



Morning Alert - Wednesday, July 26, 2017

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## HEADLINES

### Morning news

NHK gave top play to a report that today marks the first anniversary of the Sagami-hara massacre in Kanagawa Prefecture in which 19 residents of a facility for disabled people were killed and many others injured.

All commercial networks and most national papers led with reports on yesterday's Upper House Budget Committee session in which Prime Minister Abe and Defense Minister Inada were grilled by opposition party members on the Kake Gakuen scandal and the issue of the daily activity logs kept by the GSDF in South Sudan.

## POLITICS

### Abe makes conflicting remarks on Kake Gakuen scandal

All dailies reported heavily on a Diet debate on the Kake Gakuen scandal held at the Upper House on Tuesday, highlighting Prime Minister Abe's remarks that contradicted his own statements made previously at the parliament. The issue in question was the time when the prime minister first became aware of the Kake Gakuen's desire to launch a veterinary school in Shikoku. Abe said on Tuesday that he learned of it on Jan. 20 this year, contradicting his previous statements suggesting that he first became aware of the plan two years ago. Opposition interpellators called him a "liar" on account of the discrepancy.

The papers said that although the premier displayed a humble attitude throughout the session as opposed to his usual combative stance in handling questions posed by opposition lawmakers, the two-day parliamentary session intended to quell public criticism of the administration's handling of the matter apparently backfired by raising fresh doubts about the explanations provided by Abe and

other senior administration officials. Yomiuri said the Kantei and the LDP are extremely concerned that the controversy will become further prolonged, quoting an unnamed administration source as saying: "It is becoming difficult to diffuse the scandal no matter what we do." In a front-page commentary, Yomiuri criticized some GOJ officials for repeatedly giving "insincere" explanations in the session, calling for the administration to make serious efforts to address the public's skepticism.

### **Cover-up of SDF daily activity logs to be subject of Diet debate**

All papers took up a basic agreement reached yesterday between the LDP and the largest opposition Democratic Party on holding parliamentary debate on the Defense Ministry's cover-up of the daily activity logs kept by the GSDF unit engaged in peacekeeping operations in South Sudan. The session will be held after the Defense Ministry's inspector general releases its findings on the scandal on Friday.

### **Noda to step down from post of Democratic Party Secretary General**

All papers wrote that Democratic Party Secretary General Noda told party parliamentarians on Tuesday that he will give up his post in order to take responsibility for the party's dismal performance in the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly election. DP President Renho stated in the same meeting attended by dozens of DP Diet members that she will reshuffle the party leadership in the near future, with possible candidates to succeed Noda reportedly to include former Foreign Minister Maehara and Chief Cabinet Secretary Edano. In an attempt to restore her grip on power, Renho also disclosed that in the next general election she will run in an unspecified single-seat district in Tokyo after relinquishing her current Upper House seat.

The articles projected that the resignation of the secretary general and Renho's plan to seek a Lower House seat probably will not curb the growing pessimism among DP politicians about the fate of the largest opposition party, noting that some of them have openly hinted at the possibility of leaving the party unless drastic steps are taken to turn the situation around. The dailies added, however, that even these disgruntled legislators apparently have no concrete ideas on how to regain the public's trust in the DP, which was lost completely when the DPJ was in power in the early 2010s. Sankei said the largest opposition party is teetering on the edge of collapse.

### **By-election slated for Aomori in October**

All papers reported on the death of LDP Lower House lawmaker Taro Kimura on Tuesday, explaining that as a result, a by-election will be held on Oct. 22 to choose the representative of District 4 of Aomori Prefecture. Pointing out that another by-election is expected to be held on the same day in District 3 of Ehime Prefecture, Yomiuri predicted that both the LDP and the Democratic Party are likely to mobilize all available resources to win the first national elections to be convened following the LDP's historic defeat in the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly election earlier this month. Sankei said the results of the two races may determine the fate of the Abe administration's key policy agenda items, such as constitutional revision. Nikkei noted that the outcomes will be the

public's verdict on the new Abe cabinet to be launched on Aug. 3, adding that Prime Minister Abe appears to be running into difficulty identifying viable candidates for cabinet portfolios. Abe's plan to retain core members, including Deputy Prime Minister Aso and Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga, for the sake of ensuring the stability of the administration probably will be unappealing to the public since it is expecting a "fresh start" of the beleaguered administration.

## **INTERNATIONAL**

### **U.S. proposes 2+2 meeting in mid-August**

Yomiuri wrote that the USG has proposed to the GOJ a plan to convene a bilateral foreign and defense ministerial meeting in Washington on Aug. 17, speculating that a final decision will be made following the planned reshuffle of the Abe cabinet on Aug. 3 since Foreign Minister Kishida and Defense Minister Inada may be replaced.

### **Intel points to imminent North Korean missile launch**

Most papers reported that North Korea appears to be making preparations to fire a ballistic missile, possibly an ICBM, within a few days. The papers warned that the launch may take place as early as tomorrow since it is a North Korean holiday celebrating the armistice that ended the Korean War. As spy satellites have reportedly detected the arrival at a northwestern North Korean city of the necessary equipment for a launch, including a mobile platform, the U.S., Japan, and South Korea are stepping up their reconnaissance and surveillance operations. According to Asahi, the projectile to be launched may be a "Mars 14," the type that was used in the ICBM launch on July 4.

## **SECURITY**

### **Abe to visit Okinawa today**

Asahi wrote that Prime Minister Abe will visit Ginowan in Okinawa today to attend the funeral of former Okinawa Governor Ota, who passed away at the age of 92 on June 12. The paper speculated that the trip is designed to spotlight the administration's stance of extending overtures toward the southernmost prefecture amid the deepening schism between the central government and Governor Onaga over Futenma relocation.