

Press briefing at the Prime Minister's Office for members of the foreign press

26 March 2011

Noriyuki Shikata, Deputy Cabinet Secretary for Public Relations of the Prime Minister's Office: Good evening. Let us start today's briefing for the international press. Today's briefers are as follows. My name is Noriyuki Shikata, Deputy Cabinet Secretary for Public Relations at the Prime Minister's Office. On my right is Mr. Hidehiko Nishiyama, Deputy Director General of NIST. On my left, Mr. Shinichi Kawarada from MEXT. Mr. Hideyuki Tsunoda, Director of the Secretariat of the Nuclear Safety Commission. On my far left is Ms. Noriko Iseki, Senior Technical Officer of the Food Safety Department of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. On my far right is Mr. Takeshi Matsunaga, Assistant Press Secretary of the Foreign Office.

Let me just come up with opening remarks in relation to Mr. Edano's press conference this evening. He announced a new appointment of Special Advisor to Prime Minister Kan. The new assistant is Mr. Sumio Mabuchi, former Minister of Land Infrastructure, Transport, and Tourism. He will be tackling the issue of response to the disaster and the nuclear power station incidents and accidents. He is starting his new assignment today.

Some of the points that Mr. Edano mentioned at the press conference starting from a little after 4pm are regarding the incident that occurred at Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station. He urged TEPCO to promptly report to the government and this is in relation to the radiation exposure of some of the workers working in Fukushima Daiichi.

Also, he mentioned that, regarding the radioactivity issue, it is unfortunate that radioactivity exceeding the provisional standard was detected at various sites. He further mentioned that due to the standard established with enough margin through careful consideration to safety, exceeding the standard itself does not necessarily mean that possible health damage will occur in the future.

Lastly, regarding Fukushima Daiichi, as far as his perspective is concerned, the power station is placed at such a stage that further deterioration is prevented and it is on the road to fundamental improvements, including cooling power restorations.

Another one is that there is a sheet of paper entitled “Government of Japan Relief Operations following Tohoku-Pacific Earthquake and Tsunami” and this includes some of the statistics collected up until this morning. This includes the number of people who are dead, exceeding 10,000, and the number of people who are missing, exceeding 17,000. The number of people rescued exceeds 26,000. Also, the number of confirmed displaced persons is nearly 250,000. This also includes the number of personnel deployed, including the Self Defense Forces, exceeding 100,000.

This concludes my initial remarks and I would like to ask Mr. Nishiyama to make opening remarks.

Mr. Nishiyama: Good evening ladies and gentlemen. As usual I would like to update the most recent status of Unit 1 to 6 of Fukushima Daiichi especially. First, with respect to reactors, introducing pure water instead of sea water to the reactors of those, especially Units 1 - 3. We hope this change from sea water to pure water will enable us to raise the efficiency of cooling the fuel core. In the case of Unit 2, in which we have never introduced Boron, we put Boron into the pool, where the water is taken for Unit 2. Regarding the spent fuel pool, we plan to replace seawater with pure water also, for introduction to the spent fuel pool of Units 1 to 4, as early as tomorrow.

Regarding restoration of power, we plan to turn on the lights of the central controlling unit of Unit 2, today, hopefully. For Unit 3, we will confirm the integrity of the electricity driven pump for the fire protection system which can be used as a sustainable method for introducing pure water to the reactor. This is for the reactor. For Unit 4 we will confirm the integrity of compressors for measuring equipment. Regarding Units 5 and 6, they are relatively stable. We successfully replaced emergency power generators with power from the outside grid. They have a very stable status right now, supported by the electricity from the outside grid.

We have a common spent fuel pool which is not attached to any one unit. Regarding this common spent fuel pool, electricity is provided from the outside grid and the temperature is 53 degrees centigrade. This is the ordinary temperature. We have found no problems here.

On the other hand, currently, one of the largest problems is unusual water spillage on the basement level of the turbine building of Units 1 to 4. Especially in Units 1 to 3, a

high radiation level around 500 millisieverts was observed. We plan to pump up and appropriately store the contaminated water. After confirming that the radiation level is low enough for engineers to work, we will resume our work to restore a sustainable cooling system, including electricity restoration. In other places where no high level radiation is observed, we will continue our work to restore the sustainable cooling system. That is all from my report today. Thank you very much.

