



Morning Alert - Tuesday, May 9, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning News

NHK, NTV, and Fuji TV gave top play to reports on a forest fire that broke out in Miyagi Prefecture on Monday. TBS and TV Asahi led with reports that polls have opened for the presidential election in South Korea.

Major front-page news stories were the election of Emmanuel Macron as the next French president and Prime Minister Abe's remarks at the Diet yesterday on constitutional revision.

INTERNATIONAL

U.S. ready to offer security guarantee to Kim regime in exchange for denuclearization

Nikkei front-paged the disclosure by several diplomatic sources that the Trump administration has informed the Chinese government that it is willing to invite Kim Jong Un to the U.S. for a summit and pledge not to take military action against his regime if North Korea chooses to give up its nuclear and missile programs. According to the daily, the Trump administration is ready to promise that it would not seek regime change, regime collapse, or accelerated reunification of the Korean Peninsula, and would not take military action north of the 38th parallel, as specified by Secretary Tillerson in his remarks to State Department employees on May 3. This message, apparently conveyed by President Trump to his Chinese counterpart Xi during their summit in Florida, has already been conveyed to Pyongyang. The Chinese side reportedly asked for additional U.S. actions, including economic assistance, negotiations for a peace treaty, and diplomatic normalization.

Abe acknowledges he spoke with President Trump on May 1

Asahi took up remarks made at the parliament on Monday by Prime Minister Abe, who acknowledged that he discussed the North Korean situation over the phone with President Trump on May 1. While stressing that the two governments agreed not to disclose the details of the latest teleconference between the two leaders, the premier also said: “Japan will continue to coordinate closely with the U.S. and South Korea in preparation for possible additional provocations by North Korea.”

GOJ relieved by Macron’s victory in French presidential race

All papers reported heavily on the election of Emmanuel Macron as the next leader of France, noting that the Japanese government was relieved by the outcome since a victory by nationalist candidate Le Pen would probably have triggered considerable turbulence. Prime Minister Abe congratulated Macron by saying: “The results represent a symbolic victory over inward-looking orientations and protectionist moves. They also signify confidence in the EU. I would like to cooperate with him for global peace and prosperity amid continued challenges to the international order.”

Japan, India confirm close defense cooperation

Asahi and Mainichi reported that Defense Minister Inada held talks with her visiting Indian counterpart on Monday and agreed to enhance mutual security cooperation including the MSDF’s participation in the “Malabar” joint naval drill between the Indian and U.S. militaries.

GOJ displeased with disciplinary steps over display of Rising Sun flag

Most papers reported on Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga’s press remarks on Monday, in which he took issue with a recent decision by the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) to discipline the Japanese soccer team Kawasaki Frontale for “discrimination and spectator misconduct” at a match in South Korea. The Japanese team’s fans displayed a Rising Sun flag at an April 25 Asian Champions League match against an ROK team. The AFC referred to it as “a banner with a discriminatory symbol relating to national origin and political opinion.” The government spokesman explained that the Rising Sun flag is used not only by the SDF but is also displayed widely across Japan to celebrate seasonal festivals and large catches of fish.

POLITICS

Abe calls for Diet debate on constitutional amendment

All papers reported extensively on Prime Minister Abe’s remarks at the Diet on Monday, in which he explained why he released a video message on May 3 on his plan to seek constitutional amendment and put the revisions into effect in 2020. The prime minister said yesterday that the message was “meant to jumpstart discussions among political parties at the Diet.” The premier stressed that he mentioned a timeframe for revision in the hope of preventing “never-ending” parliamentary debate. While noting that he doesn’t think the draft constitution that the LDP put together in 2012 will be

approved by the national legislature as is, the prime minister called for the ruling party to expedite discussions to amend the nation's supreme law.

In response to the premier's request, the LDP is expected to reopen internal deliberations on constitutional revision, with a special focus on Abe's proposal to make the SDF's existence explicit in the language of Article 9 and make higher education free. Secretary General Nikai told the press: "The premier has launched an opening salvo. The LDP must do its utmost to realize his goal." The papers said, however, that some LDP officials have already expressed doubts about the prime minister's "bold" remarks since some of his ideas are incompatible with what the party agreed upon after intense debate. Former Defense Minister Ishiba said this was the first time for him to hear that the premier is hoping to uphold the second paragraph of Article 9. Hajime Funada, who used to head the party's panel on constitutional amendment, wrote in his blog that the premier should have been "more careful" because his message will make the largest opposition DPJ even more resistant to constitutional revision.

According to Asahi, a senior LDP official close to Abe said: "We would like to build public sentiment in favor of constitutional revision in view of the strong popularity of the Abe cabinet." Mainichi said that not many Diet members or ordinary citizens strongly oppose the prime minister's specific proposals on making higher education free and making the SDF's existence explicit. The paper speculated that Abe was hoping to drive a wedge into the DP, which is divided between proponents and opponents of constitutional amendment.

SECURITY

Abe says no information to be released on SDF's "asset protection" operation

Most papers highlighted Prime Minister Abe's remarks at the parliament yesterday regarding the recent "asset protection" mission carried out by MSDF vessels for a U.S. Navy supply ship. The prime minister said the GOJ will not release information on whether or not such an operation took place since doing so would have adverse effects on U.S. military operations. He explained that Japan undertakes such missions when U.S. vessels do not have sufficient self-protection capabilities.

Aircraft carrier departs Yokosuka for sea trials

Monday evening's Tokyo Shimbun wrote that the USS Ronald Reagan left Yokosuka Naval Station around Monday noon for sea trials in the northern Pacific, saying that aircraft aboard the nuclear flattop are expected to conduct FCLP training on Iwo Island through Saturday. The daily speculated that the aircraft carrier may then replace the Carl Vinson Strike Group in the Sea of Japan for monitoring North Korea.

ECONOMY

President Trump says he is a “fan” of Sharp Corporation

Mainichi reported that Sharp Corporation President Tai Jeng-wu and Hon Hai Precision Industry Co. (Foxconn) CEO Terry Gou met with President Trump at the White House on April 28. According to a message for Sharp employees released yesterday by President Tai, the U.S. leader told the two visitors: “I am a fan of Sharp. I have great expectations for Sharp products.”

