



Morning Alert - Wednesday, September 6, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK gave top play to a report that North Korea hinted at additional military provocations through its state media last night. All commercial networks led with reports that a JAL passenger plane made an emergency landing at Haneda Airport shortly after leaving the airport as flames were seen coming from the left engine on Tuesday. No injuries were reported.

Major front-page items in national papers included the launch of the new Democratic Party leadership headed by President Maehara and a U.S. proposal to impose the “strongest possible” sanctions on North Korea focusing on an oil embargo.

INTERNATIONAL

China, Russia negative about imposing stronger sanctions on DPRK

All papers reported that the U.S. and Japan are considering proposing to the UN Security Council extremely strong sanctions to penalize North Korea for its latest nuclear test. The proposed measures include banning the import of North Korean textiles, suspending petroleum supplies to the DPRK government and military, and placing restrictions on DPRK workers in foreign countries. While Washington and Tokyo are hoping to put the proposal to a vote for enactment next Monday, Russia and China still appear to be reluctant to endorse such sanctions. Russian President Putin told the press in China on Tuesday that imposing tougher sanctions would be “meaningless and ineffective.”

In a related development, most papers took up the disclosure by Defense Minister Onodera yesterday that the GOJ has revised its initial estimate of the magnitude of the North Korean nuclear blast on Sunday. The nuclear test was apparently ten times more powerful than the previous one

conducted a year ago. The updated data suggests that the latest test may have indeed involved a hydrogen bomb as claimed by the Kim regime.

Abe, Merkel agree to cooperate in dealing with North Korea

All papers wrote that German Chancellor Merkel phoned Prime Minister Abe yesterday and pledged Germany's cooperation with Japanese efforts to counter North Korea's nuclear and missile provocations. The two leaders agreed to enhance international pressure on Pyongyang based on the shared recognition that the latest DPRK nuclear test posed a threat to the entire world and that Russia and China can play a significant role in reining in the defiant regime.

Abe, Putin to confirm specific business projects on disputed islands

Yomiuri predicted in its lead story that during their planned meeting in Vladivostok tomorrow, Prime Minister Abe and Russian President Putin are likely to agree on five specific projects for "joint economic activities" in the Northern Territories, including tourism, wind power generation, and garbage disposal. The two leaders will also agree to launch a panel tasked with working out the details of each project. The taskforce members are expected to conduct a feasibility study in the fall.

In a related development, most papers reported that Abe received a courtesy call from Putin's top policy aide Patrushev at the Kantei yesterday, speculating that the two probably exchanged views on the upcoming summit and North Korea's relentless provocations. Abe plans to depart for Vladivostok today.

Diet member Antonio Inoki to visit North Korea

Asahi and Yomiuri reported that Upper House legislator Antonio Inoki plans to visit Pyongyang from Thursday through next Monday for talks with senior DPRK officials. Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga commented on the planned trip by telling the press yesterday: "The government is asking Japanese citizens not to visit North Korea."

Abe meets with Indian defense chief

All papers reported that Prime Minister Abe held talks with the visiting Indian defense minister at the Kantei on Tuesday and agreed to step up pressure on the DPRK so as to forestall its nuclear and missile development. The Indian official later met with Defense Minister Onodera, during which they forged a consensus for promoting bilateral defense cooperation by conducting joint training not just between the two nations' navies, but also their air forces and armies.

SECURITY

U.S., Japan to carry out joint surveillance training

Yomiuri reported on an MSDF announcement on Tuesday that its EP-3 and OP-3C signal intelligence reconnaissance aircraft will conduct a joint drill with a U.S. Navy special observation platform over the East China Sea today and tomorrow with the goal of holding North Korea's

provocations and China's maritime advancement in check. The article added that it is extremely unusual for the two navies to disclose a plan for this type of training, which it claimed is highly sensitive.

U.S. Pacific Fleet commander calls for cooperation with ROK, Japan

Asahi highlighted a speech in Seoul on Tuesday by visiting U.S. Pacific Fleet Commander Swift, who called for enhanced trilateral cooperation with the navies of Japan and South Korea by saying: "By closely integrating operations with the South Korean Navy and the MSDF, we are committed to providing overwhelming capabilities for ballistic missile defense and anti-submarine warfare." While saying that some 60% of U.S. Navy ships are under his command and are on standby, the admiral criticized North Korea's escalated provocations by saying: "The regime continues to conduct self-destructive activities that cannot be logically explained."

Japan Coast Guard to enhance training for Okinawa-based personnel

Yomiuri front-paged a plan by the Japan Coast Guard (JCG) to enhance training for personnel stationed on Miyako Island in Okinawa in order to counter China's intensified maritime push in the vicinity of the Senkaku Islands. In addition to increasing the number of personnel stationed on Miyako from 180 to 230 by the end of FY2018, the JCG is expected to provide them with extra training for cracking down on intrusions into territorial waters by setting up a firing range on Miyako. JCG patrol boats under construction for deployment near the contested outcrops are reportedly being fitted with steel materials of above average strength as a precaution against collisions with Chinese fishing boats.

POLITICS

New DP leadership gets off to bumpy start

All papers reported on the official launch on Tuesday of the new Democratic Party leadership led by President Maehara, noting that his appointment of veteran lawmaker Oshima as secretary general and others to senior party posts was endorsed during an all-hands meeting of party Diet members without objection. The dailies said, however, that the new leader was forced to give up on his initial plan to tap Shiori Yamao, a junior female lawmaker from Aichi, as secretary general in order to repair the party's tarnished public image by putting a "fresh face" on the leadership. The idea was shot down by strong criticism from some party members who expressed concern about her "lack of political experience" and speculation that a tabloid might take up a rumored extramarital affair by Yamao that she has categorically dismissed.

As Maehara's last-minute about-face on Yamao has damaged his credibility, some party politicians are already raising doubts about the new leader's ability to govern the largest opposition party. According to Asahi, an unnamed disgruntled DP parliamentarian who is reportedly considering bolting the party ridiculed Maehara by saying: "The new president made an excellent debut. He is making steady efforts toward the dissolution of the DP."

ECONOMY

Ambassador Hagerty meets with economic minister

Nikkei reported online that Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Seko and Ambassador Hagerty held talks on Tuesday and agreed to cooperate in enhancing economic relations between their two nations. In response to the Japanese official's statement that U.S. engagement is indispensable for stability in the Asia-Pacific region, the Ambassador said: "Strong U.S.-Japan relations are the cornerstone of regional stability." With the Trump administration's complaints about the U.S. trade deficit with Japan in mind, Seko stressed that cooperation, rather than friction, has been a primary feature of the bilateral economic ties. However, Ambassador Hagerty noted in response that the issue of the bilateral trade imbalance will be discussed in the future at such venues as the economic dialogue.

