



Morning Alert - Friday, September 8, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK gave top play to a report that North Korea will celebrate its National Foundation Day tomorrow. All commercial networks led with reports that Democratic Party member Saori Yamao submitted her resignation from the party on Thursday.

Major front-page stories in national papers included a meeting between Prime Minister Abe and Russian President Putin in Vladivostok yesterday and a draft UN Security Council sanctions resolution against North Korea prepared by the United States.

INTERNATIONAL

U.S. proposes oil embargo, inspection of DPRK ships

Most papers highlighted a draft sanctions resolution against the Kim regime in North Korea circulated among UN Security Council members by the Trump administration, saying that the U.S. is calling for banning oil and natural gas exports to North Korea, prohibiting North Korean textile imports, and freezing all assets held by Kim Jong Un and the country's military. The draft resolution also asks that UN members be allowed to intercept North Korean ships at sea, inspect them, and use "all necessary measures" to enforce compliance with the sanctions. The articles projected that Russia and China are highly unlikely to endorse the measures that Washington is referring to as the "strongest possible" sanctions.

Abe, Putin remain at odds over pressure on DPRK

All papers gave prominent front-and inside-page play to a summit held in Vladivostok on Thursday between Prime Minister Abe and Russian President Putin, at which the two agreed to enhance coordination in dealing with North Korea based on the shared belief that the defiant regime's recent

nuclear test is a “serious threat” to the international community. However, Putin remained very cautious about Abe’s call for strengthening sanctions against Pyongyang by saying: “The standoff on the Korean Peninsula can only be resolved through political and diplomatic means. Dialogue has to be pursued.” The articles speculated that the Russian leader did not accept Abe’s request for Moscow to endorse the draft sanctions resolution proposed by the United States.

The papers said despite the “strong ties” that Abe has forged with Putin through almost a dozen bilateral summits, the premier failed to sway the Russian leader, who probably believes that the United States poses more of a security threat in the Far East than North Korea as it has moved forward with the deployment of THAAD batteries in South Korea and encouraged Japan to procure Aegis Ashore platforms. Nikkei suspected that Moscow is using the North Korean crisis as a diplomatic tool to hold the Trump administration in check.

On the bilateral front, Abe and Putin agreed to pursue five business projects, including tourism, in the Northern Territories as part of “joint economic activities” with a feasibility study to be conducted in December. The dailies projected, however, that difficulties may arise in launching the initiatives since the two governments still have to work out the details for implementation in a manner that does “not compromise each side’s legal claims” to the contested islands. Yomiuri speculated that the Russians will perhaps try to seek concessions from Japan by suggesting that third-country partners could be tapped to implement these projects if Japan fails to compromise. Asahi said although the Japanese side is keen to play up the economic accord as a major accomplishment, the Russians are not showing as much enthusiasm because they want to obtain Japan’s assistance in major infrastructure programs, such as the construction of pipelines and electric distribution networks.

Meanwhile, Nikkei reported that Putin told the press after his meeting with Abe that the Russian Armed Forces’ Chief of Staff Gerasimov will visit Japan in the near future, adding that the top Russian general is subject to EU sanctions due to the situation in Ukraine.

Top Chinese diplomat shows flexibility on imposing tougher sanctions on Pyongyang

All papers reported from Beijing on yesterday’s press conference by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang, who demonstrated a fairly positive attitude toward growing calls for tougher sanctions on the DPRK. “Given the recent change in the Korean Peninsula situation, China is prepared to endorse further responses and necessary measures by the UN Security Council,” he said. However, the minister also added: “Sanctions and pressure are only half of the key to resolving the dispute. The other half is dialogue and negotiations.”

Foreign Minister Kono to tour Middle East

Asahi reported that Foreign Minister Kono will depart tomorrow on a five-nation Middle East tour, including stops in Qatar, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia, saying that he is hoping to enlist from his

counterparts support for strengthening the coalition against the DPRK given that thousands of North Korean citizens are working in these nations as manual laborers.

SECURITY

Okinawa to officially seek SOFA revisions

Tokyo Shimbun wrote that the Okinawa prefectural government has drafted a package of proposals regarding SOFA amendment and plans to submit it to the central government next week. In the first official proposals put together in 17 years, the local government requests that the agreement be amended so as to allow Japanese investigative authorities to seize U.S. military property. Other proposals include requiring the U.S. military to submit data to local governments on the number of service members and base workers as well as information about where they live.

Smoke seen coming out of grounded Osprey in Oita

Asahi and Tokyo Shimbun reported that on Thursday afternoon observers witnessed on two occasions smoke coming out of the engines of the Futenma-based Osprey that has been grounded at Oita Airport since last week due to engine trouble. The smoke was emitted right after the replaced engines were started. According to the prefectural government, the U.S. military explained that this is “not an abnormal phenomenon.” While the U.S. military had earlier explained that the MV-22 would depart from MCAS Iwakuni at around 3 p.m. on Thursday, it later informed the local government that the maintenance work would continue through today. Asahi wrote that local government officials are frustrated with the U.S. military’s failure to provide sufficient information on the plane. TV-Asahi filed a similar story.

Ruling officials take issue with Ishiba’s comment on allowing U.S. nuclear weapons into Japan

All papers reported on the reaction among senior ruling coalition officials to former Defense Minister Ishiba’s call for national debate on possibly allowing U.S. nuclear weapons to be brought into Japan. LDP Policy Research Council Chairman Kishida dismissed the need for such a debate by saying: “I don’t see any problem with the present state of U.S. nuclear deterrence. The three non-nuclear principles should be preserved.” Komeito Chief Representative Yamaguchi echoed a similar view by saying: “The three non-nuclear principles have been confirmed repeatedly. They must not be changed.”

POLITICS

Democratic Party hit hard by scandal involving rising star

All papers took up Democratic Party legislator Shiori Yamao’s submission of a letter of resignation to Secretary General Oshima on Thursday, explaining that the junior politician decided to quit the party to take responsibility for a controversy caused by a tabloid article alleging that she was engaged in an extramarital affair. The scandal dealt a heavy blow to the newly launched party leadership

headed by President Maehara given that Yamao was initially tapped as secretary general by him in the hope that the party's tarnished image could be turned around by her appointment. The prosecutor-turned lawmaker has been viewed as one of the few rising stars in the largest opposition party on account of her assertive stance in parliamentary debates with Prime Minister Abe and other cabinet members. The papers predicted that as a result of this scandal, the DP will be forced to wage a tough campaign in the three by-elections scheduled for late October, with Tokyo Shimbun adding that disgruntled DP Diet members may be tempted to capitalize on the scandal to justify bolting the party.

