

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

27 March 2011

Mr. Noriyuki Shikata, Deputy Cabinet Secretary for Public Relations: Good evening. Thank you very much for coming to the Japanese government officials' on-the-record briefing.

This evening, we have with us the following officials from various ministries and agencies of the Japanese government. In order to listen to simultaneous translation, please make use of the listening device, English, channel one, and Japanese, channel two.

The briefers are, to my right, Mr. Hidehiko Nishiyama – he is Deputy Director-General of the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA) – and Mr. Masanori Shinano, Counselor, Secretariat of the Nuclear Safety Commission (NSC) to his right, and to the very right is Mr. Takeshi Matsunaga, Assistant Press Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA).

And to my left is Mr. Itaru Watanabe, Senior Deputy Director-General of the Science and Technology Policy Bureau of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), and Ms. Noriko Iseki, Senior Technical Officer, Food Safety Department of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW). My name is Noriyuki Shikata, Deputy Cabinet Secretary for Public Relations at the Prime Minister's Office.

At the outset I would like to just refer to a couple of points that Chief Cabinet Secretary Edano mentioned in his press conference this afternoon from 16:00. As you are aware, we have introduced simultaneous interpretation for these press conferences, so you are welcome to attend those press conferences by Chief Cabinet Secretary Edano with prior registration.

Let me just refer to a couple of points that he made. Regarding the wish of some of the residents who evacuated from 20km radius of Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, Mr. Edano said the government recognizes there is a strong request from some residents evacuated from 20km radius of Fukushima Daichi strongly wishing to go back to their

homes, even temporarily. We do desire to respond to that request and now have started examining the possibility, of whether it is possible or not from the viewpoint of ensuring safety.

And secondly, Prime Minister Kan has started to contact with the heads of the local prefectural and municipal governments in the quake-hit areas to grasp clearly the situation of the affected regions and listen to their requests, and this was in relation to Prime Minister Kan having had a conversation with the mayor of Rikuzentakata City.

And next, as for Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, high levels of radioactive substances in stagnant water detected at Unit 2. We are embarking on removing such water from the reactor while securing the safety of the workers on-site and this will be discussed by Mr. Nishiyama later on, I believe.

Mr. Edano further mentioned that the reason behind the development of the high level of radioactive substance in stagnant water was detected at Unit 2 was, he believes, that the fuel rods inside the reactor were exposed above water for some time and a certain amount of radioactive materials melted. However, cooling functions are working properly at present.

And also the issue of voluntary evacuations, the government has encouraged the residents living in the radius between 20 and 30km from the nuclear power plants to voluntarily evacuate. I will continue to provide the information to them thoroughly and give a detailed response to those who choose to stay in the zone as well as those who wish to evacuate, respectively.

And regarding the workers who were exposed to high-level radiation at Unit 2, they are expected to leave the hospital tomorrow. It is a welcome sign that the period of their hospitalization was short. I will continue to ensure safety management thoroughly in order to prevent similar accidents from ever happening again in the future.

And lastly, regarding compensation for those farmers who have suffered from the suspension of agricultural product shipments caused by the nuclear power plant accident, the Japanese government intends to respond properly including the provision of temporary payment with a view to supporting their business and livelihood.

So this concludes my reference to Mr. Edano's press conference this evening. And now, I would like to ask Mr. Nishiyama of NISA to have opening remarks.

Mr. Nishiyama: Thank you Mr. Shikata. Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I would like to briefly update you on the status of Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant.

Regarding the reactors, we are now introducing pure water with fire engines to the reactor of Unit 1, 2, and 3. Now, the parameters of the fuel cores of those units are stable. We will replace fire engines with electricity-driven pumps as early as today regarding Units 1, 2, and 3. In the case of Unit 2, we will begin to use a pure water tank instead of the temporary tank with which we put in boron. By taking those actions we will establish a sustainable cooling system for the fuel cores of Units 1-3.

Regarding spent fuel pool, we introduced seawater with concrete injection machines to the spent fuel pools of Units 3 and 4 today. For the spent fuel pool of Unit 1, we will do the same thing on March 29. In parallel, we will begin to introduce pure water instead of seawater and replace fire engines with electricity driven pumps. We will do that very soon. The aim of these actions is to formulate a sustainable cooling system for spent fuel pool for Units 1-4. Regarding restoration of electricity, we will prepare, confirm integrity, and/or find substitutes of direct current electricity cables. Also we will confirm integrity of air conditioners attached to reactor buildings. Those are examples of many activities with respect to electricity restoration.

