



Morning Alert - Thursday, July 13, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning news

All networks gave top play to reports on an incident in which a 71-year-old assistant nurse was arrested on charges of regularly adding sleeping medication to the drinks of her colleagues at a nursing home in Chiba, one of whom was killed in a car accident.

Most papers gave top play to the Tokyo Summary Court's decision to officially put on trial advertising giant Dentsu for the suicide of an employee who had complained about extreme overwork and exhaustion.

INTERNATIONAL

U.S., Japan making arrangements to hold "2+2" meeting as early as mid-August

TV Tokyo reported on Wednesday afternoon on the finding that the governments of the U.S. and Japan are making arrangements to hold a "2+2" meeting of defense and foreign ministers as early as mid-August in Washington. The network said the USG sounded out Japan on holding the meeting in August, adding that the GOJ is arranging the meeting based on the assumption that Defense Minister Inada will be replaced in the cabinet reshuffle planned for early August.

U.S. diplomat comments on nuclear weapons ban treaty

Mainichi published a telephone interview with U.S. Permanent Representative to Conference on Disarmament Wood regarding the recent adoption of the Nuclear Weapons Convention (NWC). He expressed doubts about the treaty by saying: "NWC signatories don't have the answers for preventing North Korea's nuclear weapons and missiles.... Only nuclear deterrence has maintained peace and security in Europe and Asia for many years." The U.S. ambassador said the GOJ

apparently thought the convention would not serve its national interests and urged Tokyo and other nations not to sign it, while noting the pact's adverse effects on international security.

Xi asked Abe to keep political disputes separate from economic cooperation

Yomiuri front-paged a story on the recent meeting in Hamburg between Prime Minister Abe and Chinese President Xi on the margins of the G20 summit, claiming that the Chinese leader asked the premier to set aside political differences so as to deepen bilateral economic cooperation. Xi reportedly said: "Although political agenda items must be resolved one by one, they must not hamper the development of bilateral economic relations." The daily speculated that Xi made this proposal in order to enlist Japanese support for his "One Belt, One Road" economic initiative amid economic deceleration at home in order to cement his political standing prior to the Chinese Communist Party convention in the fall. Abe embraced the Chinese initiative to improve bilateral ties with the goal of obtaining more cooperation from Beijing in reining in North Korea.

SECURITY

Japanese missile interceptors to be installed at Yokota AB for training

Asahi wrote that ASDF PAC-3 anti-missile batteries will be deployed at Yokota AB in August for training purposes in order to counter North Korea's relentless provocations. The paper said the installation will constitute a "concrete action," which Japan and the U.S. have promised to take in responding to Pyongyang's repeated missile tests. The batteries will be installed in Tokyo in response to a request from the Japanese government, which reportedly insisted that they should be in Tokyo instead of Misawa AB as originally envisaged so as to display the two nations' strong security coordination. The daily said the Yokota base will be temporarily designated for "shared use" under the SOFA so that the Japanese missile interceptors can be brought in.

Inada's remarks on Futenma relocation cause stir

Asahi reported on strong reactions from Okinawa to remarks made at the Diet in mid-June by Defense Minister Inada, who said that unless all of the eight conditions that the two governments agreed upon in 2013 for returning MCAS Futenma to Japan are met, the installation will not be reverted even if a replacement facility is built off Camp Schwab. The minister apparently had in mind the U.S.'s request for the use of Japanese commercial airports by the U.S. military in the event of a contingency. Okinawa officials suspect that Inada was hinting at the use of Naha Airport in Okinawa during a crisis. According to the daily, the minister clarified the controversial remark in question by telling the press last week: "It is inconceivable that the Futenma base will not be returned after the relevant functions are transferred to Henoko."

ECONOMY

President Trump mentioned nontariff barriers in auto trade during meeting with Abe

Mainichi took up the disclosure by several GOJ sources that during his summit with Prime Minister Abe in Germany last week, President Trump took issue with nontariff barriers in the Japanese automotive market. The U.S. leader reportedly referred to Japanese safety and environmental standards as nontariff barriers to U.S. auto imports. The President also took up problems in other industrial sectors that were not specified in the article, asking the premier to rectify the bilateral trade imbalance. They agreed that these issues should be addressed in the economic dialogue co-chaired by Vice President Pence and Deputy Prime Minister Aso.

Some TPP members take issue with early effectuation

All papers reported on the start of a three-day TPP chief negotiators' meeting in Hakone on Wednesday, quoting Japanese representative Umemoto as telling the press last night: "All the members have agreed on early effectuation. We have discussed possible arrangements that will entice the United States to return to the TPP." According to the article, however, some participants raised potential legal issues with altering the agreement that was reached by the U.S. and the remaining 11 members. The dailies said the members are divided over the scope of modification in order to effectuate the regional free trade pact quickly without U.S. membership. Nikkei said the 11 members are hoping to reach by November a rough consensus on how and when to put the accord into force.

POLITICS

Kishida torn between Kantei and close associates

Mainichi wrote that close attention is being paid to whether Foreign Minister Kishida will stay in the Abe cabinet when Prime Minister Abe reshuffles it in early August. Although the Kantei appears to be inclined to retain him, many members of his LDP faction are insisting that he should turn down an offer to stay in his post so that he can speak more freely about his ideas in a bid to seek the party presidency in the future. Kishida's close associates are calling for him to break away from the prime minister especially at a time when Abe's grip on power is eroding following the historic defeat sustained by the LDP in the recent Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly race. The foreign minister is reportedly undecided on whether to accept the premier's probable offer for continued service out of fear that he may not be given a prominent LDP portfolio if he turns down the proposal.

LDP politician abandons bid to unseat anti-base mayor in Nago

Asahi reported that a former Okinawa prefectural government official has decided not to run in the Nago mayoral election next January due to his family's opposition, noting that since the LDP had planned to support his candidacy to unseat incumbent anti-base Mayor Inamine, it will now have to search for a new candidate.

Yomiuri ran a similar story, adding that Governor Onaga is expected to support Inamine's reelection bid to ensure his own reelection bid in the gubernatorial race in November 2018 and to play up local residents' support for their signature policy of blocking the FRF initiative, as he plans to file a lawsuit

later this month against the central government seeking a court injunction to halt the construction work. It added that the governor's political standing has weakened gradually in the face of the dismal performance by candidates close to him in several key elections in the island prefecture this year.

Abe administration to commit resources to backing candidates in local elections

Nikkei reported that the fate of the Abe administration may depend on the outcome of the Sendai mayoral election on July 23, the Yokohama mayoral election on July 30, and the by-election in Ehime in October, as the LDP is desperate to address the growing public discontent with the prime minister demonstrated by the results of the recent Tokyo assembly race. As LDP-backed candidates are likely to face off with opposition contestants in the three races, the Abe administration and the LDP are expected to commit maximum political resources to ensuring their candidates' victories.
