



Morning Alert - Tuesday, August 8, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning news

All networks led with reports on Typhoon Noru, which is slowly moving up the Japanese archipelago, saying that it is expected to bring heavy rains to eastern Japan today.

Major front-page items in national papers included the launch of the political group “Japan First” by a Diet member close to Tokyo Governor Koike, and a series of meetings held in Manila on Monday by the foreign ministers of the U.S., Japan, South Korea, China and other nations. The main topic of discussion in the bilateral and trilateral meetings was North Korea’s nuclear and missile development.

SECURITY

USFJ official provides explanation on Monday’s Osprey flight at Futenma

All papers highlighted Defense Minister Onodera’s meeting yesterday with USFJ Deputy Commander Chiarotti, who explained that an MV-22 Osprey took off from MCAS Futenma earlier in the day for reasons of “operational necessity.” In response to the U.S. military official’s assurance that safety measures were taken before the flight, Onodera reiterated his request for the suspension of Osprey flights in Japan by asking for “maximum consideration” in view of the escalation in opposition to the MV-22 voiced by people in Okinawa following the recent Osprey crash in Australia.

According to the dailies, Okinawa Defense Bureau officials briefed Okinawa prefectural government officials yesterday on the Osprey crash based on an explanation from the U.S. military. The aircraft apparently went down when attempting to land on the USS Green Bay after taking off from the flight deck of the amphibious assault ship USS Bonhomme Richard. The Okinawa officials reportedly voiced “considerable shock” over the mishap, emphasizing that the stability of the U.S.-Japan

security arrangements will be undermined if there is a further exacerbation of local distrust of the U.S. military. Okinawa Governor Onaga separately told the press on Monday: “The Osprey is a terrible aircraft. We cannot trust the U.S. investigation at all.” He reportedly expressed serious doubts about the GOJ’s commitment to dealing with accidents and incidents involving Ospreys.

In a related development, Asahi wrote that Hokkaido Governor Takahashi filed with Defense Minister Onodera a request calling for the cancellation of planned Osprey flights in an upcoming U.S.-Japan drill to begin later this week and continue through Aug. 28. Six Futenma-based MV-22s are scheduled to take part in the exercise. Tokyo Shimbun quoted Defense Minister Onodera as telling the press in response to this request: “We are trying to determine the cause [of the Osprey accident in Australia]. We will consult with the U.S. side about the request while taking into account the results [of the U.S. investigation].” The daily added that the Chiba prefectural government asked the Defense Ministry on Monday to suspend scheduled Osprey flights associated with regular mechanical inspections to be performed at GSDF Camp Kisarazu starting in September.

Osprey crash in waters off Australia classified as “Class A” mishap

NHK reported online this morning that the U.S. Navy announced on Monday that the Osprey incident in waters off Australia will be classified as a “Class A” mishap, the most serious type of incident, given that the three missing crewmembers are believed to be dead.

INTERNATIONAL

U.S., Japan, ROK agree to put stronger pressure on DPRK

All papers took up a trilateral foreign ministerial meeting between Secretary of State Tillerson, Foreign Minister Kono, and ROK Foreign Minister Kang in Manila on Monday, at which they agreed to step up the pressure on North Korea to get it to desist from conducting missile launches. They also agreed to ask China, Russia, and ASEAN members to take a concerted approach toward the defiant regime. According to the papers, during their bilateral meeting, Secretary Tillerson and FM Kono agreed to hold a U.S.-Japan 2+2 foreign and defense ministerial meeting in Washington on Aug. 17 to discuss measures to curb North Korea’s provocations, including enhanced missile defense.

Kono holds separate talks with top Chinese, ROK diplomats

All papers reported that Foreign Minister Kono met with his Chinese counterpart Wang in Manila on Monday on the margins of the ASEAN conference and agreed on the importance of all UN members abiding by the latest sanctions resolution against North Korea adopted unanimously by the Security Council. The Chinese diplomat, however, expressed opposition to the “secondary sanctions” imposed on Chinese entities by the U.S. and Japan. According to the daily, Wang at the onset of the session voiced “disappointment” with Kono’s statement earlier in the day, in which he expressed concern about China’s militarization of the South China Sea. Wang said Kono’s remarks gave the

impression he made them at the instruction of the United States. The Japanese official stated in response: "It is necessary for China to behave properly as a major responsible stakeholder."

