
 **JAPAN MEDIA
HIGHLIGHTS**

Morning Alert - Monday, June 25, 2018

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HEADLINES

Morning news

All networks led with reports on the Japan-Senegal match at the FIFA World Cup, which ended in a draw at 2-2.

Lead stories in national papers included a GOJ plan to develop an underwater vehicle to explore natural resources in the deep sea, Prime Minister Abe's intention to highlight marine microplastic pollution at the G20 summit in Osaka next summer, the Japanese soccer team's draw in its match against Senegal in the World Cup, and a modest increase in the number of female corporate executives in Japan.

SECURITY

Onodera briefs governors on deployment of new missile defense platforms

All Saturday morning papers reported that Defense Minister Onodera visited Akita and Yamaguchi on Friday to brief their governors on the planned deployment of Aegis Ashore batteries at SDF camps there. The governors were not fully satisfied with the defense minister's explanation that the installation of the state-of-the-art missile defense platforms is indispensable to national security in view of North Korea's possession of a large number of ballistic missiles, some of which may be capable of carrying nuclear weapons. The governors reportedly conveyed the skepticism and concern of some residents about the

deployment by citing the rapid easing of tensions on the Korean Peninsula as a result of U.S.-DPRK rapprochement.

Asahi noted that despite the two local governments' hesitancy, the Abe administration is determined to go ahead with the deployment in the belief that the Aegis batteries are critical for maintaining deterrence. The paper opined that Tokyo is eager to procure the defense hardware manufactured by Lockheed-Martin in response to President Trump's call for Japan to purchase U.S.-made weapons systems.

Okinawa memorial ceremony demonstrates deep schism between Tokyo, Okinawa

All weekend papers reported on a ceremony held in Okinawa on Saturday to mark the 73rd anniversary of the end of the 1945 Battle of Okinawa, highlighting the absence of any communication between Prime Minister Abe and Okinawa Governor Onaga at the event or on the sidelines. In his remarks at the event, Onaga stated that his determination not to allow the construction of a new base off Camp Schwab "remains rock-solid." The premier, on the other hand, did not mention Futenma relocation and instead underscored his administration's "steadfast efforts" to reduce the defense burden on Okinawa. After the ceremony, however, Abe reportedly told the press that his administration is strongly committed to moving ahead with the FRF construction since the "keeping MCAS Futenma in its current location permanently must be avoided at all costs."

Sunday's Sankei highlight the governor's remarks at the event in which he stressed that the FRF is no longer necessary due to the "continuing changes in the security environment in East Asia." The daily dismissed the governor's opinion, arguing that the raison d'être of the U.S. military presence in the southernmost prefecture will not diminish at all as a result of U.S.-DPRK reconciliation since the U.S. forces on Okinawa are playing a crucial role in ensuring the stability of East Asia.

Okinawa gubernatorial election to be held on Nov. 18

All Saturday morning papers reported that the Okinawa prefectural election steering committee decided on Friday to hold a gubernatorial election on Nov. 18 following a 17-day official campaign period beginning on Nov. 1. The papers projected that the FRF construction project off Camp Schwab will be one of top campaign issues. Incumbent Governor Onaga has been holding off on announcing whether or not he will seek reelection possibly due to health issues. However, the Abe administration and the LDP are looking to

field Ginowan Mayor Sakima as a candidate to derail Onaga's reelection bid if he decides to run.

PM Abe meets with Ambassador Hagerty

Saturday morning's Yomiuri reported very briefly on a meeting between Prime Minister Abe and Ambassador Hagerty at the Kantei on Friday, during which they reportedly discussed a recent incident in Nago, Okinawa, where what appeared to be a stray bullet was discovered in a farm shed near Camp Schwab. Abe reportedly asked the Ambassador for cooperation to determine what happened. Saturday morning's Asahi wrote that in response to the Okinawa Defense Bureau's request for a temporary suspension of the use of the shooting ranges at Camp Schwab, the U.S. military has decided to temporarily discontinue their use.

Jiji reported on Saturday on press remarks made by Abe in Okinawa earlier in the day, in which he commented on the incident by saying: "It is a serious matter that could have resulted in fatalities.... We have asked the U.S. military to conduct an investigation and stop using the shooting ranges."

Government spokesman dismisses concerns about Japan's plutonium stockpile

Saturday morning's Nikkei focused on press remarks by Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga, who reportedly commented on the concerns of the U.S. and other nations about the steady increase in Japan's plutonium stockpile. "We will deal with the matter properly so as to continue upholding the principle that Japan will not possess plutonium without a specific purpose," he was quoted as saying. "The IAEA has determined that Japan's plutonium program is for peaceful purposes. It does not pose a problem in terms of nuclear nonproliferation."

INTERNATIONAL

Japanese outlet suspects North Korea is putting off denuclearization talks

Today's Mainichi reported from Washington on the continued absence of any announcements by the USG or North Korea on the launch of bilateral denuclearization talks, which President Trump projected would start soon after his summit with Kim Jong Un. The paper speculated that the Kim regime may be trying to backtrack on its commitment to denuclearization. While noting that mutual confidence between the two countries appears to be building as evidenced by progress on the agreed-upon return of remains of U.S. POWs and MIAs, the daily speculated that denuclearization talks may be prolonged due to North Korea's procrastination.

President comments on Japanese reaction to U.S.-DPRK summit

Monday's Mainichi took up President Trump's interview with the Trinity Broadcasting Network, during which he reportedly said he is seen as a "world hero in Japan" because of his meeting with Kim Jong Un, which the President said has defused the tension on the Korean Peninsula. "There's been no missiles fired. There's been no rockets fired. Japan thinks I'm like a world hero over there," said the President.

