



Morning Alert - Tuesday, August 29, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning news

Main front-page items in national papers included the results of a nationwide scholastic aptitude test administered by the Education Ministry, the passing of former Prime Minister Hata, Toshiba's plan to sell its lucrative semiconductor division to a consortium involving Western Digital, and the Chinese Communist Party's plan to amend the present retirement age rule for senior officials so as to allow President Xi to be elected a third time in the next party convention to be held in 2022.

INTERNATIONAL

DPRK fires missile through Japanese airspace

All broadcasters reported extensively on North Korea's apparent firing of a ballistic missile at around 5:58 this morning. Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga held an emergency press conference at the Kantei at around 6:40 a.m. He said that the North apparently fired a ballistic missile at around 5:58 a.m. from its west coast and that the missile appeared to have flown over Hokkaido at around 6:06 a.m., separated into three pieces, and splashed down in the Pacific 1,180 km east of Cape Erimo in Hokkaido at around 6:12 a.m. He said no debris fell on Japan's territory and that there are no reports of damage to aircraft or ships in the vicinity. Suga said that shortly an NSC meeting will be convened to analyze the situation, noting that the missile not only posed an "unprecedented serious and grave" threat to national security but also undermined the peace and stability of the Asia-Pacific region. Noting that the latest launch constituted a serious violation of relevant UN Security Council resolutions, the government spokesman revealed that the GOJ has already lodged a protest with North Korea and condemned the nation in the "strongest" language. He pledged the GOJ's utmost efforts to ensure national defense.

Prime Minister Abe told reporters at the Kantei at around 6:30 a.m. that the GOJ will collect and analyze information about the missile launch and make utmost efforts to protect the lives and property of the Japanese people. Japan did not take any action to intercept the missile but announced an alert to governments in Hokkaido and Tohoku via its satellite-based J-Alert system. JR East briefly suspended Shinkansen services in response to the missile launch, and resumed services at around 6:29 a.m.

Foreign Minister Kono told reporters at around 8:00 a.m. that in coordination with the U.S. and South Korea, Japan is asking the UN Security Council to swiftly convene an emergency meeting, adding that Japan will continue to apply pressure on Pyongyang. Expressing the view that the level of the threat has been increasing, Kono stated that he welcomes the Trump administration's policy of putting all options on the table.

Defense Minister Onodera said that he was instructed by Prime Minister Abe to collect and analyze information by closely working with the U.S. and other nations.

At around 8:00 a.m. Abe spoke to reporters, adding that the GOJ had tracked the flight of the missile from launch to splashdown. The premier stated that this provocation posed an "unprecedented serious and grave" threat to Japan's national security and undermined the peace and stability of the region and that Tokyo has lodged a strong protest. Abe added that Japan will coordinate with the international community at the UN to ratchet up the pressure on North Korea and will be fully prepared to protect the safety of the Japanese people under the strong alliance with the U.S.

Fuji-TV said that a Pentagon spokesperson reportedly said the North Korean missile flew over Japan and did not pose a threat to North America. The official said the U.S. military is still in the process of assessing the launch and promised to provide an update as soon as possible.

DPRK ready to conduct nuclear test

Most papers wrote from Seoul on a briefing given to the ROK parliament on Monday by the National Intelligence Service (NIS), in which the spy agency explained that the Kim Jong Un regime appears to have completed preparations for its sixth nuclear test at a test site in Punggye-ri, speculating that Pyongyang may choose to detonate an experimental nuclear device around its National Foundation day of Sept. 9. The NIS also reported that the Kim regime is preparing to carry out an SLBM launch test in the eastern city of Sinpo.

IAEA finds North Korea pursuing nuclear program at Yongbyon complex

Monday evening's Yomiuri front-paged a report put together by the IAEA, noting that the international nuclear watchdog has concluded that the DPRK has been actively pursuing a nuclear development program at its nuclear complex in Yongbyon by continuing to operate a graphite reactor even after a nuclear test that was conducted about a year ago. The IAEA reportedly

suspects that the Kim regime may choose to remove nuclear fuel from the reactors later this year to extract plutonium at a reprocessing plant. The IAEA document raised “serious concerns” about these activities, which it called “extremely regrettable.”