Finally, I would like to comment on radiated water, which was found in the reactor buildings and also within the sea. First of all, we found highly radiated water in the turbine buildings of Units 1-3. We plan to pump it up and store the radiated water into isolated pools or pits so that the water will not run into the outside world. We already began this type of work regarding Unit 1. After that kind of work, we will wash the place and will continue the work we should do regarding restoration of electricity and pumps and so on at those places. Separately, we detected increased figures regarding radiated materials in the seawater at the kennel attached to the site. However, the data shows that the effect of this slightly radiated seawater on human health is very small, and we can see that from the data which was taken from the ship around 30km from the site. However, we will closely watch the data in this sea area, so that we can keep the good environment in the sea near the site. That is all for my report today. Thank you very much.

Mr. Shikata: Thank you Mr. Nishiyama. Then I would like to ask Mr. Shinano, Counselor Secretariat of the NSC. OK, then, I would like to ask Mr. Watanabe of MEXT to go next.

Mr. Watanabe: I would like to explain the monitoring activities of MEXT. Please see the handout papers. And additionally, many details on that – I would like to point out two points: 1) We have additional data of sea area monitoring 30km in front of Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant; 2) and the additional information is the airborne radioactive analysis done by the Ministry of Defense, and the paper is written only in Japanese, but we attached yesterday's data to this paper so you can compare yesterday's data and today's data for the airborne monitoring by the Ministry of Defense. These two points are new information for today. Thank you.

Mr. Shikata: Mr. Shinano, please.

Mr. Shinano: I am the Counselor, Secretariat of the NSC. Let me explain on behalf of the NSC. The NSC from immediately after this accident has been evaluating or assessing the results of the environmental monitoring conducted by MEXT and has been communicating the data to the various ministries and agencies for use in taking countermeasures and responses. From Friday of last week we decided to change our policy to communicate the monitoring results not only to the related ministries and agencies but to the public at large. Therefore we would like to, on a daily basis, share with you the results from of our assessment of the monitoring results which have been provided to us by MEXT. Basically, the data compiled as of 16:00 hours that same day will be assessed by the NCS and will be relayed or made public by that evening. That is the basic scheme. As MEXT has just explained the most up-to-date monitoring results are being assessed now.

So today I would like to share with you the results of NSC's assessment of MEXT's monitoring results. As it indicates, first of all, as for air radiation levels, these were taken at a point 30km northwest from the site and those rates were slightly higher than normal. However, this is not a level that would have an impact on human health. As for the developments of those rates, I think we must continue to closely monitor the air dose rates going forward.

The second is the concentration of radioactive materials in the air. To the south of the site we have seen slightly higher readings, in particular for Iodine 134. It does exceed slightly the dose limit, however, because it has a very short half-life of just eight days this is not a level that would have an impact on human health, we believe. But, it is necessary to continue to closely monitor the concentration as of Iodine 134, as well.

Next is airborne monitoring using planes. In order to assist the diffusion rate of airborne materials, we need to take samples at lower speeds and lower altitudes than now. Therefore, we have instructed MEXT to conduct monitoring under such conditions going forward.

Fourth is about environmental samples. There are various environmental samples. For example, water in the surface, such as in ponds and rainwater. Also, soil and fallout, and seawater monitoring are conducted. In grass and in soil we have seen slightly higher radiation levels, concentration levels which both require closer monitoring. As for seawater, it's not the concentration in the seawater but rather the impact on human health through – produce or seafood. That needs to be assessed. For example, iodine 131 has a short half-life of eight days. Also, through diffusion, iodine 131 can be diluted to a large extent. Therefore, by the time people intake such seafood we believe that the level of radiation would have been greatly reduced.

Fifth is assessing the environmental radiation levels by prefecture and municipality. As for air dose rate, although some regions exhibit slightly higher levels over normal we believe they are not to the extent that they would impose any immediate health risk. Also, for tap water, the MHLW's data must be monitored quite closely, we believe. Next, data, which is based on environmental monitoring, shows that for all items, they all fall below the intake of consumption limitations for foodstuffs in general. However, they both require close monitoring. Those are the results of assessment by the NSC of the monitoring results that we received up to 16:00 hours yesterday and we'd like to make a similar update to you tomorrow.

