



Morning Alert - Tuesday, July 11, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK continued to give heavy coverage to the damage caused by record rainfall in the Kyushu region, saying that the death toll has now reached 25. NTV led with a report that venomous red fire ants have been found in Kasugai, Aichi Prefecture, saying this is the first discovery of the ants in an inland area of Japan. TBS, Fuji TV, and TV Asahi gave top play to Monday's Diet testimony by former Vice Education Minister Maekawa regarding the Kake Gakuen scandal.

Front-page stories in national papers included Maekawa's testimony at the Diet, the effectuation of the anti-conspiracy law, and updates on the liberation of Mosul from ISIL control.

POLITICS

LDP alarmed by growing public discontent with prime minister

All papers reported on the strong apprehension among LDP politicians over the rapid decline in Prime Minister Abe's popularity as evidenced by the results of public opinion surveys conducted over the weekend by four major media outlets, including Yomiuri and NHK. Their concern about the prospects for the next general election has deepened because public approval for the ruling party has also plunged. These legislators are alarmed by the severe criticism leveled against the premier and the ruling party by their local constituents. As Abe is rapidly losing his grip on power amid the steep drop in public support, the dailies suspected that the cabinet reshuffle planned for early August may not be able to turn around growing pessimism over the fate of the administration. Asahi speculated that if Abe's support rates drop below 30%, calls may emerge within the LDP for the premier to step down ahead of the next national election.

Yomiuri added that ruling party Diet members are split over Abe's plan to submit an LDP draft on constitutional revision by year's end, with proponents insisting that his leadership will be weakened further if he gives up on the plan, while opponents argue that plunging support rates point to the voters' skepticism about Abe's resolve to amend the nation's supreme law.

Nikkei reported on rallies calling for Abe's resignation that were held on Sunday in Shinjuku and six other locations across the nation, noting that the events were organized spontaneously in response to social media messaging by a group that is critical of the Abe administration.

In a related story, Mainichi claimed in a front-page story that Abe is likely to retain LDP Secretary General Nikai when he changes the lineup of the LDP leadership and the cabinet next month in order to rely on the veteran lawmaker's strong ties with key Chinese and South Korean officials. Abe will also ask LDP Vice President Komura to stay on so that the lawyer-turned legislator can take the initiative in drafting a new constitution.

Anti-conspiracy law goes into effect

All papers reported that the controversial anti-conspiracy law took effect today, noting that the effectuation will allow Japan to accede to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC). Sankei said the GOJ will submit relevant documents for accession to the UN secretary general today, projecting that the UNTOC will take effect in Japan starting on Aug. 10 at the earliest.

The government is reportedly underscoring the statute's effectiveness in heading off acts of terrorism, with Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga telling the press yesterday: "It will play a very significant role in combating terrorism." However, most papers expressed qualms about the possible abuse of the law by the police, highlighting some experts' concern that ordinary citizens may be monitored and stalked by the police possibly through wiretapping on the grounds that they might be "indirect accomplices" to criminal conspiracy planned by "organized crime syndicates."

Candidates close to Onaga lose majority in Naha assembly

Sankei and Tokyo Shimbun reported on the results of Sunday's Naha municipal assembly election, noting that only 18 candidates close to Governor Onaga prevailed, two short of a majority in the 40-member legislature. Pointing out that the governor served as the mayor of Naha for almost 15 years until 2014 and that the candidates backed by him have been defeated in three mayoral races in the island prefecture this year, the articles said the latest election setback has cast a dark cloud over the governor's probable bid to seek reelection next year. Opponents of Futenma relocation were reportedly shocked by the election outcome and are concerned about the possible weakening of the governor's grip on power.

INTERNATIONAL

U.S.-Japan 2+2 meeting postponed

Yomiuri wrote that the USG and the GOJ have decided to put off a bilateral foreign and defense ministerial meeting originally scheduled to be held in Washington on July 14, noting that the Trump administration has turned down a Japanese proposal to hold the meeting on July 17 or later since Foreign Minister Kishida is expected to attend a UN conference on that day. The daily speculated that the meeting will probably be postponed until the autumn. Asahi ran a similar story, adding that Defense Minister Inada will call off her scheduled visit to Hawaii to observe an Aegis Ashore platform.

ROK minister pledges support for adding comfort women to UNESCO World Memory list

Most papers reported from Seoul on a meeting held on Monday between several former comfort women and South Korea's minister of gender equality and family, during which the official promised the Moon administration's support for having the comfort women issue included in UNESCO's Memory of the World Register. This position marks a turnaround because the previous Park administration chose not to pursue the idea following the conclusion of the comfort women agreement with Japan in December 2015. The minister said the government will examine whether it will be possible to renegotiate the agreement, stressing that the matter is no longer a bilateral issue with Japan but an issue with international implications. She added that the government will open a comfort women museum in the capital.

Japan participates in trilateral naval drill with U.S., India

All papers reported that a trilateral exercise involving the navies of the U.S., India, and Japan started yesterday in the Indian Ocean, noting that the Malabar naval exercise is intended to hold China's maritime push in the region and the South China Sea in check. Some 16 warships, including the USS Nimitz and MSDF helicopter destroyer Hyuga, as well as two submarines and more than 90 airplanes, are expected to take part in various training exercises at sea. MSDF Deputy Chief of Staff Yamaura said: "Maintaining stability in the Indian Ocean serves the interests of the three countries.... The most important goal of the exercise is to enhance cooperation with the U.S. and India." Asahi added that the three navies are wary of active submarine operations conducted by the PLA in the Indian Ocean in recent years.

Japan, Finland agree to enhance defense cooperation

Nikkei wrote from Helsinki that visiting Prime Minister Abe and Finnish President Niinistö held a summit on Monday and agreed to strengthen their strategic partnership by increasing dialogue and exchanges between their two defense authorities. The two officials also discussed North Korea and shared the view that China could play a larger role in reining in the defiant Kim regime.