Mr. Shikata: Thank you Mr. Nishiyama. I would like to ask Mr. Kawarada of MEXT to make opening remarks.

Mr. Kawarada: Good evening ladies and gentlemen. From the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, beyond the 20km radius on the ground, as well as above the sea, we have been carrying out radiation monitoring. We have been conducting monitoring on the ground and on the sea, and since yesterday, we have decided to conduct aerial monitoring. We have started this monitoring operation since 25 March, and we have conducted monitoring on four points. If you look at pages 17 and 18 you will find the information. We have the routes and the findings on 17 and 18, and we look at the dosage level in the air, and the numbers are given on page 18. The readings on page 17 are comparable to background levels. That is the first thing that I wish to share with you. Thank you, that is all.

Mr. Shikata: Next, Mr. Tsunoda of the Nuclear Safety Commission.

Mr. Tsunoda: Allow me to speak in Japanese through translation. From the Cabinet Office I am from the NSC. We have made a press release on 23 March about the SPEEDI system. This is the estimation conducted by the SPEEDI system, which is the System for Prediction of Environmental Emergency Dose Information. Since 26 March, we have used SPEEDI. We have started the consideration of using SPEEDI to estimate the dose. Now, since 20 March, the wind has been blowing into the ground, so whilst there are some constraints, we are now able to give certain estimation to the release of radioactive substances, and now the estimation is made possible by SPEEDI.

On the second page, you have the results of our estimation shown on the colored page. Now our assessment evaluation of those readings or estimations, or rather, now since the accident at each nuclear plant, we have used the assumption that the people stay outdoors 24 hours a day and look at the thyroid gland exposure.

Now that is outdoor, but indoors, if you stayed indoor you would be able to reduce the radiation exposure to one-fourth to one-tenth of that of the outdoor. Now of course this estimation is conducted under certain constraints and limitations. We would like to enhance the accuracy and position of this system, so we have to strengthen the monitoring activities further.

If you go back to page two, in terms of assessment, again the assumption is that we are looking at the thyroid gland radiation supposing that 24 hours a day is spent outdoor. And on page 3, we have the description of SPEEDI and also MEXT has put together an English pamphlet illustrating SPEEDI for you to look at for information. Thank you.

Mr. Shikata: Next I would to ask Ms. Iseki of MHLW.

Ms. Iseki, MHLW: Good evening. I will briefly give the number of the samples tested and reported on 25 March as well as 24 March. First I give the number of the first sample tested yesterday. In total, 83 samples were tested and reported from ten prefectures. Among them, seven green, leafy vegetables in Chiba prefecture, three samples which are also green vegetables in Tochigi, and also one lettuce in Ibaraki exceeded the provisional regulatory levels.

And on 24th, we reported that in total, 30 samples were tested. Among them, two samples exceeded the provisional levels. The samples detected are from Ibaraki prefecture, which is a parsley sample, and the other one is *nekomatsuna*, that is sampled in Edogawa-ku in Tokyo.

I just would like to add one thing about the test results on fish that was sampled in Choshi Fishery Harbor in Chiba prefecture reported yesterday. We have four test results on these fish indicating that no radionuclides are detected. Thank you.

Briefer: Thank you. I am from the Waterworks Bureau of MHLW. I would like to report to you the current status of restriction of intake of tap water. In four prefectures, restriction of intake of tap water on infants are being imposed, so including the intake on adults and infants, Idate Village is the only prefecture in which intake includes intake of adults. And five in Miyagi, and in Chiba there is one city and Utsunomiya that has the intake restriction on infants.

Mr. Shikata: I would like to ask Mr. Matsunaga, Foreign Ministry Assistant Press Secretary.

Mr. Matsunaga: Thank you Mr. Shikata. As always, I would like to update about the overseas assistance but before that, I would like to draw your attention to complement the explanation given by the honorable representative of the Ministry of Health, Welfare, and Labour about water. I would like to draw your attention to the announcement by the World Health Organization.

