



Morning Alert - Wednesday, October 11, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK, TBS, and all national papers gave top play to reports on yesterday's start of the official campaign for the general election. Other broadcasters led with reports on the arrest yesterday of a man who used his car to block another car on the Tomei Expressway and cause it to be hit by a truck, killing the couple in the car.

INTERNATIONAL

DPRK may have developed updated ICBM

Asahi took up the disclosure by a Seoul-based military source that North Korea finished upgrading its "Mars 14" ICBM in September, speculating that the new version called "Mars 13" can apparently travel farther than the existing model that was tested twice in July. The article conjectured that the upgraded projectile, which appears to be a three-stage missile as opposed to the two-stage Mars 14, may have been the one that the Kim regime transported from a weapons factory near Pyongyang in late September to an undisclosed destination for a possible test-launch.

Although North Korea did not stage any provocations on Tuesday when it celebrated the anniversary of the foundation of its Workers' Party, the U.S., Japan, and South Korea remain on high alert given that Pyongyang may choose to engage in provocations by capitalizing on key events in the region next week, including the opening of the Chinese Communist Party convention, a trilateral vice ministerial meeting by the U.S., Japan, and South Korea, and a U.S.-ROK military exercise involving a U.S. aircraft carrier.

Meanwhile, several papers took up the disclosure by a senior Russian politician that the North Korean parliamentary speaker recently told him in Pyongyang that the Kim regime is trying to

develop an ICBM that can travel some 9,000 km to reach the U.S. mainland. The top DPRK official also reportedly told Russian lawmaker Anton Morozov that the maximum range of its existing missiles is about 3,000 km.

Secretary Mattis warns of possible military action against North Korea

Yomiuri and Sankei reported on a speech delivered in Washington on Monday by Defense Secretary Mattis, who emphasized that if necessary, the Trump administration may use force to derail North Korea's nuclear and missile development. The Pentagon chief stated before Army officials: "It is right now a diplomatically led, economic sanctions-butressed effort to try to turn North Korea off of this path.... What does the future hold? Neither you nor I can say, so there is one thing the U.S. Army can do. And that is you have to be ready to ensure that we have military options that our President can deploy if needed." The papers said the Secretary's comment may have been intended to ratchet up the peaceful pressure on Pyongyang.

Yomiuri separately took up a South Korean media report regarding former President Carter's apparent willingness to visit North Korea to help defuse the escalated tension, adding that President Trump appears to be reluctant to involve the elder statesman in the standoff between Washington and Pyongyang.

Security Council designates four cargo vessels as subject to DPRK sanctions

Yomiuri and Sankei reported from New York that a UN Security Council panel has determined that four cargo vessels, including one from North Korea, have violated relevant UN sanctions resolutions on the Kim regime by attempting to transport sanctioned materials to the DPRK and that as a result, they are now prohibited from calling at ports of UN member states.

East Asian trilateral summit may be held in December

Asahi took up remarks made on Tuesday by Foreign Minister Kono, who disclosed that arrangements are being made for the leaders of Japan, China, and South Korea to meet in Tokyo for a trilateral summit in December. If the plan is realized, Chinese Premier Li and ROK President Moon will visit Japan for the first time in their current roles.

POLITICS

Three forces vying for power in upcoming election

All papers reported heavily on the upcoming general election, emphasizing that the race will pit the ruling coalition of the LDP and the Komeito party against the alliance between Party of Hope and the Japan Innovation Party and the three-way partnership of the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan, the Japanese Communist Party, and the Social Democratic Party. The papers added that the main campaign issue will be whether the Abe administration should be given a mandate again to deal with major challenges such as the heightened tension on the Korean Peninsula, possible constitutional revision, and the planned consumption tax hike.

Asahi and Sankei said attention is focused on the scope of the possible losses to be suffered by the ruling LDP, explaining that although Prime Minister Abe has stated that the ruling coalition's goal is to maintain a majority of the 465 seats up for grabs, he may be forced out of office if the LDP loses more than 50 of its current 284 seats. Sankei said the prevailing view within the LDP is that Abe will probably be able to survive and get reelected in September next year if the ruling party loses less than 30 seats.

SECURITY

Okinawa leader vows to block FRF construction

Tokyo Shimbun wrote that Okinawa Governor Onaga testified at a local court hearing on Tuesday and reiterated his determination to derail the plan to build the Futenma replacement facility off Camp Schwab by saying: "The local people have continued to oppose the construction of a new base with pride and dignity. As the governor who has been given a strong mandate by many local residents, I am absolutely determined to block the relocation initiative in Henoko." The court is currently hearing a case on the prefectural government's claim that it is illegal for the central government to destroy rock reefs in the vicinity without obtaining permission from the local government.

