



Morning Alert - Wednesday, September 20, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK gave top play to a report that Prime Minister Abe will hold a press conference on Sept. 25 to explain his decision to dissolve the Lower House on Sept. 28 for a snap election. TBS led with a report on the upcoming general election. NTV, Fuji TV, and TV Asahi gave top play to reports on President Trump's speech at the UN General Assembly session on Tuesday.

Major front-page items in national newspapers included President Trump's speech at the UN General Assembly, updates on PM Abe's intention to call a snap election on Oct. 22, and a GOJ plan to make a decision this year on the date for the Emperor to abdicate, which will likely be late December 2018 or late March 2019.

POLITICS

LDP to call for enshrining SDF in the constitution

Asahi wrote that in drawing up its policy manifesto for the general election in late October, the ruling LDP has decided to mention Prime Minister Abe's desire to amend Article 9 of the Constitution so as to make the existence of the SDF explicit in the war-renouncing clause. Yomiuri published an interview with Democratic Party President Maehara, who said that in the election campaign, his party will call for a review of the comprehensive security laws, which he insisted are "unconstitutional." The opposition leader argued that the legislation should be revised to make it compatible with the nation's supreme law in order to enable seamless collaboration between the U.S. military and the SDF in peacetime and contingences.

Yomiuri also wrote that in the planned policy platform, the LDP is expected to trumpet the party's commitment to expediting Abenomics by reforming the present social security system, under which a

huge amount of money is being spent primarily for the elderly. The LDP is set to pledge greater spending on youths by making secondary and higher education less expensive. The article added that the DP is miffed by this plank in LDP election platform given that the largest opposition party has put forward such an idea for many years.

Nikkei said Abe's intention to highlight North Korea in the election campaign may be potentially "double-edged," explaining that while he might be able to draw public attention to his administration's crisis-management capabilities, naysayers may criticize the premier for creating a "power vacuum" at a time when Pyongyang is escalating provocations.

In a related story, Mainichi claimed that PM Abe plans to dissolve the Lower House right after he delivers a key policy speech at a plenary session of the extraordinary Diet session to be convened on Sept. 28. The paper said that in the planned remarks, Abe is likely to set forth his policy initiatives for the election campaign, such as applying enhanced pressure on North Korea and allocating a larger budget for education. Given that the chamber will likely be dissolved immediately after his speech, opposition parties are bound to react sharply to this arrangement because they will not be given an opportunity to rebut the prime minister and present their own policy goals at the parliament prior to the dissolution. On the other hand, Nikkei said the premier will probably dissolve the chamber without giving a policy speech based on the judgment that doing so would make a snap election on Oct. 22 difficult because holding a post-speech Q&A session for the opposition would be time consuming.

Election cooperation within opposition bloc appears difficult

Asahi and Sankei reported that the Democratic Party and the Japanese Communist Party may not be able to agree on election cooperation for the coming general election since DP President Maehara is cautious about deepening collaboration out of fear of alienating centrist voters. Instead of forging a common policy platform with the JCP, the new DP leader prefers to have the JCP give up on fielding its candidates in as many single-seat districts as possible so that DP candidates can go head-to-head with their ruling party rivals. The JCP is displeased with such an idea, with Secretary General Akira Koike saying on Tuesday that mutual support is indispensable and that his party will not stop fielding its candidates unilaterally. According to Asahi, the JCP has already decided on candidates for 263 of the 289 single-seat constituencies.

INTERNATIONAL

President Trump issues stern warning to DPRK

All papers spotlighted Tuesday's speech given to the United Nations General Assembly by President Trump, in which he warned North Korea against further provocations by saying: "The United States has great strength and patience, but if it is forced to defend itself or its allies, we will have no choice but to totally destroy North Korea." While calling North Korea's reckless pursuit of nuclear weapons

and ballistic missiles a threat to the entire world community and referring to Kim Jong Un by saying, "Rocket man is on a suicide mission for himself and his regime," the President strongly urged UN member states to fully enforce relevant Security Council resolutions so as to isolate the defiant regime. He said: "Nations cannot be bystanders in history." In criticizing North Korea's human right violations, he took up the abduction of a 13-year-old Japanese girl by DPRK agents.

Mainichi interpreted the presidential address as a sign of the Trump administration's overtures toward the international community, explaining that given that his "America First" doctrine has apparently failed to stop North Korea's nuclear and missile ambitions, the President may have had no choice but to ask for international coordination since support from other countries is indispensable for enhancing diplomatic and economic pressure on North Korea, which the daily claimed is the only practical policy option that Washington can pursue in defusing the tension on the Korean Peninsula.

Calls mounting in South Korea for ACSA with Japan

Asahi reported that an increasing number of South Korean diplomats and defense officials are advocating the importance of concluding an acquisition and cross-servicing agreement (ACSA) with Japan in the face of North Korea's ceaseless provocations. These officials are insisting that a pact that enables the two militaries to supply each other with weapons parts, ammunition, and fuel is imperative in order to be better prepared for North Korea's possible aggression. However, some Moon administration officials are negative about concluding an ACSA with Tokyo on the grounds that it may provoke Pyongyang.

Kono pledges \$20 million in aid for Palestinians

Asahi took up remarks made in New York on Tuesday by Foreign Minister Kono, during which he emphasized Tokyo's strong commitment to the Middle East peace process by pledging \$20 million in aid for Palestinian reconstruction. The money will be spent on food for Palestinian refugees and improvement of infrastructure in refugee camps. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Abe held talks with his Israeli counterpart Netanyahu in New York on the same day and agreed to deepen mutual cooperation in such areas as cyber technology and economic investment. They also acknowledged the importance of increasing international pressure to rein in North Korea.

SECURITY

Onodera meets with new 7th Fleet chief

Nikkei wrote that Defense Minister Onodera received a courtesy call on Tuesday from the new 7th Fleet Commander, Vice Admiral Phillip Sawyer, and affirmed enhanced mutual coordination between the U.S. Navy and the MSDF to counter North Korea's provocations. The Japanese official said to the admiral: "Joint response by the U.S. and Japan is necessary to deal with a range of issues related to North Korea. In particular, Aegis warships are important assets."

ECONOMY

“TPP 11” to discuss possible revision of 70 items

Mainichi reported on the planned opening in Tokyo tomorrow of a meeting of chief negotiators of the 11 TPP member states, predicting that they are likely to address some 70 items in total for possible revision, such as the agreed-upon rules of origin for textiles and copyright protection periods. Although Japan wants to “freeze” these points to facilitate the U.S.’s possible return to the regional free trade arrangement, other nations are eager to alter them given that in the run-up to the final TPP accord, they made major concessions on these fronts in the hope of having greater access to the U.S. market, which is now impossible due to its withdrawal. The paper added that Japan’s chairmanship in the Tokyo meeting will be tested given that the early effectuation of the trade liberalization deal may become elusive if the negotiations are prolonged due to internal divisions.

