



Morning Alert - Wednesday, September 27, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK gave top play to a report that an earthquake with a seismic intensity of 4 on the Japanese scale hit the Tohoku region at about 5:22 a.m. today. Most commercial networks led with reports on Tokyo Governor Koike's new Party of Hope, saying that many politicians are leaving the Democratic Party to join the new party.

Major front-page stories in national papers included growing pessimism among Democratic Party lawmakers about their election prospects and the GOJ's acknowledgment that it is scientifically impossible to reliably forecast an earthquake in the Nankai Trough.

POLITICS

More politicians likely to bolt Democratic Party

All papers reported extensively on current and former Diet members rushing to leave the Democratic Party to join the new Party of Hope led by Tokyo Governor Koike in a bid to maintain or recapture their parliamentary seats in the upcoming general election. Asahi said at least 23 DP politicians are considering leaving the embattled party, which they have concluded is no longer capable of regaining public confidence. A DP legislator who is mulling joining the Party of Hope said: "The new party is attracting attention due to the strong popularity of Governor Koike."

Sankei said calls for disbanding the party are rapidly mounting among some DP parliamentarians so that they can also join the new party and create a new group of "non-LDP, anti-communists." Such calls are emerging in response to Governor Koike's insistence that she is not interested in merging her party with any existing political party and that those wishing to join will have to apply for membership individually. According to Asahi, Koike plans to personally interview prospective

candidates to assess their “qualifications.” DP members critical of the party leadership’s moves to seek election cooperation with the Japanese Communist Party are calling for disbanding the party. The dailies said DP President Maehara may choose to merge the party with the Liberal Party headed by Ozawa in an attempt to turn around the dismal outlook for the party.

Meanwhile, Nikkei claimed that Maehara and Koike met last night and exchanged views on possible cooperation in the upcoming election to defeat the ruling coalition. In a meeting held yesterday with President Kozu of Rengo (Japanese Trade Union Confederation), the party’s largest supporter, Maehara stressed that the DP must explore coordination with the Party of Hope. The DP leader separately told his deputies: “All options must be considered to defeat the Abe administration.” The daily said Koike apparently holds the key to the fate of the DP, noting that she is hoping Maehara will break ranks with the party’s liberal wing.

Koike’s party may form election partnership with Japan Innovation Party

Mainichi wrote in a front-page story that the Party of Hope is looking to pursue election cooperation with the Japan Innovation Party led by Osaka Governor Matsui since the two parties share many policy goals, such as robust administrative reform, accelerated decentralization, and a streamlined parliamentary system, including reduction in Diet members’ salaries. The two parties may support each other by choosing not to field candidates in the same single-seat districts. According to the article, the Party of Hope plans to announce its policy platform today, with its primary slogan being that the group will strive to be a “pro-reform, benevolent conservative force.”

Abe promises to ensure “crisis management” mechanism during election campaign

Yomiuri ran a prominent inside-page article on growing criticism of Prime Minister Abe’s plan to dissolve the Lower House tomorrow for a snap election in late October despite North Korea’s relentless pursuit of nuclear and missile development. The paper noted that the premier has rebuffed such criticism by saying that all necessary steps will be taken so as not to create a “political vacuum.” Although Abe will be crisscrossing the country during the official election campaign period, he has instructed Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga and Defense Minister Onodera not to leave Tokyo in case the DPRK stages another missile launch or other provocation. Abe will also probably stay in Tokyo around Oct. 10 when the Kim regime might stage a serious provocation to commemorate the anniversary of the foundation of the Workers’ Party, adding that most of his campaign visits to local areas will be day trips.

INTERNATIONAL

Tokyo displeased with ROK’s plan to build comfort woman monument

Most papers wrote that Foreign Minister Kono on Tuesday conveyed to the South Korean ambassador Tokyo’s apprehension about the Moon administration’s plan to construct a monument to the comfort women on the grounds of a national cemetery. The Japanese official stressed that the

plan runs counter to the 2015 bilateral comfort women agreement, warning that it may “throw cold water” on Japan-South Korean relations.

According to Nikkei, the Moon administration dismissed Japan’s concern, with a Foreign Ministry spokesperson saying yesterday: “Our government’s position is that efforts will continue to be made to ensure that the comfort women issue becomes a historical lesson irrespective of the comfort women pact with Japan.”

Chinese envoy attributes deterioration of bilateral ties to security legislation

Asahi and Mainichi took up a speech delivered yesterday at the Japan National Press Club by Chinese Ambassador Cheng Yonghua, who said the “absence of mutual trust” in the security sector is a primary cause for the deterioration of Sino-Japanese relations. The Chinese diplomat referred to the Japanese parliamentary debate leading to the passage of the comprehensive security laws two summers ago, saying that mutual distrust deepened as some legislation proponents claimed China posed a threat in order to advance their agenda.

ECONOMY

U.S. relaxes restrictions on dairy imports from regions affected by Fukushima accident

Tuesday evening’s Yomiuri and Mainichi wrote that Agriculture Minister Saito told a news conference on Tuesday that the U.S. has partially relaxed its import restrictions on milk and dairy products from five prefectures in eastern Japan that have been in place since the nuclear accident in Fukushima in 2011. The move makes it no longer necessary for Iwate, Miyagi, Fukushima, Tochigi, and Gunma Prefectures to attach papers certifying that their products do not violate U.S. food safety standards. However, the import ban will remain in place for raw milk and milk products from certain parts of Fukushima that are prohibited from producing raw milk by the Japanese government.

Western Digital to seek temporary halt to Toshiba’s plan to deconsolidate chip division

Most papers wrote that Western Digital has announced its plan to ask the Permanent Court of Arbitration to issue a temporary stay on Toshiba’s plan to sell its flash memory business to a trilateral coalition including U.S. equity fund Bain Capital. Western Digital reportedly insists that the Japanese electronics giant must not be allowed to move forward with the planned sale until the court makes a final judgment on its earlier suit seeking the suspension of the Toshiba Memory sale initiative.

SECURITY

Okinawa Defense Bureau considering delivering materials to Henoko by ship

NHK reported this morning that it learned from the Okinawa Defense Bureau that it is mulling a plan to deliver materials for the reclamation work at Henoko by ship in order to accelerate the work,

saying, however, that this is likely to trigger strong opposition from local protestors. The network said while the bureau began seawall construction in April, many local protestors are blocking the street in front of Camp Schwab where materials are being delivered by truck. The network said the bureau is considering delivering a large volume of materials directly by sea in addition to the current land route.

SCIENCE

Research whaling in northwestern Pacific ends

Mainichi took up a Fisheries Agency announcement yesterday that this fiscal year's research whaling conducted in the northwestern Pacific since mid-June has come to an end, noting that a total of 177 mammals, including 134 sei whales, were caught. Data obtained from the program will be presented to the International Whaling Commission.

