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DAILY SUMMARY OF JAPANESE PRESS

Tuesday, February 8, 2000 

**INDEX:**

(1)  Prime Minister desires to invite China to Okinawa Summit to play up "Asia's point of view", but realizing his plan is a delicate issue; Foreign Ministry cautious about the notion for failure would injure Japan's prestige; China is negative, thinking its participation would further weaken the UN's functions

**(2)  Atsugi base dioxin uproar:  U.S. irritated at slow response**

**(3)  Smokestack emissions hanging over Japan-U.S. security setup; U.S. Atsugi base complaining for 8 years about health hazards**

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ASAHI  (Page 2)  (Full)

February 6, 2000

**(2)  Atsugi base dioxin uproar:  U.S. irritated at slow response**

TOKYO SHIMBUN  (Page 6)  (Full)

February 6, 2000

      The problem of dioxin emissions harming AtsugiNaval Air Station, a U.S. military facility that is located across Ayase City and certain other municipalities in Kanagawa Prefecture, is now shaking the relationship between Japan and the United States.  The central and Kanagawa prefectural governments have told an industrial waste disposal plant operator to improve the emission situation.  But the U.S. military has been taking a tough stance, with such remarks as, "Japan has been slow in taking action.  We are considering a civil lawsuit."  There are no signs yet of a resolution to this pending issue, which ranks with the problem of relocating Futenma airfield.

[Ryota Kawagoe, **Atsugi** correspondent]

      When one speaks of U.S. base problems, the only cases heard of before were the complaints of communities outside the bases, such as a string of lawsuits instituted by a group of residents near **Atsugi** base suffering from the roars of jet aircraft.  However, the problem this time is an unprecedented case.  On-base U.S. servicemen and their families are crying out for help, complaining of the hazard to their health from dioxin-rich smoke emissions from a local incinerator.  When Assistant Secretary of the Navy Pirie recently visited Japan, he stated that the U.S. military has never before experienced such a case in its history.

      What the U.S. military has raised as an issue is the smoke emitting from a complex of incinerators run by Environtec (formerly, Shinkampo), located about 250 meters west of Atsugi base's housing compound.  U.S. military personnel's families living there began to complain a decade ago about the "terrible smoke."  Last year, the Japanese government and the U.S. military jointly monitored the base's environment.  In the joint monitoring of dioxin levels, a maximum of 53 picograms [per cubic meter]—a record-high level of dioxin in Japan—was detected in soil on the base.

      The problem was even taken up by President Clinton in his meeting with Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi last May.  The President said, "There's Shinkampo (as a problem pending between Japan and the U.S.)."  Prime Minister Obuchi promised to take responsibility to find a solution to the problem.  The Japanese government then earmarked expenditures in its fiscal 2000 budget as a 'supralegal action' to build a 100-meter smokestack, as requested by the U.S. military.  The government planned to complete the construction work by March next year.

      However, the company rejected the government's offer of smokestack construction, claiming that it would be impossible to carry out an environmental assessment by March next year and that the cost of such a facility would be too large.  In compliance with the Kanagawa prefectural government's recommendation, the company will only install bag house filters on the incinerator's chimney.  It has yet to hold talks with the government over the government-proposed construction of a smokestack.

      Seeing such a situation, the U.S. Navy exploded in anger.  In a bilateral meeting with his counterpart this January, Secretary of Defense Cohen expressed his strong discontent:  "Our frustration is mounting, and our patience reaching a limit."   Assistant Secretary Pirie also was unable to conceal his irritation, saying, "The Japanese side has been very slow to respond.

      The U.S. government says it is ready to file a civil lawsuit.  In that case, however, there is a question in connection with the Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement.  The question is who the lawsuit will be aimed at.  Assistant Secretary Pirie has also expressed the U.S. military's hope that the Japanese government can resolve the problem as early as possible through regular channels.  The U.S. side has thus left the matter up to the Japanese side for now.

      Perhaps as the first step in resolving this problem, the government needs to have a talks with that company.

