



Morning Alert - Monday, June 26, 2017

The following information reflects the reporting of the cited news media and does not reflect the opinions of the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo. Japan Media Highlights is intended for USG use only and should not be forwarded. Visit the website [here](#). For more information, contact TokyoMATT@state.gov.

HEADLINES

Morning News

NHK gave top play to a report that shogi player Sota Fujii will face off with another teenage player Yasuhiro Masuda today to aim for his 29th straight victory. NTV led with a follow-up report on the death of former TV announcer Mao Kobayashi due to breast cancer. TV Asahi gave top play to a report on a new type of international romance scam. Other top news included a follow-up report on the Kake Gakuen scandal.

Major front-page stories in national papers included a GOJ plan to equip ASDF F-35s with air-to-surface missiles, multiple cases of medical malpractice by the same doctors, the former South Korean Park administration's plot to topple the Kim Jong Un regime, and public opinion polls pointing to a strong performance by Tokyo Governor Koike's political group in the upcoming Tokyo metropolitan assembly election.

SECURITY

Prospects unclear for Japanese probe into Fitzgerald accident

Saturday evening's Asahi carried a prominent inside-page article on the ongoing investigation by the Japan Coast Guard (JCG) into the fatal collision between the USS Fitzgerald and a container vessel, noting that the focus of the probe is on which side was at fault in failing to honor maritime protocols to avoid the collision. While quoting an unnamed JCG official as saying, "It is unlikely that we would hold one side completely responsible for the accident," the paper said the JCG is interested in investigating the events that occurred on both ships leading up to the collision and the circumstances aboard the Aegis vessel under which the seven sailors were killed. The JCG is

reportedly looking into the possibility of professional negligence resulting death and injury in addition to endangerment of traffic caused by professional negligence.

The article noted that although an onsite investigation aboard the Fitzgerald and interviews with the warship crew will be essential to determine the cause of the accident, the JCG is pessimistic about obtaining U.S. investigative cooperation because of the SOFA. While noting that the U.S. Coast Guard has already questioned the crews of both vessels, one maritime source said: "Investigations into the accident are being carried out by the U.S. and Japan separately, not in coordination." A JCG source said: "Aegis warships are full of military secrets. We have no choice but to wait patiently for the U.S. to respond."

Sunday's Mainichi published a similar report, projecting that the JCG probe into the accident may become prolonged partially on account of the SOFA. The daily highlighted a statement released on Thursday by the Chief of Naval Operation Admiral Richardson, who said: "There are multiple U.S. and Japanese investigations underway to determine the facts of the collision. This process will unfold as quickly as possible, but it's important to get this right. We need to protect the integrity of those proceedings." The article added that the U.S. military has been not responsive to JCG's call for investigative cooperation.

Onaga criticizes GOJ in Okinawa Memorial Day speech

All papers reported on the Okinawa Peace Memorial Ceremony held in Itoman City on Friday, during which Prime Minister Abe pledged the central government's utmost efforts to reduce the security burden on the island prefecture. In his "peace declaration" speech, Governor Onaga leveled strong criticism against the Abe administration's moves to go ahead with the Futenma Replacement Facility construction, which he said runs counter to local sentiments. He vowed to block the relocation plan at all costs.

While noting that the governor also took up various problems associated with the U.S. military, such as the Osprey accident in December last year and recent parachute drop training at Kadena AB, Asahi said Onaga demonstrated a confrontational stance toward Tokyo out of frustration with the steady progress being made in the construction work off Camp Schwab. The daily projected that the governor is likely to step up his opposition to the relocation initiative ahead of the Nago mayoral election in January and gubernatorial election in the autumn of 2018. Mainichi said the absence of talks between the premier and the governor during Abe's six-hour visit to the southernmost prefecture signified a deep rift between Tokyo and Okinawa.

Japanese F-35s to be equipped with air-to-surface missiles

Monday's Yomiuri gave top play to a GOJ idea of mounting air-to-surface missiles on ASDF F-35s as a measure to strengthen remote island defense, noting that the necessary funding will be secured in the FY2018 budget. By equipping the stealth fighters with joint strike missiles (JSM) that can hit

targets up to 300 km away, the GOJ is looking into the possible acquisition of the ability to strike enemy bases to deal with North Korea's relentless pursuit of ballistic missiles. In a separate article, the daily said the proposed introduction of JSMs will expedite debate on the need to allow the SDF to possess enemy base strike capabilities, which will be extremely costly. Noting that the U.S. has been cautious about Japan acquiring such capabilities due to the security implications for the region, the paper said the GOJ is hoping to deepen discussion on the topic when the two nations' foreign and defense ministers meet in Washington on July 14.

