



Morning Alert - Wednesday, July 25, 2018

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK, NTV, and TV Asahi gave top play to the extreme heat in Japan, calling for caution against heatstroke. TBS led with a report on sumo wrestler Mitakeumi, who won the summer tournament in Nagoya. Fuji TV gave top play to a report that a woman and her lover were arrested in Mie Prefecture on suspicion of abandoning the body of the woman's husband.

Major front-page stories in national papers included former Foreign Minister Kishida's decision not to run in the LDP presidential election in September, Yamato Transport's admission that it has overcharged a total of 2,640 companies approximately 1.7 billion yen in moving fees, an agreement between Japan and Vietnam for Japan to accept 10,000 Vietnamese elderly care workers, and TEPCO's plan to start removing molten nuclear fuel from Reactor No. 2 of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant beginning in 2021.

INTERNATIONAL

North Korea anxious to obtain regime guarantees from U.S.

All papers reported on North Korea's apparent moves to begin dismantling a missile launch site in the western part of the country. Asahi and Mainichi speculated that by taking a step toward complete denuclearization, the Kim regime is probably aiming to obtain security guarantees from the Trump administration through the issuance of a joint declaration on ending the Korean War. Yomiuri reported that President Trump said in a tweet that Japan and Asia as a whole are happy that North Korea has not launched any rockets or conducted any nuclear tests in nine months. The paper conjectured that the President posted the tweet in response to North Korea's purported moves to dismantle Sohae Satellite Launching Station in Tongchang-ri.

ROK government earmarks 1 billion yen for comfort women fund

All papers reported that the Moon administration on Tuesday approved a plan to contribute about 10.3 billion won in reserve funds to the Reconciliation and Healing Foundation that was launched several years ago to alleviate the suffering of former comfort women, explaining that the amount is equivalent to the 1 billion yen that the GOJ donated to the fund as compensation to the victims based on the 2015 bilateral comfort women agreement. The ROK government decided to use its own funds since some of the comfort women have refused to accept the Japanese compensation via the foundation, which has been unable to take action due to opposition from some of the victims. Seoul has yet to decide on what to do with the Japanese money, but it probably will not be returned to the GOJ.

Nikkei conjectured that by effectively paying the Japanese expense, South Korea may be aiming not to allow Tokyo to claim that the comfort women dispute has already been resolved. Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga commented on the Moon administration's decision to use reserve funds by telling the press yesterday: "It is very important to enforce the comfort women accord steadily. South Korea must not take any actions that run counter to or undermine the content or the spirit of the pact."

Japan's parliamentary speaker meets with Chinese leader

Yomiuri and Nikkei wrote that House Speaker Oshima visited Beijing yesterday and held talks with Premier Li, noting that the two senior politicians agreed to further improve bilateral relations. In reply to Oshima's request for President Xi to visit Japan after Prime Minister Abe's purported trip to China later this year, China's No. 2 official referred to his tour of Japan in May this year by saying: "As a result, Sino-Japanese relations have gotten back on a normal track.... We would like to build a relationship with Japan that can develop in a stable manner for many years by using history as a mirror."

Japan's Upper House president delivers speech at Russian parliament

Yomiuri wrote from Moscow that House of Councillors President Date made a speech at Russia's Council of the Federation on Monday, during which he called for Russia's support for achieving the denuclearization of North Korea and resolving the abduction issue. This was the first speech ever made by Japan's Upper House leader at the Russian national legislature.

Top German diplomat to visit Japan today

Yomiuri published a written interview with German Foreign Minister Maas, who is scheduled to arrive in Japan today for talks with Prime Minister Abe and Foreign Minister Kono. On Germany's ties with Japan, Maas reportedly said Japan is a "partner that shares idealistic values" with Europe. He hailed Japan's recent signing of an EPA with the EU.

POLITICS

Kishida chooses not to challenge Abe's reelection bid

All papers reported extensively on LDP Policy Research Council Chairman Kishida's announcement to the press yesterday that he has decided not to run in the LDP presidential election slated for September and instead will support Prime Minister Abe's bid to seek a third term. He said: "I've decided against running in the belief that it is more appropriate for me to assist the prime minister in dealing with various political challenges," such as the recent flooding in western Japan, including his home constituency of Hiroshima, and the Emperor's abdication next year. The veteran politician phoned Abe earlier in the day to convey his decision, which the premier reportedly appreciated greatly.

As former LDP Secretary General Ishiba is prepared to file his candidacy for the presidency, the September race is likely to be a showdown between him and PM Abe. Although Ishiba is popular among rank-and-file party members, especially in the countryside, most papers projected that Abe will probably prevail since support for his candidacy appears to be overwhelming among LDP Diet members. The articles speculated that Kishida chose not to challenge Abe this time in the hope that after Abe's purported third term as LDP leader expires in 2021, he and his followers will embrace Kishida's bid to take the helm of the ruling party.

SECURITY

Defense chief comments on cost estimate for ground-based missile defense platforms

Yomiuri and Mainichi took up press remarks on Tuesday by Defense Minister Onodera, who commented on the cost of the two Aegis Ashore batteries that the SDF plans to procure by saying: "I've never spoken about the cost estimates.... It's difficult to present an accurate figure at this stage because it will vary considerably depending on the components of the systems, including radar, and where they will be installed." The dailies added that the Defense Ministry has previously indicated that the cost of deployment will be around 100 billion yen per unit.

