



Morning Alert - Monday, October 2, 2017

The following information reflects the reporting of the cited news media and does not reflect the opinions of the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo. Japan Media Highlights is intended for USG use only and should not be forwarded. Visit the website [here](#). For more information, contact TokyoMATT@state.gov.

HEADLINES

Morning news

All TV networks and most national dailies led with reports on the political upheaval caused by the planned merger between the Democratic Party and the Party of Hope. NHK stated that the Party of Hope will release as early as today a list of candidates it plans to endorse in the upcoming general election, including those from the DP.

POLITICS

Party of Hope to reject Democratic Party liberals

All Monday papers reported that the Party of Hope is likely to reject applications for party membership submitted by liberal-minded politicians of the Democratic Party, speculating that almost a third of DP lawmakers might be excluded on account of their opposition to constitutional revision and the security legislation. Such prominent figures as former Prime Ministers Noda and Kan, former DP Presidents Okada and Kaieda, and former Chief Cabinet Secretary Edano probably will not be accepted. According to Yomiuri, Tokyo Governor Koike, who leads the Party of Hope, will require DP politicians who join her party to sign a “policy pact” to demonstrate their approval of the party’s position on seeking constitutional revision and endorsing the security legislation. Koike is reportedly determined to be very selective in screening applications from DP politicians in view of mounting criticism from the ruling coalition that she is trying to take in as many DP politicians as possible regardless of their political ideology just to win the upcoming general election.

Edano to launch new party

The dailies reported that about a dozen liberal DP members headed by former CCS Edano are aiming to launch a new party, perhaps called the Democratic Party of Japan, in a bid to counter

Koike's moves to exclude them from the Party of Hope. They projected that as a result, the snap election will probably end up being a showdown between the ruling coalition, the Party of Hope, and the new liberal party that is likely to join hands with the Japanese Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party. Nikkei said former PM Noda and several other conservative-minded DP politicians may choose to run as independents. The dailies also said these DP legislators are highly critical of President Maehara for failing to persuade Koike not to be overly selective.

Koike's political calculus may have failed

The papers wrote that criticism of Koike is growing among DP parliamentarians in response to her decision to exclude liberal-minded politicians from her new party, noting that the DP's largest supporter Rengo (Japanese Trade Union Confederation), which Koike is reportedly counting on to provide strong support for her new party in the election campaign, is displeased that she is not going to accept all DP politicians. Yomiuri pointed out the absence of calls from the public for Koike to run in the general election, conjecturing that she may have thought the public would accept her resignation from the top Tokyo post in exchange for her bid to seek the premiership. Wakasa, the Party of Hope's de facto spokesman, said on a Sunday talk show that it is more realistic to expect the party to clinch power in a later election than the one on Oct. 22, adding that Koike probably will not run in the upcoming election. Sankei said Prime Minister Abe and other ruling coalition officials are pleased with the ongoing turmoil within the opposition camp based on the assessment that the "balkanization" of opposition parties will certainly benefit the LDP and the Komeito party in the upcoming race.

Party of Hope commands strong support in polls

Saturday morning's Yomiuri led with the results of its latest public opinion poll showing that 19% of respondents said they will vote for the Party of Hope in the proportional representation segment of the upcoming general election, while 34% chose the LDP. The daily said support for the new party headed by Tokyo Governor Koike is very strong among those who do not support the Abe administration, adding that most independent voters are still undecided as to which party they will support. Approval for the Abe cabinet dropped 7 points to 43% compared to three weeks ago. About 65% disapproved of Abe's decision to dissolve the Lower House for a snap election at this juncture. Three out of five expressed opposition to the possible candidacy of Party of Hope leader Koike in the general election by saying that she should concentrate on her gubernatorial duties.

According to a Kyodo survey, some 24% said they would vote for the LDP in proportional representation, while almost 15% chose the Party of Hope. Disapproval of the Abe cabinet was at 46.2% (up 5 points from a week ago), exceeding approval which was 40.6% (down 4.4 points).

Party of Hope, Japan Innovation Party agree to avoid showdown

All Sunday papers reported that Party of Hope Leader Tokyo Governor Koike and Japan Innovation Party President Osaka Governor Matsui agreed on Saturday that their parties will not field candidates in each other's prefectures in the upcoming general election since the two parties have many policy goals in common, such as increased decentralization and bold administrative reforms. The two governors and Aichi Governor Omura held a meeting in Osaka on the same day and agreed to work together in promoting decentralization and "draining the swamp" in national politics.

