



Morning Alert - Tuesday, June 20, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning News

Most networks gave top play to reports that the Osaka Public Prosecutors Office searched the office of Moritomo Gakuen on Monday on the suspicion that it illegally received subsidies for its preschool. NTV led with a report that Princess Mako and her fiancé are expected to hold a press conference on July 8 to announce their engagement.

Major front-page items in national papers included Prime Minister Abe's press remarks on Monday voicing regret over the administration's poor handling of the Kake Gakuen scandal and the launch of the Osaka prosecutors' investigation into Moritomo Gakuen.

POLITICS

Abe expresses remorse over his attitude during Diet debate on Kake Gakuen scandal

All papers reported extensively on Prime Minister Abe's press conference on Monday on the conclusion of the regular Diet session. The papers focused on Abe's apologetic statements over his emotionally charged responses to questions from opposition lawmakers concerning his alleged involvement in the GOJ's decision to allow Kake Gakuen to launch a new veterinary school in Shikoku. He said: "I tended to respond in an agitated manner to narratives that were apparently intended to give false impressions. This behavior enlivened debate on issues unrelated to actual policy. I am deeply remorseful." He also expressed regret over the conflicting explanations given by him, Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga, and other cabinet ministers about the scandal, including the

discovery of government documents referring to his “strong desire” to allow the educational institution to open a veterinary school.

The papers noted that the premier was apparently eager to take an apologetic stance in order to ease rising public distrust about the Kantei’s handling of the Kake scandal given that all of the opinion polls conducted over the weekend showed sharp drops in support for his cabinet. Asahi claimed that Abe was only remorseful on the surface, speculating that he and his top deputies are confident that he can restore public confidence soon because the plunges in his approval were much worse when the controversial comprehensive security laws were enacted about two years ago. The daily said, however, that some LDP officials are concerned about rising public discontent ahead of the Tokyo metropolitan assembly election next month.

Abe “likes” Facebook post calling Asahi coverage of Kake Gakuen scandal “verbal terrorism”

Asahi reported that Prime Minister Abe apparently “liked” a Facebook post by a screenwriter who criticized Asahi’s coverage of the Kake Gakuen scandal by saying: “I think it can be characterized as verbal terrorism. It is hardly journalism. The outlet is crazy.”

Mainichi wrote that Abe also apparently “liked” a Facebook message posted by a journalist who favors constitutional revision in which he described Constitution Day on May 3 as “trash day.” The journalist reportedly voiced his respect for the premier’s “courageous decision” to seek constitutional amendment.

SECURITY

Fitzgerald accident under investigation

All papers other than Nikkei carried follow-up reports on the fatal collision between the USS Fitzgerald and a Philippine-flagged merchant ship in their city news sections. The papers reported on the extent of damage sustained by the U.S. warship and the ongoing investigations by the Japan Coast Guard (JCG) and other authorities. Tokyo Shimbun wrote that a team of U.S. Coast Guard investigators from Hawaii arrived in Japan yesterday to launch their own probe. One of the U.S. investigators reportedly told Kyodo that the team would like to coordinate with the JCG to question the crew of the container ship. The papers projected that the focus of the multiple investigations will be on which side was at fault in failing to honor maritime rules to avoid the collision. Sankei said Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Richardson will visit the Yokosuka Naval Base today to meet with Fitzgerald crewmembers, adding that Acting Navy Secretary Stackley issued a statement expressing deep sorrow over the loss of the sailors.

Onaga to mention Osprey accident in speech at peace memorial event

Tokyo Shimbun projected that during his remarks at the Okinawa Peace Memorial Day event on Friday, Governor Onaga is likely to refer to the shallow-water landing of a Futenma-based Osprey that occurred last December in a bid to play up the continued danger that local residents are exposed to by the U.S. military on a daily basis. He might also criticize the U.S. military for continuing to conduct training that he claims runs counter to the 1996 SACO final report.

INTERNATIONAL

Disarray emerging among U.S., Japan, ROK toward North Korea

Asahi reported on the disclosure by a source involved in trilateral relations among the U.S., Japan, and South Korea that the Moon administration did not hold prior consultations with the two partners before announcing the administration's policy toward North Korea last week. The paper said that although the three countries previously shared the view that dialogue with the DPRK will not take place unless Pyongyang takes concrete steps toward denuclearization, the new government in Seoul appears to be distancing itself from Washington and Tokyo over how to deal with the defiant neighbor.

In related articles, other papers reported that a key foreign policy advisor to President Moon has been criticized at home and abroad for his recent remarks in Washington expressing sympathy for North Korea's views on the U.S. The ROK official reportedly said U.S.-South Korea military exercises can be reduced and that it is not necessary for the U.S. to deploy aircraft carriers in the region.

Abe supports rapprochement between U.S., China

Nikkei took up yesterday's press remarks by Prime Minister Abe, in which he commented on increasing economic and diplomatic policy coordination between the Trump administration and China by saying: "Greater cooperation between the U.S. and Chinese leaders will have a positive impact on Japan.... Applying pressure on North Korea through U.S.-China coordination at all levels serves Japan's interests." He mentioned the U.S.-Japan alliance and said: "It is important to hold close communications at all levels, including leaders and cabinet members, so as to build relations that are free of surprises."

Visit to Northern Territories by chartered flight cancelled due to inclement weather

All papers reported that the planned visit by former residents to their ancestors' graves in the Northern Territories by air was called off again due to foul weather on one of the four contested islands. Although the Japanese side is hoping to rearrange the visit in the summer, the Russians have been lukewarm toward the idea of using aircraft for grave visits by former residents from the start.

Abe to hold summit with EU leaders

Asahi reported that arrangements are being made for Prime Minister Abe to hold a summit with EU President Tusk and other senior EU officials in Brussels in early July when the Japanese leader travels to the region for the G20 summit in Germany. The premier is hoping to call global attention to the importance of promoting free trade by forging a rough consensus with EU leaders on an economic partnership agreement.

ECONOMY

EU to eliminate tariffs on Japanese sake and green tea

Yomiuri wrote that the EU is likely to agree to phase out duties on Japanese sake and green tea during ongoing EPA talks in a bid to elicit concessions on Japan's tariffs on European cheese. Nikkei claimed that the EU is prepared to remove tariffs on sake and green tea immediately.

Toshiba to choose consortium of U.S., Japanese, ROK companies

Sankei claimed that Toshiba is inclined to sell its semiconductor division to a consortium led by U.S. Bain Capital, South Korea's SK Hynix, the Innovation Network Corporation of Japan and several other Japanese investors based on the judgment that the Japanese side can continue have a say in the operations of Toshiba Memory even after its deconsolidation and that anti-trust review of the planned sale in multiple jurisdictions will go relatively smoothly. The paper added that Toshiba is set to reject a bid put forward by U.S. Broadcom out of concern that the U.S. chip maker might implement a massive restructuring of Toshiba Memory once it is sold.

GOJ to limit Japanese access to casinos as measure against gambling addiction

Yomiuri front-paged an outline of measures to be adopted by the GOJ to deal with gambling addiction, which is expected to increase when casinos are opened in Japan in the near future. According to the daily, Japanese customers will be required to present their "My Number" ID cards upon admission and weekly and monthly limits will be placed on the number of times they can enter casinos. Minors and those affiliated with crime syndicates will not be admitted. Advertisements for casinos will be prohibited in principle outside of "integrated resort" areas.