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# JAPAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

Morning Alert - Monday, July 10, 2017

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## HEADLINES

### Morning news

Most networks continued to report on the damage caused by record rainfall in the Kyushu region, which claimed 21 lives. NHK warned that heavy rain is forecast for Western Japan today. NTV led with a report on torrential rain in Osaka on Sunday.

Major front-page items in national papers included the plunge in public approval of the Abe cabinet, the Iraqi government's announcement on Sunday on the liberation of Mosul from ISIL control, strong opposition from the operators of existing veterinary schools to Prime Minister Abe's idea of allowing similar schools to be launched across the nation, and Abe's press remarks yesterday hinting at a plan to reshuffle his cabinet early next month.

## POLITICS

### Cabinet support drops to record low

Monday's Yomiuri and Asahi both led with the results of their latest public opinion surveys, with Yomiuri's poll putting support for the Abe cabinet at 36% (down 13 points from three weeks ago) and Asahi's at 33% (down 5 points from a week ago). The papers emphasized that the ratings marked a record low since the prime minister took office in December 2012. Nonsupport exceeded support in both polls, standing at 52% (up 11 points) in the Yomiuri poll and 47% (up 5 points) in the Asahi one. The papers said public confidence in the administration appears to be waning steadily, as distrust over the prime minister's handling of the Kake Gakuen scandal is deepening. Almost 70% of Yomiuri respondents found Abe to be "arrogant." The premier commented on the steep drop in his approval ratings last night by saying: "I would like to take this seriously as a reflection of the people's voices. I'd like to regain public trust by moving forward with policies." Yomiuri added that support for the LDP also plummeted to 31%, down 10 points, while that for the largest opposition Democratic Party

remained almost the same at 7%. Some 47% said they did not support any political party, up 7 points.

### **Administration officials alarmed by erosion of public trust**

Yomiuri wrote that since cabinet approval has plunged by almost 30% in the past five months among female respondents, many LDP officials are deeply apprehensive about the prospects for the next general election. Given that some voters expressed strong hope for the Tomin First party effectively led by popular Tokyo Governor Koike to field candidates in national elections, LDP politicians are concerned that the ruling party may lose many seats especially in the Tokyo metropolitan area.

### **Abe to reorganize cabinet lineup on August 3**

Most Saturday papers projected that Prime Minister Abe is likely to reshuffle his cabinet on Aug. 3 in a bid to turn around mounting criticism of his leadership among the public and LDP politicians following the ruling party's historic defeat in the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly election. While retaining Deputy Prime Minister Aso and Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga, the premier is expected to replace Defense Minister Inada and Justice Minister Kaneda. Asahi said greater attention will be paid to whether Abe will ask Foreign Minister Kishida to stay on because Kishida has recently been making somewhat critical comments about the prime minister on such issues as Abenomics and constitutional revision perhaps in a bid to seek the LDP presidency. Attention will also be focused on whether the prime minister will tap former Economic and Fiscal Policy Minister Amari, in whom Abe has strong confidence. Sankei speculated that LDP Policy Research Council Chairman Motegi will be given the post of foreign minister.

Monday papers took up Abe's press remarks in Stockholm on Sunday, in which he indicated that Aso and Suga will remain in their posts. The prime minister said: "The core cabinet members must not be changed frequently." The papers said the fate of the Abe administration may depend on how the public will react to the new cabinet lineup, with Mainichi speculating that many current cabinet members will be replaced as the prime minister is desperate to turn around the deepening public distrust of his leadership.

### **Abe vows to put together draft constitution by year's end**

All papers reported this morning from Stockholm that Prime Minister Abe told the press on Sunday that his plan to have the LDP draft a constitution this year for revision as early as 2018 remains unchanged despite the LDP's recent election setback. "I think it is entirely possible for the LDP to put together a draft before the next Diet session ends," said Abe. However, Yomiuri wrote that opposition to the prime minister's timetable is growing sharply within the LDP, quoting an unnamed veteran legislator as saying: "Public distrust of the premier runs too deep to allow him to amend the Constitution."

