


JAPAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

Morning Alert - Wednesday, June 27, 2018

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HEADLINES

Morning news

All networks gave top play to reports that a former SDF member was arrested on Tuesday on charges of stabbing a police officer to death, stealing his gun, and fatally shooting a security guard in Toyama.

Major front-page items in national dailies included the incident in Toyama, a USG request for Japan to stop importing oil from Iran, a dubious loan offered by a brokerage firm to former Environment Minister Hosono during the official campaign period for the Lower House election last October, and Princess Ayako's plan to marry a businessman in October.

INTERNATIONAL

U.S. urges partners to end oil imports from Iran

All papers reported that the Trump administration is allegedly asking Japan and other partners to halt oil transactions with Iran by Nov. 4 when it plans to reinstate economic sanctions. A USG delegation headed by Assistant Secretary of State Ford visited Japan last week and reportedly asked GOJ ministries and commercial enterprises to stop importing Iranian petroleum. The Japanese side was reportedly noncommittal toward the alleged U.S. request. According to the articles, Washington has decided that third countries such as European nations and Japan will not be exempted from the planned disciplinary measures that penalize the companies of third parties that do business with Tehran.

The GOJ is reportedly set to ask the USG to allow Japan to continue importing Iranian oil, which accounts for 5% of the nation's overall petroleum imports, based on the judgment that a suspension

would damage diplomatic relations with the Iranian government. However, Nikkei speculated that Japanese oil and trading companies may choose to heed the U.S. request and avoid procuring Iranian products out of fear of losing business opportunities in America. Sankei projected that a discontinuation or reduction of Iranian petroleum imports would not have a substantial impact on the stable procurement of oil products since Japanese firms would try to reach out to other suppliers. According to Mainichi, Trade Minister Seko commented on the purported U.S. demand by telling the press yesterday: “Japan would like to hold discussions with the countries involved, including the United States, so that the stable supply of energy will not be adversely affected.”

International pressure on North Korea allegedly easing

All papers took up Secretary of State Pompeo’s remarks made to the CNN in which he expressed the view that the U.S. will not set a deadline for North Korea’s denuclearization. Nikkei wrote that this remark is incompatible with press remarks made earlier by an unnamed senior DOD official, who suggested that the Trump administration is expected to make “specific asks” and press for a “specific timeline” on denuclearization. The national daily opined that international pressure on Pyongyang has apparently begun to weaken following the Singapore summit between President Trump and Kim Jong Un, expressing concern that the Kim regime may put off fulfilling its commitment to complete denuclearization.

North Korea dismisses Japanese narrative on abductions

Sankei reported on a commentary aired yesterday by a DPRK media organization concerning bilateral relations with Japan, quoting it as saying: “Instead of offering apologies and compensation for the crimes of the past, Japanese reactionary forces are trying to play up the abduction issue, which does not exist in the first place, and maneuvering unabashedly to portray themselves as victims.” The commentary underscored that Tokyo must come to terms with its history on the Korean Peninsula, calling for compensation for its colonial rule prior to and during WWII.

In a related development, Mainichi highlighted remarks made during a UN arms control meeting in Geneva on Tuesday by a DPRK ambassador, who said Japan has “no role” to play in denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula since it is not a party to the inter-Korean Panmunjom Declaration or the Singapore joint statement between the U.S. and North Korea. “We advise Japan not to interfere in the affairs of other countries,” the North Korean diplomat said.

Japan alarmed by planned supervision of Chinese coast guard by PLA

Asahi reported on a decision to incorporate the China Coast Guard (CCG) into the Chinese People’s Armed Police Force under the auspices of the Chinese Communist Party’s Central Military Commission on July 1. Because the coast guard’s boats will effectively be operated by the People’s Liberation Army, the GOJ is reportedly worried that its operations in the vicinity of the Senkakus may become even more aggressive. Defense Minister Onodera commented on the plan yesterday by

telling the press: “Japan is determined to safeguard its territory, territorial airspace, and territorial waters, including in the vicinity of the Senkakus.”

SECURITY

Discrepancy between Abe, U.S. military over request for F-15 flight suspension

Asahi reported on a controversy triggered by remarks made at the parliament on Monday by Prime Minister Abe concerning the crash of a Kadena-based F-15 off Naha on June 11, noting that although the premier indicated that the GOJ asked the U.S. military to suspend F-15 flights, the U.S. military has denied that it received such a request from the Japanese side. According to the daily, in response to a question about the incident by an opposition lawmaker, the prime minister said: “We strongly called on the U.S. side to ensure flight safety and take thorough measures to prevent a recurrence. The U.S. side decided to halt flight training to conduct thorough inspections.... As we asked for a flight suspension, the U.S. side discontinued drills for two days and carried out inspections.” A USFJ spokesperson reportedly told the daily yesterday that the U.S. military, including Kadena AB, has not received such a request. Mainichi ran a similar story emphasizing that MOD asked the U.S. side to ensure flight safety and prevent a recurrence but not to discontinue F-15 flights.

LDP running into difficulty fielding gubernatorial candidate in Okinawa race

Sankei reported that the LDP headquarters is frustrated that it has been unable to make much progress in finding a ruling party candidate for the Okinawa gubernatorial election to be held on Nov. 18. The paper noted that although Ginowan Mayor Sakima has emerged as a possible candidate, the municipal leader has yet to make up his mind about whether to run. The daily said the ruling party is impatient to field a candidate quickly since the election could be conducted earlier than scheduled in the event that Governor Onaga chooses to step down for health reasons before his term expires in December.

Yomiuri published a similar article, noting that the LDP intends to field Sakima as its candidate for Okinawa governor in order to proceed with FRF construction without delay. Although Governor Onaga’s supporters are reportedly stepping up their efforts to prepare for his reelection bid, the daily quoted a person close to the politician as saying: “It would be difficult for Mr. Onaga to run owing to his health condition.”

SCIENCE

Japan to propose partial resumption of commercial whaling

All national papers except Nikkei reported that the Fisheries Agency has decided to put forward a package of proposals on whaling at an upcoming International Whaling Commission (IWC) meeting to be held in Brazil in September, explaining that Japan plans to propose lifting the existing moratorium on commercial whaling so that it can hunt humpback whales since their population

appears to be recovering. The Japanese proposals will also include a change in the IWC decision-making mechanism so that key decisions can be made with the consent of a simple majority instead of a three-fourths majority, contingent on unanimous approval by panels tasked with deliberating single topics such as sustainable use and sanctuaries. Although Tokyo is hopeful that it will be able to obtain IWC consent for its proposals since the Japanese representative is expected to chair this year's confab, Asahi expressed doubts about the prospects.

