
 **JAPAN MEDIA
HIGHLIGHTS**

Morning Alert - Thursday, September 28, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK and NTV gave top play to reports on heavy rain in the Kanto and Tokai regions since early this morning. Other networks led with reports on the launch of Tokyo Governor Koike's new Party of Hope, which created a rift in the Democratic Party.

All national dailies gave top play to reports on a plan by Democratic Party President Maehara to propose a de facto merger between his party and the Party of Hope.

POLITICS

Democratic Party to be effectively "dissolved"

All papers gave prominent top play to a plan by Democratic Party President Maehara to propose at his party's general meeting today allowing DP members to run in the upcoming general election on the ticket of the Party of Hope, the new party led by Tokyo Governor Koike. Asahi wrote that Maehara will propose that the Democratic Party field no candidates in the Oct. 22 election. The papers wrote that the DP will be effectively dissolved and merged with the Party of Hope as a result. Koike stated during a TV interview on Wednesday that she will examine DP candidates' views about constitutional revision and national security in determining whether to accept them as candidates of her party.

The papers wrote that the idea of "consolidating" the DP and the Party of Hope emerged based on the common understanding between Maehara and Koike that their collective efforts will be indispensable for going up against the Abe administration. However, the papers speculated some DP members, especially those who support liberal policies, will strongly oppose Maehara's proposal.

The papers wrote that the envisaged merger between the two parties could bring about drastic changes in the Japanese political scene as a whole.

The papers wrote that the ruling LDP and Komeito are becoming increasingly alarmed about Koike's moves. Although she has dismissed the possibility of running in the upcoming election, there are growing expectations among new party hopefuls that she will return to national politics. However, Mainichi and Yomiuri wrote that although Koike has announced her intention to create a "tolerant, reform-minded conservative party," the new party is running into difficulty crafting specific policies and campaign platforms. Nikkei expressed concern over the pork-barreling and populist policies presented by Koike, including suspending the consumption tax hike and phasing out nuclear energy. Meanwhile, former Prime Minister Koizumi stated on Wednesday that although he supports Koike's idea of seeking a society that doesn't rely on nuclear energy, he will not be involved in the new party.

Polls show support for Party of Hope

An Asahi poll taken on Sept. 26-27 showed that 32% of respondents said that they would vote for LDP candidates in the proportional-representation segment of the upcoming election, while 13% chose the Party of Hope and 8% picked the DP. However, 17% of voters with no party affiliation said they would vote for candidates running on the Party of Hope ticket, exceeding the 13% who said they would choose LDP candidates. Some 45% said they have high hopes for the new party, while 39% said they don't. A Mainichi poll showed that 29% of the respondents said that they would vote for LDP candidates in the proportional-representation segment of the election, while 18% chose the Party of Hope.

INTERNATIONAL

President Trump says "U.S. is totally prepared for the second option" for North Korea

All Wednesday evening papers wrote that in response to North Korean Foreign Minister Ri's assertion on Monday that Pyongyang has the right to shoot down U.S. strategic bombers, President Trump told a news conference on Tuesday: "We are totally prepared for the second option, not a preferred option. But if we take that option, it will be devastating for North Korea. That's called the military option." The President added: "North Korea is a situation that should have been handled 25 years ago, 20 years ago, 15 years ago, and 5 years ago, and it could have been handled much more easily. You had various administrations which left me a mess. But I'll fix the mess."

U.S. imposes sanctions on 8 North Korean banks, 26 individuals

All Wednesday evening papers wrote that the Department of the Treasury announced on Tuesday that it has added eight North Korean banks and 26 individuals operating in China, Russia, Libya, and the UAE for North Korea to its sanctions blacklist. This is the first action taken by the U.S. in response to an executive order signed by President Trump on Sept. 21 to ratchet up its pressure on North Korea, and the punitive measure is intended to prevent Pyongyang from earning foreign

currency for its nuclear and missile programs. Secretary Mnuchin said in a statement: “We are targeting North Korean banks and financial facilities acting as representatives for North Korean banks across the globe.”

Secretary Tillerson to visit China

Wednesday evening’s Asahi and Yomiuri wrote that the Department of State announced on Tuesday that Secretary of State Tillerson will visit China from Sept. 28 to Oct. 1 to hold talks with senior Chinese officials. The papers wrote that the Secretary will probably discuss such issues as North Korea, President Trump’s planned visit to China in November, and the U.S. trade deficit with China.

U.S. lawmaker says “all options are on table”

Sankei wrote that Chairman Ted Yoho of the Asia and the Pacific Subcommittee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee told a group of Japanese journalists on Tuesday that the U.S. will seek a diplomatic resolution of the North Korean issue, but Kim Jong Un must understand that the U.S. puts all options on the table to defend itself and its allies. He reportedly added that although North Korea is an imminent challenge today, the threat posed by China is the greatest concern in the long run.

Abe to attend ceremony at Chinese Embassy

Asahi wrote that Prime Minister Abe intends to attend a ceremony to be held at the Chinese Embassy in Tokyo today to celebrate China’s national foundation and the 45th anniversary of diplomatic normalization with Japan. This will be the first time in 15 years for a Japanese prime minister to participate in such an event. Foreign Ministry Kono is expected to deliver remarks at the ceremony. The paper speculated that Abe’s participation in the event is aimed at improving Japan’s relations with China in order to obtain Beijing’s cooperation in dealing with North Korea.

In a related development, Mainichi wrote that Kono is making arrangements to visit Beijing in November to hold talks with his Chinese counterpart Wang.

South Korean parliament panel passes bill on “comfort woman day”

All papers wrote that a South Korean parliamentary committee on Wednesday passed a bill to designate Aug. 14 as “a day of tribute to comfort women.” The parliament is expected to pass the bill in a plenary session in the near future. Aug. 14 marks the day when a former comfort woman gave the first testimony in 1991 about her ordeal. Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga expressed concern at a news conference on Wednesday, saying that the move could throw cold water on the efforts to develop forward-looking relations.

SECURITY

Endangered coral found in Henoko

NHK reported this morning on the finding that the Okinawa Defense Bureau found a rare type of coral that is on the Ministry of the Environment’s Red List of threatened species in waters off Henoko,

Nago, in July. This was reportedly the first time for such coral to be found in waters off Henoko. The network said although the Okinawa Defense Bureau is planning to ask for Okinawa's permission to transfer the coral to other locations, the prefecture, which is against the plan to relocate the Futenma base to Henoko, is expected to conduct stringent screening, adding that this could develop into another source of conflict between the central and Okinawa governments.