Kono may accompany Abe on trip to Russia

Several papers wrote that Foreign Minister Kono may accompany Prime Minister Abe when he visits Vladivostok in the second week of September for a summit with President Putin. The Japanese foreign minister is hoping to hold talks with his Russian counterpart Lavrov.

Japan to assist anti-piracy operations off Philippines

Mainichi wrote from Vienna that the GOJ on Monday signed an action plan memorandum with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to help Philippine authorities combat piracy by local Islamic militants. The UN entity has ample expertise in anti-piracy operations, as it has been heavily involved in such missions off the coast of Somalia.

SECURITY

SDF Osprey deployment in Saga hits snag

Mainichi reported that a Defense Ministry plan to base GSDF MV-22s at Saga Airport has run into difficulties due to strong opposition by local fishermen in the vicinity, many of whom harbor deep distrust of the central government over a decades-long dispute concerning a land reclamation project in the area. As some 560 fishermen are reportedly alarmed about the potential disruption to their livelihoods again by a major public work project pursued by the central government, the ministry is failing to acquire land adjacent to the airport as planned. The recent fatal USMC Osprey crash off Australia, coupled with the shallow water landing of the same model in Okinawa late last year, has also made the local opponents even more cautious about endorsing the deployment initiative. The ministry, however, has no intention to give up on the Osprey deployment since the tilt-rotor planes are expected to be used for airlifting GSDF amphibious personnel to be assigned at a base in neighboring Nagasaki Prefecture.

JCG to employ satellites to monitor territorial waters

Yomiuri wrote that the Japan Coast Guard has decided to use data obtained by commercial satellites to conduct enhanced monitoring of foreign naval activities around the Japanese archipelago with the goal of dealing with possible intrusions of territorial waters by the Chinese and others and carry out maritime search and rescue missions more effectively. The agency plans to sign contracts with commercial satellite operators this autumn to launch the new surveillance and early warning operation at an early date.

ECONOMY

Toshiba, Western Digital close to deal on sale of Toshiba Memory

All papers wrote that Toshiba President Tsunakawa and Western Digital CEO Milligan held talks in Tokyo last night and agreed to finalize in the near future a proposed deal for the sale of Toshiba's semiconductor subsidiary to a consortium involving KKR, the public-private Innovation Network Corp. of Japan, the state-backed Development Bank of Japan, and Western Digital.

Aso to meet with Pence on Sept. 5

Asahi reported that Deputy Prime Minister Aso plans to visit Washington and hold informal talks with Vice President Pence on Sept. 5 in preparation for convening in October the second session of the bilateral economic dialogue where such issues as nontariff barriers in the Japanese auto sector and Japan's safeguard on U.S. beef imports will be taken up.

TPP chief negotiators begin discussions for early effectuation of free trade pact

All papers reported from Sydney that the chief negotiators of the 11 TPP member states gathered in the Australian city for in-depth discussions to implement the landmark free trade arrangement in the Asia-Pacific region. The participants are expected to hold talks to tweak or "suspend" some elements of the existing accord, such as the protection period for pharmaceutical data and intellectual property, which were adopted at the time due to strong prodding by the Obama administration. Sankei said Japan is teaming up with New Zealand and Australia to minimize possible modifications so as to forge a consensus for putting the high-level free trade initiative into effect when the leaders of the member nations assemble in Vietnam in November on the margins of the APEC summit.

POLITICS

Abe may be tempted to call snap election later this year

Yomiuri projected that following the victory of a candidate backed by the ruling LDP in Sunday's gubernatorial election in Ibaraki, Prime Minister Abe and some LDP officials may be tempted to dissolve the Lower House for a snap election at an early date to coincide it with the planned three by-elections on Oct. 22 based on the assessment that the ruling coalition may be able to prevail with relative ease, as most opposition parties are not prepared to wage robust election campaigns. The daily noted, however, that calling a snap election amid the dismal public approval of the Abe cabinet entails risk for the premier since the ruling coalition, even if it wins a majority of votes, would probably lose its two-thirds majority in the Diet, which is imperative for realizing the premier's signature policy of amending the Constitution.

