



Morning Alert - Thursday, July 20, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK gave top play to a report that the LDP and the DP reached an agreement to hold budget committee meetings at the Lower House on July 24 and the Upper House on July 25 with Prime Minister Abe in attendance to discuss the Kake Gakuen scandal. TBS and TV Asahi gave top play to reports that Defense Minister Inada dismissed a media report that she approved a decision to deny the existence of some daily activity logs kept by the GSDF troops in South Sudan. Fuji TV reported that Yomiuri Giants pitcher Yamaguchi allegedly injured a guard at a Tokyo hospital while intoxicated on July 11. NTV led with a report that the temperature in central Tokyo exceeded 30 degrees Celsius for the 15th day in a row on Wednesday.

Top stories in national dailies included Regulatory Reform Minister Yamamoto's alleged statement to the Japan Veterinary Medical Association in November 2016 on a plan to open a new veterinary school in Shikoku (Asahi, Mainichi); a proposal on starting the 2020 Olympic torch relay from either Okinawa or Miyagi Prefecture (Yomiuri); a plan by the U.S., Japan, Europe, China, and South Korea to set common specifications for 5G data services for mobile communications by around 2020 (Nikkei); and a court ruling against a claim by a pro-Pyongyang school operator in Hiroshima that it is entitled to participate in the GOJ's tuition waiver program covering most high schools in the nation (Sankei).

POLITICS

Inada's ability to govern ministry being questioned

All papers front-paged reports on remarks made to the press on Wednesday by Defense Minister Inada, during which she denied earlier news reports alleging that she approved a decision to withhold the fact that some logs detailing the activities of the GSDF in South Sudan existed.

Asahi and Nikkei speculated that growing dissatisfaction within the GSDF toward the defense minister and senior ministry officials over their plan to blame the GSDF for the log concealment scandal led to the reemergence of the issue in the media. Yomiuri wrote that Inada's grip on power is clearly weakening.

Mainichi and Sankei wrote that they learned from several GOJ sources that Vice Minister Kuroe decided to conceal the existence of the logs to maintain the ministry's position that the records had been discarded. According to the sources, Kuroe told GSDF Chief of Staff Okabe in February that there was no need to disclose the logs because they were not official documents. Mainichi wrote that the issue calls into question Inada's ability to govern the ministry.

INTERNATIONAL

Nikai, House Majority Leader McCarthy agree to strengthen bilateral cooperation over DPRK

NHK reported this morning that LDP Secretary General Nikai met with House Majority Leader McCarthy in Washington on Wednesday. On North Korea's repeated missile launches, McCarthy reportedly said: "The relationship between the U.S. and Japan could not be any stronger. We need to work together and stand up to the challenges facing the world. I want to continue to work together to keep the world peaceful and safe." In response, Nikai told McCarthy: "I hope to work together to further develop the U.S.-Japan relationship." The network said Nikai also met with Senate Minority Leader Schumer, adding that they agreed that the U.S. and Japan should work together while enlisting China's cooperation in resolving the North Korean issue.

An NHK reporter said Nikai has been active in diplomacy since he assumed the position of the party secretary general, adding that his visit to Washington follows his visits to China in May and South Korea in June. The reporter said Nikai's active engagement stems from the increasing tension over North Korea and the need to build multi-layered channels for dialogue to strengthen government-to-government ties as the future of the Trump administration remains uncertain. Noting that Nikai has always stressed that only a long and stable government can exercise leadership in the international community, the reporter said that Nikai is hoping to support Prime Minister Abe both in domestic politics and diplomacy and put the Abe administration back on track following its crushing defeat in the Tokyo assembly election and the plunge in the cabinet approval rate.

Japanese, ROK foreign ministers to hold bilateral talks

Sankei wrote that the governments of Japan and South Korea are making arrangements for their foreign ministers to hold bilateral talks on the sidelines of the ASEAN foreign ministerial meeting to be held in the Philippines in early August. These will be the first bilateral foreign ministerial talks between Japan and South Korea since the launch of the Moon administration in May. The paper speculated that Japan will call for South Korea to implement the bilateral comfort women agreement at the planned talks.

South Korea plans to establish memorial day for comfort women

Nikkei and Sankei wrote that the Moon administration of South Korea included in its five-year policy plan an idea to establish an annual day of commemoration for the comfort women starting in 2018. However, concerning its relations with Japan in general, the administration will seek to develop a forward-looking partnership of cooperation with Tokyo by keeping history issues separate from security cooperation.

Japan, UK to hold strategic dialogue

Mainichi reported on a MOFA announcement on Wednesday that Foreign Minister Kishida will hold a strategic dialogue with his British counterpart Johnson in Tokyo on Friday. The two officials are expected to discuss such issues as responding to North Korea and security cooperation between the SDF and the British military.

SECURITY

Japan Coast Guard to train own pilots amid rising surveillance demands

Wednesday evening's Yomiuri gave top play to a report on a plan by the Japan Coast Guard (JCG) to train pilots of fixed-wing aircraft on its own instead of having the MSDF train them in response to the increasing importance of warning and surveillance activities in the skies near the Senkaku Islands and in other areas of concern. According to the paper, the number of Chinese government ships was 40 in 2012, but it is expected to increase threefold by 2019. However, the JCG will probably have only 66 patrol ships by then.

ECONOMY

TEPCO chairman reiterates plan to consult with fishermen on tritium-laced water

Nikkei wrote that TEPCO Chairman Kawamura told Chairman Kishi of the National Federation of Fisheries Cooperative Association on Wednesday that there has been no change in the company's plan to closely consult with the government and local fishermen on the discharge of treated water that contains tritium from the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant into the sea. The fishermen's association called on TEPCO not to release the water without careful consideration.

Mainichi wrote that Kawamura's statement in his interview with Kyodo on July 13 that the decision to discharge the water has already been made created a stir. The National Federation of Fisheries Cooperative Association lodged a protest with the TEPCO chairman on Wednesday, but Kawamura told the fishermen that neither he nor the company has made a decision.

In addition, Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) Chairman Tanaka expressed displeasure over Kawamura's reported remarks that the decision to release the water is in line with Tanaka's view that there should be no problem with discharging water that has contamination levels below the

government-set limits. The NRA chief said that TEPCO's plan runs counter to his policy of attaching importance to communication with local residents.

OPINION POLLS

Poll shows drop in Japanese people's trust in U.S.

Asahi reported on the results of an opinion survey conducted by the Genron NPO in June and July. When asked whether their trust in the U.S. has increased or decreased after observing the statements and actions of President Trump, 50% of the respondents said their trust has decreased. Only 2% said their trust of the U.S. has increased and 22% said there has been no change.