## **INTERNATIONAL**

### **Japanese, U.S. leaders discuss trade imbalance**

All Sunday papers reported extensively on Sunday's summit in Hamburg between Prime Minister Abe and President Trump, during which the U.S. leader mentioned the "U.S. trade deficit and reciprocal market access" for the first time in a bilateral meeting with the Japanese premier. In response, Abe said: "I would like Deputy Prime Minister Aso and Vice President Pence to discuss measures for enhancing the win-win relationship." The papers said the Trump administration may renew its call for Japan to open its market to American imports, with Nikkei saying that some U.S. industries, including beef and pork, are concerned that market access to Japan will be constrained by the U.S.'s withdrawal from the TPP especially given that Japan has just reached a rough free trade agreement with the EU. Today's Yomiuri speculated that the Trump administration may further pressure Japan to open its market, as the clout of Commerce Secretary Ross, who is viewed as a trade hawk, is reportedly growing within the U.S. government.

### **Abe, Moon agree to increase communication despite gap over comfort women pact**

All Saturday morning papers gave prominent front- and inside-page play to the first meeting between Prime Minister Abe and South Korean President Moon in Hamburg on Friday, during which they agreed to develop a future-oriented bilateral relationship by resuming "shuttle diplomacy" under which the two leaders make alternating visits to each other's countries. In reply to Abe's request for the steady implementation of the 2015 comfort women agreement, Moon said: "A wise solution must be pursued through mutual efforts while acknowledging that a large majority of the Korean people are emotionally averse to accepting the pact." The ROK leader, however, did not mention a need for renegotiations, stating instead: "While it is true that difficult problems exist between the two neighbors, common interests dictate that we need to manage those issues so they don't have adverse effects on the overall relationship." On North Korea, Abe stressed the importance of applying greater pressure by preventing Pyongyang from earning hard currency. The two leaders agreed to deepen trilateral security cooperation with the U.S. to counter North Korea's missile and nuclear development.

The papers said Abe and Moon agreed to keep history issues separate from political, economic, and security cooperation in the face of North Korea's relentless provocations. Yomiuri said that in his first summit with Abe, Moon chose to take a "realistic" line by refraining from demanding renegotiation of the comfort women accord. The papers speculated that when it comes to dealing with Japan, there is a tug of war underway within the Moon administration between hardliners and pragmatists, adding that the issue of the comfort women will remain a potential "hot potato" between Tokyo and Seoul. The dailies voiced qualms about possible disarray in trilateral relations, as the U.S. and Japan are skeptical about the Moon administration's inclination to seek dialogue with Pyongyang.

### **Abe, Xi agree to improve bilateral ties**

All Sunday dailies took up Abe's meeting with Chinese President Xi in Hamburg on Saturday on the margins of the G20 summit, noting that the two leaders were eager to improve bilateral ties. Abe expressed support for Xi's signature policy of creating a transcontinental "One Belt, One Road" economic zone. The Japanese leader apparently wanted to highlight rapprochement with Beijing as a major diplomatic achievement in order to regain his grip on power that has been undermined due to the LDP's dismal performance in the recent Tokyo assembly election.

As for China, the papers said President Xi was also anxious to mend ties with Tokyo especially at a time when its relations with the U.S. and South Korea have become strained. Ensuring stable relations with China's neighbors is critical for Xi, who would like to reinforce his power base ahead of the Communist Party convention in the autumn. The papers added, however, that friction between Tokyo and Beijing may reemerge over the Senkaku dispute and China's militarization of the South China Sea. Sankei claimed that the Chinese leader apparently did not fully embrace Abe's enthusiasm for improving bilateral relations.

### **Abe, Putin agree to expedite talks on joint economic activities in Northern Territories**

All Sunday papers wrote that Prime Minister Abe and Russian President Putin met in Hamburg on Friday and agreed to accelerate talks by working-level officials in order to swiftly implement joint economic activities in the Northern Territories. The two nations' vice foreign ministers plan to hold talks in Moscow in late August to identify specific joint projects on the disputed islands. The papers projected, however, that it will be difficult for the two parties to work out a "special legal system" for implementing the joint activities in a manner that does not compromise each party's legal claims. Tokyo is reportedly concerned that following Moscow's recent designation of the four islets as a special economic zone, foreign companies will be tempted to make investments there based on Russian laws.