As of the day before yesterday, the World Health Organization issued a fact sheet and “frequently-asked questions” in which they stated that “drinking tap water in Japan poses no immediate health risk”. They updated their information as of yesterday, and in the updated information they reiterated that drinking tap water poses no immediate health risk, adding that “local conditions will differ and may fluctuate”. They further stated that “WHO urges people in the area to heed the advice of local authorities, as they will have access to the latest measurements of radiation levels in water to compare against the standards for adults and children. These standards are precautionary, and the presence of some degree of radioactivity in tap water does not mean that it is unfit for human intake. Short-term consumption does not pose a significant threat to health because it would take long-term exposure to those levels of radiation to generate adverse health effects”. The relevant information on paper will be put on the table, so please refer to those materials for further details.

With respect to overseas assistance, I would like to make one correction about the rescue team of India. I announced that the team would have arrived today but the schedule clearly was adjusted, and now they are expected to arrive on 28th instead of 26th.

I also would like to mention about the South African rescue team that consisted of 45 members, including four women. They are, after active operations, scheduled to leave Narita Airport tomorrow. They have worked in Miyagi prefecture in such places as Iwanuma City, Natori City, Yuriage area, as well as Ishimaka City, Ogatsu area, etc., and they did search, rubble removal, and assisted in the recovery of victim’s household belongings, etc. Their work is greatly appreciated and our gratitude is also extended to the government of South Africa.

So far I have explained to you about rescue teams as well as in-kind assistance and yesterday I referred to some donations, monetary donations. I would like to add a number of countries and regions which generously extended monetary donations. Those countries are Timor-Leste, Samoa, Tonga, Lao Republic, Sri Lanka, Brazil, Thailand, Indonesia, Viet Nam, Cambodia and Afghanistan.

I also would like to add a few matters with respect to relief supplies. We received assistance in kind from Uzbekistan. They generously provided food, tents and blankets. I also would like to report to you that France generously supplied blankets, water, food, medicine, radiation counters, etc. Relief supplies from the Philippines arrived the day before yesterday. Those supplies head for Miyagi and Iwate Prefectures. And I presume I have already reported as to the relief supplies from Pakistan. Thank you very much. That is all for me. Thank you.

Mr. Shikata: Now I would like to open the floor for questions. When you ask a question, please limit it to one question, and please identify yourself with your name and affiliation. And please come close to the microphone.

QUESTION: (Michael Chandler, Washington Post). I was wondering if you could comment on the increased level of radioactive contaminants found in the seawater outside of the plant that was reported today, and whether you think that the radioactive material is coming from inside the containment buildings housing the reactors? Is it leaking from the reactors?

Mr. Nishiyama: Regarding the increase in the radiation level in seawater which has been provided today as data, first of all, because the area within a radius of 20km from the nuclear power plant is now designated as an evacuation area and there are no residents or people in that area, and also the radiation in fish and seaweed in the ocean does actually dissipate before they actually are consumed by human beings, therefore, by the time they are actually consumed by human beings, the levels will be far lower. So I do not believe that the levels that we detected today are levels that would have any direct problem.

And also, in response to your question about where the radioactivity is coming from, we do not know for sure, we will have to look into this matter by making a through analysis

of the nuclides.

Mr. Shikata: Next question.

QUESTION: (Yamaguchi, AP). I would like to ask you, regarding the stagnant water in the turbine building, when did TEPCO know that there was water accumulation or stagnant water with high radiation levels within any of the buildings. For instance, was this fact known already before some of the workers suffered injury. There are some reports that as of the 18th TEPCO was aware of one instance of the stagnant water in the turbine buildings. I would like you to confirm whether that is the case or not. If they already knew about the existence of the water with high radioactive levels at that time, couldn't the incident which occurred after that have been prevented?

Mr. Nishiyama: First of all, I don't know the exact date, but I am aware that some days ago TEPCO did find a certain level of radioactivity in the turbine building of Unit 1 when they were working in the turbine building and they found a certain level of high radioactivity when they measured not only the levels in the water but also in the general atmosphere.