Japan, U.S. to expand joint defense against DPRK missiles

Today's Tokyo Shimbun wrote that the U.S. and Japan are planning to expand the present joint missile defense arrangements against North Korea's ballistic missiles, given that Pyongyang appears to be pursuing the capability to launch missiles on lofted trajectories to make interception more difficult. In addition to building and updating its Aegis warships, Japan is likely to obtain an Aegis Ashore system. The GOJ plans to discuss the matter with the U.S. in the upcoming 2+2 security and foreign ministerial meeting next month.

Japan, U.S. to conduct anti-ship missile training for first time

Sunday's Sankei front-paged a joint drill to be carried out by the GSDF and the U.S. military involving surface to ship missiles, noting that this is the first bilateral training of its kind ever. The drill, which is reportedly aimed at dealing with China's maritime advancement in the South and East China Seas, will probably be held in Hawaii next summer as part of the RIMPAC multilateral exercises conducted by the U.S. Navy.

Atsugi commander says carrier-borne aircraft to continue using U.S. base

On Iwakuni Mayor Fukuda's official announcement on Friday that he will accept the planned relocation of a carrier-borne wing from NAF Atsugi to MCAS Iwakuni, Saturday morning's Tokyo Shimbun reported on remarks made on the same day by Atsugi Commander John Bushey, who said: "There will be flights by carrier-borne aircraft even though they are not based here. They may use the base for training." While underscoring the operational integrity of the USS Ronald Reagan and its FA-18s and other aircraft that will be relocated to Western Japan, the Navy captain indicated that the planes may fly to Atsugi for field carrier landing practice. The daily said in Monday's edition that Atsugi residents are concerned that noise pollution at the installation will not be reduced drastically even after the transfer of the air wing to Iwakuni.

Drone flies over U.S. Embassy

Sunday's Sankei reported briefly that an unidentified drone was witnessed flying over the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo at around 4 p.m. on Saturday, noting that while the police tried to track down the UAV, they failed to locate it. As drones are prohibited from flying over foreign missions, the police are searching for the operator. Fuji-TV and TBS aired similar stories.

INTERNATIONAL

Vice foreign minister to visit U.S.

All Saturday morning papers reported that Vice Foreign Minister Sugiyama plans to visit Washington for three days beginning on Monday for talks with Deputy Secretary of State Sullivan. The two officials are expected to exchange views on North Korea, China's militarization of the South China Sea, and other issues.

DPRK called for dispatch of ex-president as President Trump's envoy

Sunday's Mainichi led with the disclosure by an informed source connected to North Korea that the Kim Jong Un regime demanded that President Trump send one of his predecessors to Pyongyang as a special emissary if he wanted to secure the release of the four American citizens that were being detained in the reclusive regime. The daily suspected that the DPRK made this demand through several diplomatic channels, including the UN, with the dispatch of former President G. W. Bush in mind. The Trump administration reportedly rejected this request and instead sent Special Representative Yun to secure the release of Otto Warmbier.

DPRK demands direct dialogue with U.S.

Saturday evening's Asahi gave top play to the disclosure by former Assistant Secretary of State Gallucci, who held talks with senior DPRK diplomats in Kuala Lumpur last October. The former USG official said the North Korean officials called for direct dialogue with Washington on nuclear and missile issues "without China's involvement." According to Gallucci, the Kim Jong Un regime is irritated that Washington is relying on Beijing to deal with Pyongyang. He reportedly conveyed North Korea's desire for direct dialogue to the State Department.

U.S., Japan opposed to North Korea's plan to send diplomat to UN secretariat

Sunday's Sankei wrote that North Korea is planning to dispatch to the UN secretariat in New York a diplomat who has served as an interpreter for the foreign minister. The paper said the U.S. and Japan have expressed strong concern about the plan based on the belief that sensitive information, such as details of proposed sanctions, could be leaked to the reclusive regime through him. North Korea is reportedly aiming to dispatch the elite diplomat under the UN's Junior Professional Officer program.

GOJ displeased with ROK leader's remarks on comfort women

Most Saturday papers wrote that the GOJ filed a protest on Friday with the South Korean government against President Moon's remarks in recent interviews with U.S. media outlets, including the Washington Post, in which he criticized Japan's handling of the comfort women issue. The GOJ believes such remarks are not conducive to improving bilateral ties, as Prime Minister Abe is hoping to hold a summit with Moon on the margins of the G20 summit in Germany next month. An unnamed senior MOFA official said bilateral relations will become strained if the South Korean leader makes similar remarks at the planned summit. Sankei said although President Moon has refrained from

calling for renegotiation of the comfort women pact, he appears to be inclined to demand that Japan take additional steps, such as offering a formal apology.

Japan, China to convene maritime talks this week in Tokyo

Today's Nikkei wrote that senior working level officials from the Chinese Foreign and Defense Ministries will visit Japan this week for maritime talks, projecting that they will discuss the details of the agreed-upon launch of a communication mechanism between the SDF and the PLA to head off inadvertent confrontations at sea.

