



Morning Alert - Wednesday, July 19, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK gave led with a report that a panel of the Legislative Council of the Ministry of Justice has drafted a proposal aimed at preventing bereaved spouses from losing their homes when the deceased's assets are settled. NTV led with a report on Keisuke Honda's announcement on Tuesday that he will join a Mexican soccer team. Fuji TV and TV Asahi gave top play to reports on scattered hailstorms in Tokyo on Tuesday. TBS led with a report that a special Diet session will be convened on July 24 to discuss allegations of favoritism involving Prime Minister Abe.

Major front-page stories in national papers included a USG plan to prosecute a Chinese company on charges of money laundering for North Korea, discussions by a Justice Ministry panel on estate laws, DP President Renho's press conference on Tuesday where she disclosed legal records to prove her nationality, and an update on a Defense Ministry scandal regarding logs kept by the GSDF engineering battalion engaged in a UN PKO in South Sudan.

INTERNATIONAL

U.S., Japan worried about ROK moves to hold dialogue with North

All papers reported that the U.S. and Japan are concerned about the Moon administration's proposal for holding dialogue with the DPRK based on the judgment that such a conciliatory gesture may render enhanced sanctions on Pyongyang irrelevant. The proposal flies in the face of a joint statement issued earlier this month by the leaders of the three countries expressing their resolve to "apply maximum pressure" on the North. Mainichi ran an interview with a senior Blue House official,

who said the overtures were extended to Pyongyang out of consideration for domestic calls for dialogue, adding that when it comes to taking a concerted approach toward the Kim regime, Seoul will spearhead dialogue while Tokyo and Washington will focus on pressure.

Blue House discovers documents pointing to “illicit instructions” on comfort women pact

Tuesday evening’s Asahi and Tokyo Shimbun reported from Seoul on a Blue House announcement on Monday that among the more than 1,300 recently discovered documents created under the previous Park administration, papers have been found that prove the existence of “illegal instructions” given to offices by the then Blue House chief of staff concerning the Japan-South Korea comfort women agreement. As President Moon has asked government agencies to scrutinize the internal administrative procedures leading to the conclusion of the bilateral history accord, the articles speculated that the Moon administration may move to nullify it if procedural problems are found.

GOJ displeased with Chinese ships repeatedly entering Japan’s territorial waters

Most papers reported that Japan is displeased by the recent incidents in which two China Coast Guard patrol boats briefly entered Japan’s territorial waters off Kyushu on Saturday and Aomori on Monday. Although Beijing gave Tokyo prior notification on the passage on the way to the Pacific to “participate in a joint fisheries patrol operation” with foreign countries, Japan is still alarmed by the possibility that China may conduct similar operations in the name of protecting its fishermen. Yomiuri speculated that the move was “revenge” for Japan’s support for the U.S. Navy’s freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea. The paper also said that the operation may have been designed to reinforce the Xi administration’s grip on power at home ahead of the Communist Party convention in the fall.

U.S. to indict Chinese firm for money laundering for DPRK

Yomiuri gave top play to a disclosure by a USG source that the Justice Department has decided to press criminal charges against a Chinese firm based in Shenyang over its involvement in money laundering for the Kim Jong Un dynasty. The move signals the Trump administration’s policy of stepping up pressure on Beijing to restrain its defiant neighbor. According to the daily, Washington is also considering imposing financial sanctions on Russian and Singaporean enterprises allegedly engaged in illicit transactions with North Korea in a bid to send a message that the Trump administration is “not necessarily singling out China,” in the words of the same USG source.

“Aircraft carriers” from U.S., India, Japan hold joint drill

Mainichi took up the ongoing Malabar trilateral exercise in the Indian Ocean by the navies of the U.S., Japan, and India. The paper highlighted a drill on Monday in which the USS Nimitz conducted joint training with the MSDF helicopter carrier Izumo and the Indian aircraft carrier INS Vikramaditya. Rear Admiral William Byrne, commander of the Nimitz Strike Group, reportedly said that the three

navies learned how to deal with future crises, such as humanitarian relief operations in natural disasters and anti-piracy operations.