Kono also held separate talks with South Korean Foreign Minister Kang at which they forged a consensus on deepening mutual cooperation to build a future-oriented bilateral relationship. In response to Kono's call for the Moon administration to honor the 2015 bilateral comfort women agreement, the South Korean official said: "A large majority of Koreans cannot accept it." In a related development, all dailies took up a teleconference held yesterday between Prime Minister Abe and South Korean President Moon, during which the ROK leader reportedly concurred with Abe's argument that now is the time to enhance pressure on the Kim regime.

Meanwhile, Kono reportedly exchanged greetings with North Korean Foreign Minister Ri in Manila yesterday on the sidelines of an ASEAN foreign ministerial dinner. Although Kono refused to disclose what was discussed during the brief encounter, the papers speculated that he pressed the top DPRK diplomat to take concrete actions toward resolving such outstanding issues as its nuclear and missile development and the abduction of Japanese nationals.

U.S. extends dialogue overtures to North Korea

Nikkei focused on press remarks made on Monday in Manila by Secretary of State Tillerson, who said: "The best signal that North Korea can give us that they are prepared to talk would be to stop these missile launches." Explaining that the Trump administration has been demanding that Pyongyang must halt nuclear development immediately if it wants to hold dialogue with Washington, the daily claimed that Tillerson apparently "relaxed" the precondition for dialogue perhaps in order to enlist cooperation from China, who has been asking the U.S. to resume dialogue with the North. The article also pointed out that calls are growing within the U.S. for the Trump administration to take a more flexible and realistic approach toward North Korea in view of its steady progress in acquiring nuclear and ballistic missile expertise. Speculating that Washington may be tempted to cut a deal with the DPRK on the condition that it abandon its ICBM program, the daily expressed apprehension that the U.S. may end up giving the Kim dynasty a tacit green light for the development and deployment of intermediate ballistic missiles that are not capable of reaching the U.S. mainland.

Kono, Lavrov exchange views on territorial dispute

All papers wrote that Foreign Minister Kono held talks with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov in Manila on Monday to discuss the Northern Territories dispute, noting that they agreed to arrange a vice foreign ministerial meeting in Moscow on Aug. 17 so as to work out the details of the planned launch of "joint economic activities" on the contested islands. The Russian official reportedly asked Kono to visit Moscow.

China rebuffs Japan's proposal for trilateral summit with ROK

Sankei reported on the disclosure by several GOJ sources that China has turned down a GOJ proposal to convene a trilateral summit by Prime Minister Abe, Chinese Premier Li, and South Korean President Moon in late August in Japan, conjecturing that the Chinese are reluctant to attend such a session ahead of the planned Chinese Communist Party convention in the fall.

POLITICS

Diet member close to Tokyo governor launches political group

All papers reported extensively on an announcement made yesterday by independent parliamentarian Masaru Wakasa, who is very close to Tokyo Governor Koike, that he has founded a new political group called “Japan First” with the goal of converting it into a political party and fielding candidates in the next general election. Although the governor will not be directly involved in the operation of the political group, she plans to give lectures on security, foreign policy, social security, and other subjects when the group organizes seminars to identify candidates interested in seeking parliamentary seats. Wakasa stressed that he is hoping to create a national party that can unseat the ruling LDP in cooperation with Koike.

The papers said both the LDP and the Democratic Party are alarmed by the launch of Japan First since it is likely to command strong support from the public, which is increasingly distrustful of the Abe administration and dissatisfied with the largest opposition party. The articles projected that if Japan First becomes a political party, it may trigger a realignment of the opposition bloc, with Asahi projecting that some Democratic Party lawmakers, including former Environment Minister Hosono who plans to leave the party today, may be tempted to join hands with Wakasa depending on the outcome of the party presidential election scheduled for Sept. 1.