INTERNATIONAL

White House announces President Trump's travel to Asia

All Saturday morning dailies took up a White House announcement on Friday regarding President Trump's planned trip to Asia from Nov. 3 through 14, noting that the U.S. leader will visit Japan, South Korea, China, Vietnam, and the Philippines for bilateral talks and to participate in two regional summits. The papers wrote that the President's Asia tour is aimed at strengthening international resolve to confront the North Korean threat and ensure the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

Secretary Tillerson meets with top Chinese officials

All Sunday papers reported from Beijing on Secretary of State Tillerson's meetings on Saturday with Chinese President Xi, State Counsellor Yang, and Foreign Minister Wang, speculating that the top U.S. diplomat asked them to step up the pressure on North Korea. Asahi conjectured that the Secretary probably urged the Chinese leaders to restrict petroleum exports to North Korea further, suspecting that he may have explained the possible military options that the Trump administration would take in the event that the "peaceful pressure" campaign failed to stop Kim Jong Un's pursuit of nuclear and missile development.

Asahi said the Secretary's trip to Beijing was hastily arranged in response to a request from State Counsellor Yang, who held talks with the Secretary in Washington on Sept. 12. Secretary Tillerson agreed to visit on condition that the Chinese present concrete steps to ratchet up pressure on the DPRK. The papers claimed that Beijing responded by ordering its banks to stop conducting transactions with North Korean enterprises.

The dailies said President Xi, State Counsellor Yang, and Foreign Minister Wang underscored Beijing's commitment to strictly implementing the relevant UN sanctions, perhaps in a bid to ensure stable relations with the Trump administration ahead of President Trump's upcoming visit to China in early November. Asahi speculated that Beijing is taking a concerted approach with Washington in applying greater pressure on the North with the goal of dissuading President Trump from considering military options.

Secretary Tillerson mentions dialogue with DPRK

The dailies also highlighted the Secretary's remarks to the press after the meetings with senior Chinese officials, in which he said that the U.S. has "direct channels of communication" with North Korea and that Washington is "probing" for potential dialogue. "We're not in a dark situation," he added.

In a follow-up development, most Monday papers took up President Trump's latest tweets: "I told Rex Tillerson, our wonderful Secretary of State, that he is wasting his time trying to negotiate with Little Rocket Man..." and "...Save your energy Rex, we'll do what has to be done!" State Department Spokesperson Nauert separately said in a statement released on Friday: "Despite assurances that the U.S. is not interested in promoting the collapse of the current regime, pursuing regime change, accelerating reunification of the peninsula or mobilizing forces north of the DMZ, North Korean officials have shown no indication that they are interested in or are ready for talks regarding denuclearization." Yomiuri speculated that these messages were issued in order to head off speculation that the Secretary's reference to communication with the North suggests that the Trump administration is planning to start dialogue with Pyongyang in the near future.

DPRK preparing to launch missiles?

Sunday's Sankei and Yomiuri took up South Korean media reports claiming that several missiles have recently been transported to an unidentified location from a weapons factory near Pyongyang. The paper speculated that this may mean that North Korea is preparing to fire ballistic missiles in the near future, possibly around Oct. 10 when the DPRK will celebrate the 72nd anniversary of the foundation of the Workers' Party or Oct. 18 when the Chinese Communist Party will hold a major convention.

Foreign Minister Kono to visit China in November

Saturday morning's Nikkei wrote that arrangements are being made for Foreign Minister Kono to travel to Beijing in November for talks with his counterpart Wang, projecting that they are likely to discuss Prime Minister Abe's desire to convene a trilateral summit with South Korea in Japan later this year and reciprocal visits to Japan and China next year by President Xi and PM Abe.

In a related story, Nikkei wrote from Beijing that Chinese FM Wang expressed gratitude for PM Abe's recent attendance at a ceremony held at the Chinese Embassy in Tokyo to celebrate the 45th anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic ties, calling it "good news." The Japanese side reportedly explained to Beijing that Abe's participation represented Tokyo's "goodwill" in seeking improved bilateral ties.

SECURITY

Two Ospreys make unscheduled landing on Ishigaki Island

All Saturday morning papers reported that two Futenma-based MV-22s made precautionary landings at Ishigaki Airport in Okinawa on Friday afternoon, noting that the tiltrotor planes made the

unscheduled landing while on their way to the Philippines for training after a warning signal lit up on the instrument panel of one of the two Ospreys. A small amount of engine oil was found to be leaking from the aircraft in question after they landed. According to the articles, a passenger aircraft bound for Ishigaki Island from Tokyo had to be diverted to neighboring Miyako Island because of the mishap. Okinawa Governor Onaga expressed anger over the incident by telling the press: “The local people are deeply concerned because mishaps like this keep happening. We are very doubtful and distrustful of the U.S. military’s safety measures, including aircraft maintenance.” Sunday papers said repair and maintenance work was performed on the Osprey on Saturday by U.S. military mechanics airlifted to the island by a KC-130 cargo plane.

In a related development, Saturday evening and Sunday morning papers took up a “hard landing” made by a USMC Osprey in Syria on Friday.

USS Ronald Reagan bound for Korean Peninsula

Today’s Asahi wrote that the U.S. Navy Carrier Strike Group 5 led by the USS Ronald Reagan will conduct joint training with the ROK Navy off the Korean Peninsula in mid-October, conjecturing that the U.S. military appears to be bracing for additional provocations by the DPRK such as an ICBM test around that time.

