



Morning Alert - Tuesday, October 24, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK, NTV, and Fuji TV continued to report on super Typhoon Lan, which claimed five lives in Japan. TBS and TV Asahi led with reports on Prime Minister Abe's press conference on Monday following his landslide victory in Sunday's general election.

Most national papers gave top play to Prime Minister Abe's press conference in which he voiced strong hope for constitutional amendment by accelerating debate with opposition parties.

POLITICS

Abe pledges to forge consensus on constitutional amendment with opposition bloc

All papers highlighted Prime Minister Abe's press conference on Monday following the ruling coalition's landslide victory in Sunday's general election, in which he vowed to make efforts to build a "broad consensus" with the Party of Hope and other opposition parties on constitutional amendment to stipulate the existence of the SDF and make preschool education free. With strong opposition to constitutional amendment by the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (CDPJ) in mind, Abe said he will continue calling for the largest opposition party to join parliamentary debate on altering the nation's supreme law. However, he also indicated that he may give up on obtaining the CDPJ's understanding and go ahead with amending the constitution by saying: "In politics, it might not be possible to win the understanding of all forces."

Asahi speculated that although the premier reiterated his strong desire to revise the Constitution, the language he used was unusually soft perhaps because he is well aware of voters' dissatisfaction with the administration as evidenced by exit polls pointing to his growing unpopularity despite the

LDP's strong election performance. An unnamed senior Kantei official said that Japanese people will not subscribe to Abe's policy of amending the Constitution if he is seen to be "arrogant."

On the diplomatic front, the premier underscored in the press conference the importance of ratcheting up the pressure on North Korea through closer coordination with the United States and other international partners.

Calls growing for opposition realignment

All papers reported on mounting calls among some opposition parliamentarians for the realignment of the opposition camp in response to the results of the general election, saying that the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan holds the key to the formation of a single, viable opposition group because it has become the largest opposition party. However, some members of the liberal-leaning party are hesitant to team up with the Party of Hope headed by Tokyo Governor Koike. The dailies said those who prevailed in the general election as independents, including former Prime Minister Noda and former Foreign Minister Okada, are expected to become catalysts in rebuilding trust between the CDPJ and the Party of Hope since most of their members who won seats used to belong to the Democratic Party.

Several papers mentioned a growing schism within the Party of Hope, explaining that many members, especially those who lost seats, are upset with Koike because they feel they were forced to wage an uphill battle due to her controversial remarks on excluding some DP politicians from the party. Mainichi said some are insisting on ousting Koike from the party leadership so that legislators who used to belong to the DP can run the Party of Hope. Sankei said some party members are openly criticizing Koike for being "autocratic."

In a related development, all papers reported from Paris that visiting Governor Koike engaged in a panel discussion with former Ambassador Kennedy and attributed her party's poor performance in the general election to the "existence of an iron ceiling." While referring to her election as Tokyo governor and her Tomin First Party's massive victory in the Tokyo metropolitan assembly election last year, Koike said: "I thought I had successfully broken through the glass ceiling. But this time I was reminded that there is still an iron ceiling."

Okinawa governor's power may weaken following LDP victory in single-seat district

Mainichi wrote that concern is growing among supporters of Okinawa Governor Onaga that his grip on power may weaken given that an LDP candidate prevailed in one of the four single-seat constituencies in the island prefecture. The governor campaigned extremely hard to help the opposition candidates defeat their LDP rivals in the four districts in the belief that his claim of "prefecture-wide" opposition to the FRF initiative would lose credibility if the LDP won even one of the four constituencies.

INTERNATIONAL

Senior White House official stresses significance of President Trump's trip to Asia

NHK reported this morning that a senior White House official held a press conference on Monday on President Trump's upcoming visit to Asia and disclosed that the President will hold a summit with Prime Minister Abe and offer words of encouragement to American and Japanese troops at Yokota Air Base in Japan. The official also reportedly said that the President is expected to reaffirm that the U.S.-Japan alliance is the cornerstone of peace and security in the region and confirm bilateral cooperation. The official also reportedly said that it would be difficult for the President to visit the DMZ while in South Korea not because of safety concerns but because of time constraints, as he is likely to visit another base. The President is also expected to meet with his Chinese counterpart and urge him to increase pressure on North Korea. He is also expected to urge China to correct the trade imbalance.

Osaka mayor reiterates opposition to comfort woman statue in San Francisco

Monday evening's Yomiuri wrote that Osaka Mayor Yoshimura told a visiting San Francisco delegation on Monday that he is opposed to a plan by San Francisco authorities to accept a group of statues symbolizing the comfort women and an epitaph created by a local civic group as a donation. The group paid a courtesy call on Yoshimura as part of events celebrating the 60th anniversary of the sister city relationship between the two municipalities. The delegation members expressed hope to maintain friendly ties but did not say how they will respond to the mayor's opposition.

SECURITY

U.S., Japan, ROK confirm continued pressure on North Korea

NHK reported this morning that the defense chiefs of the U.S., Japan, and South Korea held talks on the sidelines of the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting in the Philippines on Monday evening, during which they agreed to continue to apply pressure on North Korea through defense cooperation such as joint military drills because North Korea has become a grave threat not just in the region but worldwide. Secretary of Defense Mattis was quoted as saying at the meeting: "America's commitment to the defense of the Republic of Korea and Japan, two of our most respected allies, remains ironclad." The network quoted Defense Minister Onodera as telling reporters after the meeting: "We have a basic agreement that we will conduct joint military drills. We will coordinate among defense authorities on how and in what sectors we will conduct joint training."

Meanwhile, all papers reported on a meeting held on Monday between Defense Minister Onodera and Secretary Mattis, during which they agreed to step up pressure on North Korea by increasing interoperability between the two militaries. Secretary Mattis reiterated the U.S. defense commitment to Japan focusing on extended deterrence and promised U.S. assistance for Japan's planned procurement of Aegis Ashore platforms. According to Mainichi, they also discussed the recent

mishap involving a Futenma-based helicopter in Okinawa, with the U.S. official reportedly promising additional efforts to ensure aircraft safety.

ECONOMY

Business leaders call for early effectuation of TPP

All papers reported that Keidanren Chairman Sakakibara and two other leading businessmen met with Prime Minister Abe on Monday and urged him to conduct diplomatic efforts so that the leaders of the 11 TPP member states can forge a consensus for swiftly effectuating the regional free trade deal when they assemble on the margins of the APEC summit scheduled for mid-November in Vietnam. Yomiuri said while the premier is committed to the early effectuation of the TPP in part to dissuade the United States from pursuing a bilateral FTA with Tokyo, it remains unclear whether he can exercise strong leadership in Vietnam since the former New Zealand government headed by a pro-TPP prime minister was defeated in a recent general election. Sankei said the GOJ views the TPP as a “bulwark” to forestall the Trump administration’s “FTA offensive.”