### **U.S. isolation pronounced at G20 confab**

All Sunday papers reported on the conclusion of the G20 summit, emphasizing a deep schism between the U.S. and other members on such key issues as global trade and climate change. The Hamburg declaration released at the end of the meeting expressed the assembled leaders' commitment to "maintaining open markets" and "fighting protectionism." However, the document also mentioned the members' rights to use "legitimate" defenses against "unfair trade practices," apparently out of deference to the Trump administration. As for global warming, all the leaders other than President Trump shared the view that the Paris climate accord "is irreversible," with German Chancellor Merkel, who chaired the G20 meeting, stating: "It is obvious that we cannot reach a consensus. I am not going to paper over the differences."

The dailies said President Trump appeared to be indifferent to being the odd man out at the summit, stressing that his "America First" doctrine made it impossible for the G20 leaders to reach a

consensus on critical global issues. They also highlighted President Trump's "unusual behavior" in the meeting, such as allowing his daughter Ivanka to briefly take his place in the summit and leaving the venue in the middle of the discussions on climate change to attend a summit with Russian President Putin.

In a related story, Nikkei said that throughout the summit, Prime Minister Abe was trying to "serve as a bridge" between President Trump and other G20 leaders in the belief that nothing good will come out of America becoming isolated. While emphasizing the importance of free trade, the Japanese leader apparently defended Trump's position on trade by underscoring the need to adhere to fair trade rules. The prime minister also echoed President Trump's insistence on stepping up pressure on North Korea during the leaders' discussions on security issues.

### **G20 fails to adopt unified approach toward North Korea**

The papers said although North Korea's nuclear and missile development was one of the major issues discussed at the G20 conference, the participants failed to agree on how to rein in the defiant Kim regime because of a split between hardliners and those calling for a conciliatory approach led by China and Russia. The papers said the Hamburg declaration failed to take up the North Korea issue due to opposition from participants such as China.

### **Japan to host G20 summit in 2019**

All papers reported that Japan was officially selected by the 20 leaders as the host nation of the G20 summit in 2019. Next year's summit will be held in Argentina.

### **New Zealand to procure American rather than Japanese patrol plane**

Sunday's Sankei wrote that Japan appears to be failing in its bid to export its P-1 patrol planes to New Zealand, as Wellington is reportedly planning to procure the P-8 used by the U.S. Navy. The paper said this will be the third setback in Tokyo's attempts to market its defense equipment abroad, which has become possible as a result of the easing of the three principles on arms export in 2014. In a separate piece, the daily blamed the Acquisition, Technology & Logistics Agency for failing to win weapons export contracts, insisting that its organizational structure and personnel appointments have to be changed quickly so that it can draw up an effective arms export strategy in a "proactive" manner.

### **UN Nuclear Weapons Convention enacted**

All Saturday morning papers reported from New York that the Nuclear Weapons Convention (NWC) was approved on Friday during a UN meeting. The dailies asserted, however, that the NWC proponents' goal of banning the development, use, and possession of nuclear weapons will be difficult to achieve because all of the nuclear powers boycotted the negotiations. The fact that many nations under the U.S. nuclear umbrella, such as Japan and South Korea, did not take part in the negotiations also revealed a deep rift in efforts to achieve a world without nuclear weapons. In

follow-up reports, the papers wrote on Sunday that the U.S., the UK, and France formally announced on Friday their intentions not to sign the NWC. Japanese Ambassador to the UN Bessho also told the press that Tokyo will not sign the convention.

## ECONOMY

### **G20 leaders agree to address excess steel production**

All Saturday morning dailies reported on the opening of the G20 summit in Hamburg on Friday, noting that the participants agreed to address the issue of excess steel production on a global scale. Because the Trump administration is considering invoking Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act to restrict steel imports for national security reasons, the dailies said Japan and Europe are eager to urge Washington not to adopt the proposed steel restrictions so as to dissuade other countries from taking protectionist measures. Sunday's Yomiuri said Europe is reacting sharply to Washington's moves to restrict steel imports, expressing concern that a steel trade war between the two continents would disrupt global trade.

### **Japan anxious to conclude deal for early effectuation of TPP**

Today's Sankei reported on a TPP chief negotiators' meeting to be held in Hakone for three days beginning on Wednesday, noting that Japan is keen to capitalize on its recent EPA accord with the EU to promptly effectuate the free trade accord in the Asia-Pacific region. The article said that in the upcoming talks, Tokyo is hoping to work out the details for early effectuation by the 11 members by modifying the current arrangements, including a provision that makes the effectuation impossible without U.S. participation.

