



Morning Alert - Friday, May 26, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning News

NHK gave top play to a report on the opening of the G7 summit in Sicily today. NTV and Fuji TV led with reports that a man was arrested on Thursday after taking the mother of his former girlfriend hostage in an apartment in Tokyo. TBS and TV Asahi gave top play to reports on a press conference by former Vice Education Minister Maekawa on Thursday about the scandal involving Kake Educational Institution.

Major front-page items included former Vice Education Minister Maekawa's press conference, the NATO summit in Brussels, and a former senior National Security Agency official's warning on the growing threat of cyberattacks by North Korea.

POLITICS

Former MEXT official's comments rock Abe administration

All papers reported extensively on the admission by former Vice Education Minister Maekawa that the Kantei applied pressure on the ministry to allow Kake Educational Institution, which is operated by a close friend of Prime Minister Abe, to open a veterinary school in a national strategic special zone in Ehime Prefecture. The former top education official held a press conference yesterday and insisted that the ministry grudgingly agreed to approve the launch of the school out of deference to the Abe administration even though there was no credible data or reason to justify the establishment of a new veterinary college. He emphasized that he would be willing to provide sworn testimony at the Diet about the pressure he was under last autumn to endorse the launch.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga on Thursday dismissed Maekawa's assertion again categorically by saying that the Education Ministry's official investigation did not discover any documents that would substantiate his narrative. The papers said that in criticizing the former official who stepped down in January over a scandal involving job placements for retired ministry bureaucrats, the government spokesman launched a "character assassination" and explained that Maekawa was reluctant to resign at the time.

According to Mainichi, the Kantei is eager to settle the case quickly by reiterating that the alleged documents are "false." Yomiuri said the Kantei is confident that it will be able to weather the storm generated by Maekawa's sensational statements because it is not illegal for the prime minister to use his influence in designating a special strategic zone in the first place. However, some LDP officials are concerned that the administration may be forced to back off and agree to have Maekawa testify in the Diet if the public becomes skeptical about the Kantei's narrative in view of what seems to be a "credible" confession by a former high-level official.

SDF chief's "personal" comment on constitutional revision draws criticism

Asahi reported on the repercussions caused by recent remarks by SDF Joint Staff Chief Kawano, who thanked Prime Minister Abe for his proposal to make the SDF's existence explicit in the language of the Constitution. The opposition bloc has reacted sharply to the comment because in their view Kawano effectively endorsed constitutional revision even though all public servants are required under the Constitution to "respect and uphold" the nation's supreme law. The GOJ has dismissed criticism from the opposition by saying that Kawano made the remarks in a "personal capacity." While noting that the Kantei has strong confidence in Kawano's performance as the SDF chief, the daily wrote that some MOD officials are skeptical about his judgment in making such controversial remarks at a press event.

SECURITY

USMC might reconsider force relocation to Guam

Asahi highlighted congressional testimony given on Wednesday by USMC Commandant Neller, who disclosed that the Pentagon is considering reviewing its plan to relocate U.S. Marines stationed in Okinawa to Guam in light of recent developments in North Korea and environmental concerns in Guam. While noting that changes in the strategic environment in East Asia have prompted the DOD and the U.S. military to initiate discussions on a possible review, the top Marine official underscored that the existing plan will be upheld for now and that reducing the number of Marines on Okinawa is a "political imperative."

Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga commented on General Neller's statements by telling the press yesterday that some 9,000 U.S. troops will be moved from Okinawa to Guam as planned beginning

in the first half of the 2020s. Suga stressed that President Trump and Prime Minister Abe confirmed their commitment to following through with the initiative when they held a summit in February.

SDF troops complete withdrawal from South Sudan

Most papers wrote that the last members of a GSDF battalion departed the capital city of Juba, South Sudan, on Thursday after completing the five-year UN peacekeeping operation there. Some 40 personnel left the African country aboard a SDF plane after wrapping up administrative work, including the transfer of heavy equipment that had been used for engineering work to the local government. Mainichi said the GSDF peacekeepers completed the mission without carrying out “rush to the rescue” operations.

INTERNATIONAL

China reacts sharply to freedom of navigation operations in South China Sea

All dailies took up the freedom of navigation operations (FONOPs) conducted near Mischief Reef in the South China Sea by the USS Dewey on Wednesday, noting that a Chinese Defense Ministry spokesman disclosed on Thursday that Beijing protested what it called a “U.S. attempt to militarize the region through a show of force.” The official said two PLA Navy ships issued a warning to the Dewey for its “intrusive” operations. Sankei said the U.S. military carried out the operations to ensure that China does not “misinterpret” Washington’s intentions and assume that the U.S. will accept China’s militarization of the South China Sea if it uses its influence on North Korea. Yomiuri speculated that Washington chose to conduct the operation for the first time in seven months perhaps out of frustration that China has not yet applied sufficient pressure on North Korea.

However, Asahi and Mainichi took note of the fact that the DOD has not made an official announcement on the latest FONOP, speculating that the Trump administration does not want to damage relations with Beijing because it is counting on China’s help in defusing tensions on the Korean Peninsula.

ECONOMY

Toshiba says sale of semiconductor subsidiary to Western Digital “difficult”

All papers reported that during his meeting with representatives of major lenders on Thursday, Toshiba President Tsunakawa suggested that it would be difficult to select Western Digital to purchase its flash memory division because the U.S. firm’s acquisition of Toshiba Memory would have to clear antitrust reviews in multiple jurisdictions and hence be too time consuming. Toshiba also found Western Digital’s initial offer too low. Mainichi and Sankei claimed that the top Toshiba official explained to creditors that the leading candidate at this juncture is a consortium led by U.S.

equity fund KKR, which is expected to join forces with the Innovation Network Corporation of Japan and the Development Bank of Japan.

METI document warns against rising protectionist sentiment

Asahi reported on a draft “Trade White Paper” to be released in late June by METI, noting that the ministry is set to express deep concern about protectionism abroad by saying: “Complaints about globalization stemming from growing disparity are emerging in the U.S. and other industrialized countries.” The GOJ document reportedly underscores the importance of pursuing trade liberalization by saying: “Free trade is an engine of economic growth and contributes to reducing disparity.”