This time, we had some workers injured in Unit 3. I believe, regardless of the experience they had in the turbine building in Unit 1, I believe there were some problems in the way the work was done.

And if I may identify some of the problems in the way they are doing the work, first of all, the first point is that they believed that the condition that they had seen the previous day would continue even on the following day. The second point is, even when the alarm rang showing a high level of radiation, they mistook it to be something else and did not stop their work. That is the second problem that I can see. And the third is that they did not have adequate equipment or protective wear, particularly the kind of boots they were wearing.

And the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA) has warned TEPCO regarding these points, and I have heard that TEPCO has made thoroughly sure to improve the way in which the workers will do their work in a way that will be able to overcome and resolve the problems that I have identified.

Mr. Shikata: Next question.

QUESTION (Mihael Chandler): How many workers are currently working at the plant? And can you review which areas are currently restricted?

Mr. Nishiyama: Currently there are in the order of approximately 500 to 600 workers from TEPCO and its affiliated companies working. In addition to that there are workers from the respective fire departments who are involved in the spraying of water.

And the areas that are currently restricted are only areas where high levels of radiation were found such as the area around the stagnant water in Unit 3. Work is going on in all the other areas.

Mr. Shikata: Any other questions?

QUESTION: (Nomiyama, Reuters). I understand that a considerably high level of radioactive material was detected in the seawater around the nuclear power plant but that it has been said that the levels are not something that will have any effect on human beings or any marine products in the area in the future. What kind of data do you have to substantiate that point, because unless data to substantiate that point is provided, I would say that not only the Japanese people but also countries that are importing these products from Japan will be concerned.

Mr. Nishiyama: On that point, we are now collecting data in a number of different ways. For instance, in an area around 30km from the nuclear power plant, we are collecting data from a number of points by ship, regarding the seawater. Also data is being collected regarding the atmosphere. We intend to evaluate all of these data as a whole and wish to show that there is no need for concern.

Mr. Kawarada: I would like to make some supplementary remarks on that point. Currently, as you can see on pages 11 and 12 of the data sheets that we have distributed today, we are now monitoring the concentration of radioactive material in the sea at a distance of 30km from the nuclear power plant. According to the concentration levels, that you can see, the levels for iodine 131, which is the material that is assumed to exist the most, the levels that we have measured or monitored, or as you see on pages 11 and 20. And the values that you see in the table are more or less, at a similar level or only



slightly higher than the levels that are allowed in the monitoring areas. Regarding these data that we have collected, we will have the NSC evaluate these data we have collected.

Let me make one correction, the data I was referring to is on page 10.

Mr. Shikata: I would like to make one supplementary comment. According to the comments made public by the NSC dated the 24th of March. It says that any radioactive material in the seawater will be carried and further dissipated by the current and will be diluted to a considerable extent by the time each is absorbed by fish or any other marine living organisms. At the same time, iodine 131 has half-life of eight days, which is a considerably short half-life and the levels are expected to be a considerably decreased by the time it is ingested by human beings.

Mr. Matsunaga: Let me also introduce to you the statement that was made by a representative from the Fisheries Agency, who is referring to cesium. According to the comments that were made by the representative from the Fisheries Agency, regarding any concentration or accumulation of radioactive material in fish and fish roe, since cesium already exists inside the body of the fish and is always constantly going in and out of body of the fish together with the seawater, that goes in and out of the body of the fish, cesium will not be concentrated or accumulated in either fish or fish roe.

Mr. Shikata: Let me just lastly add that there are no fishing activities being conducted within the 30km radius of Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. Ok, next question, please?

Mr. Nishiyama: I have one correction to make regarding the answer I gave earlier to the question from Ms. Yamaguchi from AP. I understand there was a news article that mentioned that it was mentioned by TEPCO that levels of radioactivity were measured in the turbine building of Unit 1 on 18 March, but that was wrong information and the news report itself was wrong. Actually, it was found at 5:50 pm on 24 March as a result of the nuclide analysis done on the stagnant water that was found in the basement of the turbine building of Unit 1.

Mr. Shikata: If there are no other questions, we would like to conclude today's briefing. Thank you very much for coming.

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