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**(3)  Smokestack emissions hanging over Japan-U.S. security setup; U.S. Atsugi base complaining for 8 years about health hazards**

YOMIURI  (Page 2)  (Full)

February 6, 2000

      An environmental pollution affecting the U.S. Navy base at Atsugi and its periphery has now become a big problem between Japan and the United States.  The U.S. military has asked the Japanese government for years to improve the situation in a drastic way, claiming that such has done harm to the health of U.S. military personnel and their family dependents.  Yet, there has been little progress in the Japanese government's action since there is a limit to its administrative guidance.  Also, the Japanese and U.S. governments' respective standpoints remain divergent over the issue of reducing Japan's host nation support or the so-called 'sympathy budget' for U.S. forces in Japan.  Officials in the Japanese government are now worried about the problem's possible impact, one of the Foreign Ministry's senior officials saying that it might go so far as to overshadow the bilateral security alliance of Japan and the United States.

Government in a fix; Industrial waste disposal operator rejects government-budgeted improvement plan

      "How long do we have to remain patient?  Congress is also showing strong reactions to the problem."  U.S. Secretary of Defense Cohen made this remark in his meeting with Defense Agency Director General Kawara on the 5th of last month during Kawara's visit to the United States.  During their meeting, Cohen brought up the so-called "Shinkampo" problem—or an environmental pollution of **Atsugi** Naval Air Station—and urged Kawara in a strong tone of voice to improve the situation.

      The Shinkampo problem was triggered by the U.S. military's filing of its claim against smoky emissions from a complex of incinerators run by a private industrial waste processing company near the **Atsugi** base.  The U.S. government therefore has been calling for improvements in the situation.  Shinkampo is the company's old name.  The Japanese government and the U.S. military conducted a joint environmental survey from July through September last year.  As a result, the bilateral monitoring survey detected a record-high level of dioxins—66 times higher than the government-set environment standard.

      The U.S. side first raised this problem in a 1992 environmental subcommittee meeting of the Japan-U.S. Joint Committee.  In the subcommittee meeting, the U.S. side asked the Japanese side to implement countermeasures, claiming against harm done to the health of 3,000 people living on the base's housing compound for U.S. servicemen and their family dependents.

      In a Japan-U.S. summit meeting held in Washington in May last year, President Clinton said to Prime Minister Obuchi, "There is the problem of Shinkampo."  One senior official at the Foreign Ministry said, "I never thought the President himself would come out to call for improvements in the situation even by referring to the name of a company.  It reminded us of how deeply the U.S. side was irritated."

      Yet, the problem has seen little improvement.  It was about two years ago when the Japanese government set about taking its initiative for improvements after becoming aware of how serious the problem was.  Until then, the Kanagawa prefectural government was the only party, as the licensing entity, to deal with the company over the problem.  In April 1998, the Defense Facilities Administration Agency set about holding direct consultations with the company.  Eventually, the company agreed to install another facility to separate plastic waste from other waste matters.  However, last year's bilateral survey found no improvement in the situation.

      In response to findings from the joint survey, the Kanagawa prefectural government recommended the company in October last year to take such improvement measures as installing bag house filters on its plant's smokestack to hold down the concentration of dusty particles and dioxins.  At the time, the prefectural government told the company that its incinerator's [dioxin] emissions violated the nation's industrial waste processing and cleaning-up law.

      The law stipulates that a local government may call off an industrial waste processing enterprise's business license in case that enterprise refuses to follow the local government's improvement recommendation.  However, it is difficult for now to write off the company's license because the company, according to sources in the prefectural government, has been following the Kanagawa prefectural government's guidance.  Therefore, the DFAA proposed building a taller smokestack at the government's expense amounting to approximately 1.1 billion yen.  However, the company rejected the offer, reasoning that a taller smokestack would rather have a negative effect on its incinerators.

      The U.S. government is now considering applying for a temporary injunction seeking to have the plant stop its operation, and intends to intensify its pressure to the Japanese government for improvements in the situation.  The U.S. Congress is now beginning to voice its doubts about stationing U.S. forces in Japan if that means sacrificing the health of U.S. servicemen and their families, sources say.

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