Japan signs pact with Germany on transfer of defense equipment, technology

Asahi took up the disclosure by several sources involved in Japan-Germany relations that the two governments signed an agreement concerning the transfer of defense equipment and technology in Berlin on Monday, noting that the German government requested that no official announcement be made. Some MOD officials are worried that the failure to make an announcement runs counter to the spirit of the eased three arms export principles calling for “transparency.”

SECURITY

Osprey deployment in Saga to be postponed

Nikkei front-paged a speculative piece saying that the planned deployment of GSDF Ospreys at Saga Airport will probably be postponed by two years at least until FY2021 given the ongoing delay in negotiations with local fishermen and the acquisition of land for hosting the tilt-rotor planes. The daily said the likely delay in the MV-22 deployment in Saga may have adverse effects on the scheduled establishment in Sasebo, Nagasaki, by next March of an SDF unit specializing in remote island defense because troops there will supposedly be airlifted by the Saga-based Ospreys.

Local officials express appreciation for rescue operation by off-duty Marines on Mt. Fuji

Tuesday evening’s Tokyo Shimbun published a report on the five Okinawa-based Marines who rescued a Japanese woman while climbing Mt. Fuji when she became incapacitated because of altitude sickness in early July. The off-duty Marines carried her in a makeshift stretcher for nearly two miles to a lower station for medical treatment. Local officials were amazed by and grateful for the “extremely speedy and seamless” rescue operation undertaken by the service members, with a Japanese alpinist saying: “They are well-trained rescue professionals.” Cpl. Christopher Ehms was quoted by the daily as saying: “We thought the woman needed to get down immediately.”

American Airlines crewmember caught with 30 live bullets at Narita

NHK reported this morning that an American male crewmember of American Airlines was found to be in possession of 30 live bullets at Narita Airport on July 15. According to the network, the bullets were found in his luggage during security screening at the airport when he was about to depart for the U.S. The network said he told the police that he mistakenly brought the bullets from home, adding that since the bullets were confiscated and the airline cooperated with the police investigation, the crewmember was allowed to leave for Dallas.

POLITICS

Inada approved plan not to disclose existence of SDF daily activity logs from South Sudan

Mainichi and Tokyo Shimbun led with a Kyodo piece on the disclosure by several GOJ sources that Defense Minister Inada approved in mid-February a decision reached by senior MOD officials that the ministry would not disclose the existence of daily activities logs kept by the GSDF engineering battalion engaged in UN peacekeeping operations in South Sudan, which the ministry initially claimed had been destroyed. According to the story, Inada approved the decision at a Feb. 15 meeting attended by a number of high-ranking officials, including the vice defense minister and the GSDF chief of staff. Pointing out that Inada has explained to the Diet up until now that she had not been informed by her deputies of what had happened to the GSDF documents in question, the article predicted that calls for her resignation will escalate since the latest finding apparently contradicts her previous remarks at the parliament.

ECONOMY

U.S. may apply pressure on “currency manipulation”

On the USTR’s announcement on Monday that it is seeking a provision to deter currency manipulation as part of its renegotiation of NAFTA, Mainichi said this move might set a precedent in U.S. trade deals with other foreign partners, including Japan. The daily said the Trump administration may ratchet up the pressure on Japan, China, and South Korea to reduce their trade surpluses with the U.S. by insisting that they are engaging in currency manipulation.

Japan, Mexico to enhance coordination for early effectuation of TPP

Yomiuri and Asahi reported on a meeting held yesterday between Economic and Fiscal Policy Minister Ishihara and visiting Mexican Economy Minister Guajardo, during which they agreed to enhance mutual coordination so as to effectuate the TPP at an early date.

