



Morning Alert - Tuesday, October 17, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK gave top play to a report that the U.S.-Japan Economic Dialogue ended at about 5:30 a.m. Japan time. Vice President Pence and Deputy Prime Minister Aso reportedly agreed to increase pressure on North Korea and released a joint press release stating bilateral cooperation in infrastructure development and natural gas exports. Fuji TV led with a report on the White House announcement that President Trump will visit Japan on Nov. 5. Other top news included reports on the increasing tension over North Korea.

Major front-page items in national dailies included reports on the detection of gravitational waves caused by a neutron-star collision, Kansai Electric Power Co.'s informal decision to decommission two atomic reactors at Oi Nuclear Power Plant in Fukui Prefecture, and the results of a public opinion survey indicating that the ruling coalition will achieve a landslide victory in the upcoming general election. Mainichi led with an article speculating that Chen Miner, the current chief of the Chinese Communist Party in Chongqing, will be appointed vice president. The daily claimed the 57 year-old politician appears to be the heir apparent to President Xi, who is set to be officially reelected during the party convention tomorrow.

INTERNATIONAL

Vice President Pence, Deputy PM Aso confirm increased pressure on North Korea

NHK reported this morning on the U.S.-Japan Economic Dialogue on Monday in Washington, saying that Vice President Pence and Deputy Prime Minister Aso confirmed at the beginning of the meeting to increase pressure on North Korea. Vice President Pence was quoted as saying: "In the face of unprecedented provocations from the regime in North Korea, you can be assured that we will continue to work closely with you and Prime Minister Abe and all our allies and partners in the region

to further isolate the Kim regime.” Aso was quoted as saying in response: “North Korea has become an unprecedented, imminent threat. The importance of the U.S.-Japan alliance has increased.” The network said the dialogue ended at about 5:30 a.m. Japan time, after which a joint press release was issued. According to the network, the joint press release states that the two nations will consider measures to simplify procedures to make it easier for the U.S. to export automobiles, and bilateral cooperation in infrastructure development and natural gas exports. The network said the two officials did not touch on trade because Japan places importance on multilateral frameworks such as the TPP, but the U.S. is interested in bilateral trade negotiations. The network also said the two sides decided to continue discussions on Japan’s safeguard measures against U.S. frozen beef imports. An NHK reporter said that although the dialogue is intended to focus on economic issues, the two leaders took up North Korea at the beginning to highlight the strong bilateral partnership and prioritized playing up bilateral economic and security cooperation while setting aside the issue of trade over which the two sides are at odds.

President Trump to visit Tokyo on Nov. 5

All papers reported on the White House announcement on Monday that President Trump will visit Japan on Nov. 5 to hold a summit with Prime Minister Abe and meet with the families of the Japanese abductees the next day. Before heading to Japan, the President will make a stopover in Hawaii to receive a briefing from PACOM on the situation on the Korean Peninsula. After Tokyo, the U.S. leader will visit South Korea on Nov. 7 to meet with President Moon and deliver a foreign policy speech at the parliament. He will then travel to Beijing for a summit with President Xi before attending two regional summits in Vietnam and the Philippines.

Deputy Secretary Sullivan meets with foreign minister

Several papers wrote that visiting Deputy Secretary of State Sullivan and Foreign Minister Kono held talks yesterday evening and agreed to step up the pressure on North Korea in coordination with South Korea. The dailies wrote that the two diplomats also exchanged views on President Trump’s upcoming trip to Japan. Nikkei speculated that such issues as the TPP and the bilateral trade imbalance will be taken up during the summit between the U.S. and Japanese leaders. The Deputy Secretary also held informal talks with Vice Foreign Minister Sugiyama earlier in the evening.

U.S., South Korea commence joint exercises

All dailies took up the start of the U.S.-ROK joint military training on Monday, noting that the U.S. is poised to display a range of powerful military platforms, including the USS Ronald Reagan, the USS Michigan, and B-1 bombers, with the goal of deterring North Korea’s aggressive provocations. The articles also highlighted the USFK’s announcement on Sunday concerning a noncombatant evacuation operation (NEO) drill for American citizens in South Korea to be held for five days starting on Oct. 23. While such training is carried out regularly, it may bear a special meaning this time since Pyongyang may interpret it as a “precursor” to a U.S. preemptive strike. The drill will be conducted based on the scenario of airlifting American nationals from South Korea to U.S. military

installations in Japan. USFK Commander Brooks reportedly stated that the NEO training “has nothing to do with the present geopolitical situation.”

