier for its parent firm Toshiba to reconstruct its business operations. Westinghouse has reportedly sought assistance from the Korean Electric Power Group as a sponsor for its post-Chapter 11 reorganization.

Indonesia decides to ask Japan to undertake Jakarta-Surabaya railway project

Saturday morning's Sankei reported that Indonesia's Coordinating Minister for Maritime Affairs Pandjaitan told reporters on Friday that President Joko Widodo has formally decided to ask Japan to undertake a project to increase the speed of the railway between Jakarta and Surabaya. The paper said feasibility studies will begin as early as May and be concluded in late November at the earliest.