



Morning Alert - Wednesday, November 15, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK gave top play to a report that the GOJ has drafted a plan for making early child education free of charge even at unauthorized daycare centers. All commercial networks led with reports that grand champion sumo wrestler Harumafuji allegedly injured a fellow wrestler by hitting him with a beer bottle last month.

Major front-page items in national papers included the scandal involving grand champion sumo wrestler Harumafuji and Tokyo Governor Koike's decision to step as leader of the Party of Hope that she founded only two months ago.

POLITICS

Koike steps down as leader of Party of Hope

All papers reported that Tokyo Governor Koike on Tuesday announced her resignation as president of the Party of Hope so that she can concentrate on her duties as the Tokyo leader, quoting her as telling party parliamentarians last night: "Diet members should be responsible for national politics. I'd like to task co-leader Tamaki with heading the party." She told the press afterward: "My responsibility as the party founder has come to an end." The papers speculated that the governor had no choice but to distance herself from national politics since her grip on power has weakened rapidly following the party's dismal performance in the Oct. 22 general election.

Tamaki, who was elected as co-leader last week by defeating rival candidate Lower House member Ogushi, decided yesterday to appoint former cabinet minister Furukawa as secretary general. The new party leader also tapped former Senior Vice Defense Minister Nagashima as policy affairs chairman and former Environment Minister Hosono as the chair of the party's constitutional research commission. Given that both Nagashima and Hosono are known to be defense hawks, the papers said the new Party of Hope leadership will be inclined to take a realistic line on the diplomatic and constitutional fronts. They added that party lawmakers, who supported Ogushi in the presidential race last week, were displeased with these appointments, with some of them hinting that they may leave the party if the Tamaki leadership moves to advocate the amendment of Article 9 of the Constitution.

SECURITY

Aegis Ashore batteries to be installed at SDF training areas in Akita, Yamaguchi

Yomiuri wrote that final arrangements are being made within the GOJ to install Aegis Ashore missile interceptors at GSDF training areas in Akita and Yamaguchi Prefectures in order to secure enough space for the missile defense platforms that will emit strong radio waves. They will become operational in around FY2023.

INTERNATIONAL

President Trump wraps up Asia trip

All papers reported heavily on the conclusion of President Trump's 10-day tour of East Asia, noting that he was successful "to some extent" in enlisting support from countries in the region, including China, in tightening the noose around North Korea to curb its nuclear and missile ambitions. However, it remains to be seen whether Beijing will be willing to step up its economic sanctions on the defiant neighbor, with Sankei asserting that the President failed to obtain clear assurances from his Chinese counterpart Xi on applying stronger pressure. While noting that Washington is poised to continue applying military pressure on the DPRK as evidenced by the deployment of three aircraft carriers in the vicinity of the Korean Peninsula, Yomiuri said the President may be inclined to seek contact with the Kim regime as suggested in his tweet several days ago saying: "I try so hard to be Kim Jong Un's friend - and maybe someday that will happen!" As the President said in a separate tweet that he will be making a major statement upon his return to Washington, the paper speculated that he might suggest dialogue with North Korea, which has refrained from staging any provocations for almost two months.

The dailies emphasized that the U.S. leader was not able to present a concrete Asia strategy during his East Asia tour, claiming that many countries in the region were apparently disappointed by the Trump administration's failure to demonstrate its commitment to curbing China's growing influence in the region. Tokyo Shimbun said America is being overshadowed by China. According to Yomiuri, the President did not make any statements criticizing China's militarization of the South China Sea. Sankei wrote that President Trump perhaps chose not to criticize China at all in order to prioritize eliciting its cooperation on North Korea. Nikkei noted that the East Asian nations did not appreciate the Trump administration's "America First" approach, arguing that U.S. leadership in the region will continue to be called into question unless it changes its inward-looking orientation. The papers added that the U.S. leader decided not to attend the East Asia Summit in Manila yesterday, citing the two-hour delay of the start of the session.

Abe stresses importance of ratcheting up pressure on Kim dynasty

All papers took up Prime Minister Abe's press conference in Manila on Tuesday, during which he commented on his tour of Vietnam and the Philippines for several regional summit meetings, including ASEAN and TPP. Insisting that North Korea's nuclear and missile development was the most important item on the agenda for his visit, the premier emphasized that he was able to share with regional leaders an "unprecedented level of concern" about the DPRK. He vowed to deepen cooperation with China to achieve peace and stability in the region. Speaking on the recent agreement among the TPP members on the core elements of the regional free trade deal, the prime minister said the 11 TPP members took a "powerful first step" toward building a new economic order in the 21st century.

Foreign Minister Kono holds talks with new ROK envoy

Most papers wrote that Foreign Minister Kono met for the first time on Tuesday with South Korean Ambassador to Japan Lee Su-hoon, who assumed the post late last month. They reportedly agreed to convene a trilateral summit with China in Japan either next month or in January. They also agreed to make arrangements for Prime Minister Abe to visit South Korea on the sidelines of the PyeongChang Winter Olympic Games in February. According to MOFA, Kono expressed hope for closer coordination in order to build a future-oriented bilateral relationship.

GOJ pressured by nuclear power to forgo nuclear disarmament speech by high school student

Tokyo Shimbun wrote that according to declassified MOFA records, an unspecified nuclear power pressured the Japanese government not to have a Japanese high school student make a speech calling for nuclear disarmament during the annual UN Conference on Disarmament in Geneva in April. The MOFA papers reportedly document repeated opposition by the ambassador of the nation in question to the proposed speech by the Japanese youth. While the GOJ had arranged for similar speeches to be given by high school students at the annual UN meetings for the past three years by allowing them to become members of the GOJ delegation, the GOJ apparently decided not to allow this year's student to do the same in light of pressure from this country.

ECONOMY

Japan, EU to conclude EPA talks this year

Nikkei front-paged a report claiming that Japan and the EU are likely to reach a final accord on a bilateral EPA by year's end after shelving the adoption of an investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) provision that Tokyo had insisted on. Foreign Minister Kono and Trade Minister Seko plan to speak by phone with senior EU officials today to confirm this policy. Pointing out that Japan has just sealed a final EPA agreement with ASEAN after 10 years of talks, the daily said the Japanese government is determined to counter the Trump administration's policy of seeking bilateral trade deals by promoting trade liberalization through multilateral arrangements.