In a related story, Sankei front-paged a report that arrangements are being made among the defense authorities of the U.S., Japan, and South Korea to conduct trilateral exercises later this month aimed at enhancing capabilities to detect and track down missiles launched by North Korea. Aegis warships of the three navies will take part in the drill with the goal of enhancing data sharing on DPRK ballistic missiles.

Japan conveys support for Iran nuclear pact

Several papers reported that Foreign Minister Kono spoke by phone with his Iranian counterpart Zarif yesterday to convey Tokyo’s support for the Iran nuclear agreement and pledge assistance for Tehran’s continued compliance. On President Trump’s policy of decertifying Iran’s compliance, Kono reportedly expressed hope for a ‘settlement through dialogue.’ In reply, the top Iranian diplomat voiced appreciation for Japan’s position, adding that the Iranian government will continue to abide by the multinational accord.

Russian military leaders to visit Japan

Nikkei wrote that Gen. Gerasimov, the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Russia, is likely to visit Tokyo in mid-November for talks with his Japanese counterpart Adm. Kawano., and the Russian Army’s Commander-in-Chief Gen. Salyukov will also travel to Japan in late November. The visits are aimed at increasing bilateral defense exchanges.

POLITICS

Ruling coalition likely to capture two-thirds majority

Sankei led with its projection for the Oct. 22 general election, underscoring that the ruling coalition of the LDP and the Komeito party is expected to win big, potentially capturing more than 310, or two-thirds, of the 465 seats up for grabs. While public support for the Party of Hope is steadily waning, more voters are apparently attracted to the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (CDPJ). The daily predicted that the Party of Hope led by Tokyo Governor Koike may not be able to achieve the reelection of all of its 57 incumbents, adding that there is a possibility that none of its candidates even in its home territory of Tokyo will be able to win in single-seat districts. On the other hand, the CDPJ may possibly win more than 50 seats to become the largest opposition party. The daily added that although many LDP candidates are waging very solid campaigns across Japan, most of those running in Hokkaido and Okinawa are apparently being outperformed by their opposition rivals.

Discussions on constitutional revision to pick up momentum

Asahi and Yomiuri both front-paged articles conjecturing that parliamentary debate on constitutional amendment is likely to gain momentum, as the ruling coalition is expected to win big in the general election. Together with the Party of Hope and the Japanese Innovation Party, which are also in favor

of constitutional revision, the ruling coalition will probably win more than a two-thirds majority of the Lower House, which is the ratio needed to propose amendments. Asahi said if the LDP is as successful in the election as predicted, Prime Minister Abe may be tempted to tell the ruling party to present a proposal on amending Article 9 next year. Yomiuri said while the four parties are in favor of amending the nation's supreme law in principle, they differ over which clauses should be revised.

SECURITY

Defense Ministry asks U.S. military whether aircraft used flares over Hiroshima

Asahi published a report on accounts by Hiroshima citizens that a U.S. military plane apparently used flares last week, noting that the aircraft in question released “fireballs” more than a dozen times in about 30 minutes. Defense Minister Onodera commented on the accounts by telling the press yesterday: “This type of drill is customarily carried out over a safe location. We are checking with the U.S. military. It is important for both the U.S. and Japan to conduct adequate training due to the escalated situation on the Korean Peninsula, but such training must be premised upon ensuring safety first. If such training could have an impact on local residents, it is necessary to avoid it as much as possible.”

Onodera comments on 96-hour suspension of CH-53 helicopter operations

Mainichi reported on press remarks on Monday by Defense Minister Onodera, who commented on the envisaged expiration on the same day of the 96-hour flight suspension of Okinawa-based CH-53 helicopters by saying: “We have not yet been informed of resumption.... Preliminary investigations [into the cause of the accident] are still ongoing.”

Tokyo Shimbun said no CH-53s were witnessed flying at MCAS Futenma on Monday, speculating that the Okinawa Marine Corps is perhaps carefully considering when to resume the flights by taking into account various factors, such as the situation in North Korea and Japan's general election. It added that no major progress has been made in retrieving the scorched aircraft.