



Morning Alert - Tuesday, June 13, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning News

All broadcasters gave extensive top play to reports that a giant panda called Shin Shin gave birth to a cub at Ueno Zoo on Monday. Major front-page items in national papers included the conclusion of the G7 environmental ministerial meeting in Italy, updates on the Kake Gakuen scandal, the passing of former Okinawa Governor Masahide Ota, and Tokyo Governor Koike's informal decision to move the Tokyo fish market from Tsukiji to Toyosu as planned.

INTERNATIONAL

LDP's Nikai meets with ROK leader

All papers reported from Seoul that LDP Secretary General Nikai paid a courtesy call on South Korean President Moon on Monday. During the meeting, the ROK leader commented on the comfort women dispute by saying: "It is true that many people are having difficulty accepting the bilateral comfort women agreement. More time is needed to resolve the matter. However, this does not mean that the two countries will not be able to build a future-oriented relationship." President Moon reportedly did not call for renegotiating the accord. In response, the Japanese politician stated: "There are various views on history issues in both nations. Japan and South Korea must make efforts to build a better future while addressing outstanding issues." They agreed to increase interactions between them through "shuttle diplomacy," under which President Moon and Prime Minister Abe will visit each other's countries alternately. They also discussed North Korea, with Moon reportedly acknowledging the need to ratchet up the pressure while concurrently stressing the importance of dialogue with the Kim regime.

Yomiuri said in a separate article that while in Seoul, Nikai has held meetings with a number of ROK politicians to support Abe's efforts to improve ties with Japan's immediate neighbor. The paper added, however, that the comfort women dispute will probably stand in the way of bilateral rapprochement, noting that a South Korean ruling party official requested renegotiations of the pact during a meeting with the Japanese official on Monday. Nikkei wrote that although the Moon administration's policy toward Japan is still unclear, Seoul is apparently set to keep history disputes separate from economic and security cooperation.

Japan, China to hold maritime dialogue this month

Asahi claimed that Japan and China are likely to hold talks in Tokyo in late June, projecting that the two nations' diplomats and military officials will discuss outstanding maritime issues, such as China's development of natural resources in the East China Sea and the agreed-upon launch of a communication channel between the two militaries to head off inadvertent clashes at sea.

In a related story, Mainichi wrote that the GOJ has proposed to the Chinese that Prime Minister Abe visit China in the first half of next year followed by a reciprocal trip to Japan by President Xi. The idea was conveyed to the Chinese side when State Councillor Yang traveled to Tokyo in late May. The Chinese official reportedly responded positively to the proposal.

UN representative reiterates concern about free press in Japan

All papers wrote from Geneva on a UN Human Rights Council meeting held on Monday, during which David Kaye, UN special rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, once again voiced his concern about freedom of the press in Japan by asserting that the Japanese government "applies pressure to the media directly and indirectly." The UN official projected that in his final report to be released in the near future, he will recommend that Tokyo conduct a review of the secrecy protection law and textbook screening by the Education Ministry since they may undermine freedom of expression. The GOJ is set to dismiss such a call, with Japanese Ambassador to the UN mission in Geneva Ihara saying at the same meeting that the GOJ has never put pressure on the media.

Russia conducts survey in Japan's EEZ off Hokkaido

Yomiuri wrote that a Russian research vessel conducted a survey in Japan's exclusive economic zone north of Hokkaido last week without obtaining prior consent. MOFA urged Moscow to halt the operation. As Russian surveys in Japan's EEZ are rare, the GOJ is analyzing its purpose.

SCIENCE

U.S. committed to withdrawal from Paris accord

Monday evening's Asahi and Yomiuri reported from Bologna, Italy, on a meeting on Sunday between Environment Minister Yamamoto and EPA Administrator Pruitt, during which the Japanese minister

expressed “disappointment” with the Trump administration’s decision to quit the Paris climate accord. Pruitt reportedly dismissed Yamamoto’s request for rethinking the decision by saying that the Paris pact is “incompatible with the President’s beliefs.” However, the U.S. official stressed that Washington will continue to be a signatory to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, promising its renewed commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions through technological development.

In follow-up articles, all papers reported this morning on the conclusion of the G7 environmental ministerial meeting on Monday, highlighting the issuance of a joint statement confirming the commitment shared by members other than the U.S. to addressing climate change under the Paris agreement. While the U.S.’s position on global warming was mentioned in a footnote in the joint document, the conference chair reportedly emphasized that the Paris pact is the “only effective tool” for combating climate change. The dailies underscored the fact that the G7 was unable to keep the U.S. in the Paris agreement will undermine global efforts to curb global warming. Asahi said the G7’s disarray was demonstrated once again due to America’s unilateralism.

Japan rebuffed Europe’s request for issuing joint document on Paris pact

Asahi reported that following President Trump’s announcement of his decision to withdraw from the Paris agreement, the GOJ turned down a request from Germany, France, and Italy to join them in issuing a joint statement upholding the landmark pact. Japan reportedly rejected the request on the grounds that such a document would be “meaningless.” A German source reportedly conjectured that Tokyo refused to take a concerted approach with the Europeans because it didn’t want to endanger its alliance with the U.S. amid the rising tension on the Korean Peninsula. The three European countries went ahead and issued the statement without Japan’s participation.

POLITICS

GOJ to enact anti-conspiracy legislation this week

Asahi front-paged an informal agreement reached between the LDP and Komeito to pass the GOJ-sponsored anti-conspiracy bill this week even if the opposition submits censure and no-confidence motions against Justice Minister Kaneda and Prime Minister Abe, respectively, in a bid to derail the enactment. The paper said that although the ruling coalition may agree to extend the current session by several days if necessary, it is still determined to dismiss the opposition’s request for “intensive debate” on the Kake Gakuen scandal.

LDP official comments on constitutional amendment

Several papers took up remarks made on Monday by LDP lawmaker Yasuoka, the party’s top official in charge of constitutional revision. Commenting on Prime Minister Abe’s proposal on adding a provision to Article 9 that would make the existence of the SDF explicit, the politician said the party’s discussions will proceed based on the view that the GOJ’s existing constitutional interpretation on

the war-renouncing clause will not be altered “one iota.” With this statement, Yasuoka underscored that Japan’s right to collective self-defense will not be expanded as feared by opponents of constitutional revision.

ECONOMY

Japan, EU closer to sealing EPA deal

Mainichi reported on an EPA meeting to be held in Tokyo this week between Japan and the EU, noting that the two sides are aware of the importance of reaching a basic agreement on trade liberalization sooner rather than later to counter the protectionism pursued by the Trump administration. The paper projected, however, that negotiations on reducing import tariffs on European dairy products and Japanese autos may encounter difficulties due to strong opposition on both sides. A source involved in the EPA talks said: “An early trade accord between Japan and Europe would put the U.S. in a disadvantageous position when it comes to exporting agricultural products to Japan. Both sides have agreed to capitalize on the bilateral EPA talks to bring the U.S. back to a free trade framework.”

Nikkei claimed in a front-page story that Japan is willing to reduce import duties on European pork to levels corresponding to the TPP arrangements. The paper added, however, that a large gap still exists between the two trading partners over European cheese, beef, and wine.