Japanese delegation to visit Northern Territories tomorrow

Sankei wrote that a Japanese fact-finding mission comprising GOJ officials and business people will travel to the Northern Territories tomorrow. During their five-day stay on the disputed islands, they will explore various ideas for launching "joint economic activities" with Russia. The daily said the Russian side has dismissed some of Japan's proposed locations for site surveys.

POLITICS

Abe says draft constitution to be submitted to Diet this year

All Sunday papers gave front- and inside-page coverage to a speech given by Prime Minister Abe in Kobe on Saturday, during which he expressed hope for the ruling LDP to submit its draft constitution for Diet deliberations "before the upcoming extraordinary Diet session ends" this year. Although the premier has previously voiced hope for amending the nation's supreme law in 2020, this was the first time for him to mention a concrete timeframe for the submission of a draft. By presenting an LDP draft by the end of this year and allowing Diet members to discuss it for about six months, Abe is reportedly looking to have the Diet propose constitutional amendments in June 2018 at the earliest for a national referendum.

Nikkei conjectured that Abe decided to propose a specific timetable for constitutional revision following the plunge in his public support so as to prevent his opponents in the ruling LDP from challenging his signature policy. The paper said a referendum on constitutional amendment could be held on the sidelines of the next general election depending on parliamentary debate on the purported LDP draft. The LDP's junior partner Komeito is perplexed by Abe's renewed push for constitutional amendment, while the largest opposition Democratic Party has reacted sharply to the premier's remarks.

In a follow-up development, most papers reported today on press remarks on Sunday by LDP Deputy Secretary General Shimomura, who said the ruling party will need to put together a draft constitution in early November in order to meet the prime minister's desired schedule.

Abe may reshuffle cabinet in early August

Saturday morning's Yomiuri said calls are mounting within the ruling LDP for Prime Minister Abe to reshuffle the cabinet in early August instead of late August as rumored in order to "change the mood" amid a plunge in public approval due to the administration's poor handling of the Kake Gakuen scandal. Some lawmakers are hoping that the premier will give popular politicians such as Shinjiro Koizumi and former Osaka Mayor Hashimoto key cabinet portfolios.

Koizumi-backed candidate wins Yokosuka mayoral race

Monday's Asahi and Mainichi reported that in Sunday's Yokosuka mayoral race the incumbent, Yuto Yoshida, was defeated by a candidate backed by LDP lawmaker Shinjiro Koizumi.

ECONOMY

Farm minister cancels European trip

All Saturday papers reported that Agriculture Minister Yamamoto on Friday called off a scheduled trip to Europe next week in response to strong opposition from LDP lawmakers, who are concerned that the minister will make concessions on agricultural import duties in ongoing EPA talks with the EU. The LDP farm clique is alarmed that the Abe administration is moving to strike a compromise on the agricultural front in exchange for obtaining European concessions on Japanese auto imports with the goal of swiftly concluding a free trade arrangement with Europe. The lawmakers and farmers are concerned that Japanese products will not be able compete with high-quality European products such as cheese if import tariffs are slashed. Sunday's Nikkei said the LDP plans to submit a motion to the GOJ on Monday or later urging it not to make major concessions on cheese and other European food imports.

Sunday's Yomiuri said in negotiating an EPA, Japan plans to eliminate import tariffs on over 90% of trade items, which is close to the level under the TPP for which Tokyo pledged to abolish tariffs on almost 95% of trade items. While duties on all industrial imports will be removed, the trade liberalization level for European agricultural imports will probably be around 80%.

Sunday's Nikkei said that in the ongoing EPA talks, Japan is demanding the accelerated removal of EU tariffs on Japanese auto imports in view of the surge in South Korean auto exports to the European continent following the conclusion of a bilateral EPA in 2011. The same daily said in a separate article that Japan has decided to seal an FTA with the UK following its departure from the EU, noting that by securing tariff reductions under a trade liberalization arrangement with London to a level equivalent to a Japan-EU EPA, the GOJ is hoping to minimize the adverse effects of Brexit on Japanese companies.

Apple may join U.S.-Japan-ROK consortium to purchase Toshiba Memory

Saturday morning's Yomiuri wrote that Apple Inc. is considering joining a consortium led by the Innovation Network Corporation of Japan, U.S. Bain Capital, and South Korean SK Hynix to acquire

Toshiba's semiconductor business with the goal of ensuring the steady procurement of flash memory chips for its iPhones and other devices.

Taiwanese leader expresses hope to join TPP

Saturday morning's Nikkei front-paged an interview with Taiwanese Prime Minister Lin Chuan, who voiced strong hope for Taiwan to become a member of the TPP. He reportedly sought Japanese assistance in joining the regional free trade framework.