GOJ might dispatch engineers to support North Korea's denuclearization

Sunday's Yomiuri led with the disclosure by several GOJ sources that the Abe administration is mulling sending nuclear technology experts to North Korea to assist with dismantling its nuclear-related facilities. According to the article, private-sector engineers who have been involved in the decommissioning of reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant may be dispatched as part of Japan's contribution to the DPRK's denuclearization process. The paper quoted a source as saying: "Japan's decommissioning technology expertise can be utilized for North Korea's denuclearization."

U.S., ROK cancel more joint drills to ensure progress on denuclearization

All weekend papers reported on the Trump administration's decision to call off two additional U.S.-ROK joint exercises that were scheduled for the summer. The papers speculated that Washington and Seoul decided to cancel the two drills, which were to be smaller in scale than the previously-canceled Ulchi Freedom Guardian exercises, to prevent the Kim regime from using them as an excuse to delay denuclearization.

Japan eases confrontational approach toward DPRK

Saturday morning's Mainichi focused on an announcement made by Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga on Friday that the GOJ has decided not to conduct missile evacuation drills requiring the participation of local residents that were scheduled to take place in nine prefectures this year. The daily speculated that Tokyo has decided to forgo the drills because North Korea might construe them as provocative especially at a time when Prime Minister Abe is seeking a summit with Kim Jong Un in order to resolve the abduction issue. The daily said the Abe administration is set to ease the pressure on the Kim regime so as to pursue dialogue in line with the U.S. and South Korea's reconciliation with North Korea.

Financial authorities launch probe into illicit remittances to North Korea

Saturday morning's Asahi and Sankei reported that on Friday the Financial Services Agency instructed all of the nation's banks to check whether they have ever conducted transactions with ten Japan-DPRK joint ventures primarily based in Pyongyang that have allegedly been

involved in money laundering and other illegal financial transactions in violation of sanctions.

ECONOMY

GOJ running into difficulty addressing possibility of U.S. auto tariffs

Sunday's Nikkei reported that the GOJ and Japanese auto manufacturers are bracing for a possible decision by the Trump administration to impose high tariffs on vehicles. If the proposed 25% tariff is imposed, Japanese automakers might have to pay over 2.3 trillion yen, or about \$20 billion, in additional tariffs on U.S.-bound products, including those assembled in Mexico, Canada, and other nations. The paper wrote that the GOJ has few effective tools to dissuade the U.S. leader from adopting what the paper characterizes as a protectionist policy, noting that the further opening of the domestic agricultural market to U.S. products may emerge as an option to head off U.S. trade pressure. While noting that taking the matter to the WTO would be time-consuming, the daily conjectured that additional investment in the U.S. in the form of Japanese automakers building new plants there might prompt President Trump not to impose the tariffs on Japanese vehicles.

Sunday's Yomiuri filed a similar story, adding that Japanese automakers are keen to play up their considerable contributions to the U.S. economy, including job creation, by conducting vigorous PR campaigns. Toyota CEO Toyoda reportedly stated that "U.S. customers would be hit hard by a rise in car prices" as a result of the proposed tariffs.

Majority of metal products exempted from U.S. tariffs are Japanese

All Saturday morning papers except Asahi took up press remarks made on Friday by Trade Minister Seko, who commented on the U.S. decision to exempt 42 steel products from Japan and other nations from the list of steel products to be subject to high tariffs. The minister reportedly estimated that almost two-thirds of the exempted items are from Japan, emphasizing that many Japanese metal imports to the U.S. are irreplaceable in terms of quality. The GOJ official insisted that all Japanese metal products should be exempted from the punitive tariffs. Mainichi and Sankei separately reported on remarks on the same subject made by Economic and Fiscal Policy Minister Motegi, who will be in charge of the "fair, free, and reciprocal" trade talks with the U.S. set to begin in July. The minister said, "High-quality Japanese steel and aluminum products are contributing greatly to U.S. industry and employment," underscoring that the imports do not constitute a threat to U.S. national security.

**OPINION
POLLS**

Support for PM Abe improves dramatically

Monday's Nikkei front-paged the results of its latest public opinion poll that put support for the Abe cabinet at 52%, up 10 points from a month ago, and nonsupport at 42%, down 11 points. This was the first time in four months that approval exceeded disapproval. The daily attributed the recovery in Abe's popularity to higher expectations for his diplomatic ability, with three out five saying that the premier should hold a summit with DPRK leader Kim Jong Un quickly. However, only 32% said such a meeting will lead to a settlement of the abduction issue.

Mainichi's poll showed a similar trend, putting support for the premier at 36%, up 5 points, and nonsupport at 40%, down 8 points. Respondents were rather pessimistic about progress on the abduction issue following the historic U.S.-DPRK summit in Singapore, with only 18% pinning hopes on finding a solution to the dispute. Similarly, only 15% said the nuclear and missile issue can be resolved.

POLITICS

LDP presidential race to be held in mid-September

Saturday morning's Asahi speculated that the ruling LDP is making arrangements to convene a presidential election in mid-September, probably around Sept. 20 or 21, so as to accommodate Prime Minister Abe's plan to depart for New York on Sept. 22 for the annual UN General Assembly session.

In a related development, today's Asahi and Sankei wrote that in his remarks to the press on Sunday, former LDP Secretary General Ishiba indicated that he will declare his candidacy in the September presidential election after the current Diet term ends on July 22.