


JAPAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

Morning Alert - Thursday, August 2, 2018

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK led with a report on the severe heat in eastern and western Japan, while all commercial networks gave top play to reports on the Japan Boxing Federation's alleged misuse of subsidies.

Major front-page items in national papers included an LDP idea to split the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare into two entities, the Tokyo Medical University's alleged discrimination against women by lowering all female applicants' entrance exam scores so as to give male students an advantage, and the Japan Meteorological Agency's announcement that last month was the hottest July in history in eastern Japan.

INTERNATIONAL

U.S. allegedly not enthusiastic about declaration on ending Korean War

Wednesday evening's Asahi reported from Seoul on the disclosure by a source involved in U.S.-ROK relations that South Korea's National Intelligence Service Director Suh Hoon visited Washington on July 26-29 for talks with Secretary of State Pompeo and other senior USG officials. According to the paper, the U.S. officials were reportedly negative toward the South Korean visitor's request for the issuance of a declaration on ending the Korean War possibly in September and the exclusion of inter-Korean economic cooperation from international sanctions on the DPRK. The U.S. side was not responsive to the ROK proposal

and said that Pyongyang must first submit a list of weapons, materials, and facilities that need to be denuclearized and a concrete timetable for the denuclearization. The South Korean government is reportedly concerned that President Moon's pro-dialogue approach to the DPRK may be derailed as a result of stalled denuclearization talks between the Trump administration and the Kim regime.

In a follow-up report, the daily wrote from Washington today that the USG appears to be delaying the adoption of a declaration on ending the Korean War in a bid to prompt North Korea to take concrete actions toward denuclearization swiftly based on the assessment that Kim Jong Un is eager to obtain the declaration as a diplomatic achievement by Sept. 9, the 70th anniversary of his nation's foundation.

Secretary Pompeo keen to promote “free and open Indo-Pacific” initiative

Sankei reported on Secretary of State Pompeo's ongoing tour of Southeast Asia through Aug. 5, explaining that one of his top priorities is to deepen coordination with ASEAN members so as to seek their cooperation with the “free and open Indo-Pacific” initiative proposed by President Trump during his first East Asia tour last fall. While speculating that the U.S.'s diplomatic initiative is intended to rein in China's growing influence in the region primarily in coordination with Japan, Australia, and India, the daily quoted an unnamed senior State Department official as saying: “ASEAN-centered meetings are the cornerstone of a free and open region.” The article projected that the Secretary will express Washington's continued commitment to engagement in the region when he attends several ASEAN-related conferences in Singapore.

Top U.S., Japanese diplomats both seeking meetings with DPRK foreign minister

Sankei wrote that Foreign Minister Kono is looking to make contact with his DPRK counterpart on the sidelines of the ASEAN Regional Forum meeting in Singapore on Saturday. The Japanese official is reportedly anxious to hold a meeting with North Korean FM Ri in order to press him to resolve the abduction issue quickly. The daily claimed that Secretary of State Pompeo may also seek a meeting with Ri in Singapore to discuss denuclearization, quoting an unnamed high-ranking DOS official as saying: “With regard to potential encounters, pull-asides, bilateral meetings, all of those are possible with members of the ASEAN Regional Forum.”

SECURITY

Two “hurdles” stand in the way of deploying new missile defense platforms

Yomiuri published a prominent inside-page story on the Defense Ministry’s plan to install Aegis Ashore batteries at SDF camps in Akita and Yamaguchi, noting that strong local opposition and inflated procurement costs are complicating the deployment. Reluctance to host the state-of-the-art missile defense systems remains strong among local residents, who are concerned the electromagnetic waves emitted by the batteries’ radar may damage their health. They are also worried that their communities could become targets of enemy attacks. The lack of an explanation of the deployment by the ministry and the rapid thaw in U.S.-DPRK relations have made local residents even more hesitant to host Aegis Ashore.

As for the procurement cost, which will apparently be at least 70% above the initial estimate, the ministry has acknowledged that its original estimate was overly optimistic. The daily expressed concern that the overall deployment cost, including maintenance and operational expenses, may escalate further because the purchase of the ground-based Aegis system will be made under the foreign military sales (FMS) arrangement, which the daily asserted has forced Japan to pay the price asked by the United States.

Futenma pupils took shelter over 450 times between April and July due to U.S. military planes flying overhead

Mainichi took up data compiled by the Okinawa Defense Bureau that showed pupils of Futenma Daini Elementary School left the playground to seek shelter in school buildings to avoid U.S. military aircraft flying over the premises a total of 455 times during the first semester of the school year from April 9 to July 20. The daily added that work is underway to build a shelter in the playground in response to requests from parents who are concerned about a recurrence of the incident last December when a window fell onto the playground from a Futenma-based helicopter.

ECONOMY

Top USG economist speaks on U.S. economy, trade with Japan

Nikkei ran an interview with Chairman Kevin Hassett of the Council of Economic Advisers, during which he predicted that the U.S. economy will grow an annual 3% over the next five years to achieve its longest expansion in the postwar era. On the imminent launch of new trade talks between Washington and Tokyo, the U.S. official reportedly stated that he respects President Trump’s view that “the best way to move forward on trade is to have

bilateral deals.” As for the Trump administration’s ongoing study on whether to impose additional tariffs on auto imports, Hassett reportedly called the process “a work in progress.”

U.S. Embassy official welcomes Japan’s policy of reducing plutonium stockpile

Nikkei took up a press briefing on Wednesday by U.S. Embassy Energy Attaché Ross Matzkin-Bridger, who said the USG “welcomes” the recent decision made by the Japan Atomic Energy Commission to reduce the nation’s plutonium stockpile.

UK trade minister voices keen interest in joining TPP

Nikkei carried an interview with British Secretary of State for International Trade Liam Fox, who is currently visiting Japan. The minister reportedly elaborated on London’s strong interest in becoming a member of the Trans-Pacific Partnership at an early date. He also voiced hope for concluding a bilateral free trade accord with Tokyo, for which he stressed the scope of liberalization should be “more ambitious” than the EPA that Japan sealed with the EU recently.