Mr. Shikata: Thank you, Mrs. Shinano. Then I would like to ask Ms. Iseki to have opening remarks.

Ms. Iseki: I would like to briefly provide the test results of food sampled reported yesterday, 26 March. In total, 62 food samples are tested in five respective prefectures,

which are Fukushima, Niigata, Ibaraki, Gunma, and Yamagata prefectures. Among them, in one sample, which is a vegetable in Fukushima, level detected exceeds the regulatory limit. Thank you.

Mr. Shikata: I guess the vegetable that exceeded the level was *hanawasabi*.

Ms. Iseki: Yes.

Mr. Shikata: So it's a kind of flower *wasabi*, anyway. Okay, then. And lastly, I'd like to ask Mr. Takeshi Matsunaga of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Takeshi Matsunaga, Assistant Press Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Thank you, Mr. Shikata. I'd like to explain briefly about the acceptance of relief supply and medical assistance team from Israel. Today we have received relief supply from Israel. A chartered flight landed at Narita Airport at 2:40 this afternoon. The relief supply consists of a lot of coats, blankets, gloves, as well as portable toilets. Those relief supplies head to Fukushima. And in addition, I would like to also explain about the provision of medical assistance team by Israel. That team consists of 53 members including 14 medical doctors, as well as 7 nurses, and technicians, interpreters, and logistical support personnel. They are about to land at Narita Airport. They are scheduled to arrive in Narita at 8:30 tonight. On arriving at Narita, they head to Miyagi Prefecture. They will be stationed in Kurihara city, and the site of their activity will be in Minami Sanriku town in Miyagi Prefecture. The duration of the team's activity is scheduled to last two weeks, subject to change depending on the situation on the site. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has dispatched four personnel to support their activities. Thank you very much. And, in addition, we also distributed a press release with respect to additional relief supply from the Republic of Korea. Thank you very much.

Mr. Shikata: Thank you, Mr. Matsunaga. Now, I'd 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 your microphone.

QUESTION (Whitney Hearst, CNN): With more and more alarming data coming out every day from the Fukushima plant, it seems that the Japanese public is losing confidence in the government and TEPCO's response to this crisis. How can the government assure the Japanese public that you have control of this?

Mr. Shikata: Could you specify to whom you would like to ask the question?

QUESTION (Whitney Hearst, CNN): Shibata-san and Nishiyama-san – anyone that would like to answer.

Mr. Shikata: Let me come up with the overall picture. What we have been trying to do is to try to explain as much as possible and to try to keep transparency in terms of announcements. So even if there is bad news, we try to send out messages. And of course, this issue is not limited to the concerns in this country. We realize that this is an issue of global attention. So that's the background behind our efforts to conduct this kind of press briefing every day, as well as introducing simultaneous interpretations for Mr. Edano's press conferences. And in the meantime, all of the government agencies involved here are trying to send out messages as soon as they know the situation. Of course, in light of the new developments, we are well aware of the need to take appropriate actions. And that we are trying to do with all our efforts inside the Japanese government and also in coming up with a very close partnership with TEPCO in the case of Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. As far as the specifics regarding Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, I would like to ask Mr. Nishiyama to have a comment.

Mr. Nishiyama: The role of NISA is to make public the data regarding the nuclear power generation plant without delay and with transparency and to make sure to give our views regarding that data. Upon doing so we intend to make known what strategy we are taking for controlling the situation. In one word, that would be to cool the reactor and spent fuel pool, and also to achieve sustainable cooling by bringing in the power source.

Mr. Shikata: Next question, Christoph.

QUESTION (Neidhard, Sueddeutsche Zeitung): A question for Mr. Shinano. You mentioned iodine 134.

Mr. Shinano: 131

QUESTION (Neidhard, Sueddeutsche Zeitung): Oh, then you probably misspoke. You

said 134 because that half-life is very much older. Let me ask anyway. Because of the relatively short half-life of 131, the question is much less problematic with 131 than 134, because it is probably about a week since this iodine 131 was released by the reactor, maybe a bit more. So if you calculate back, you must estimate much higher doses, probably double the dose for the time when it was released. Will that still be within the limits?

Mr. Shinano: Let me first explain the data you are referring to, particularly the data that has been made public by TEPCO this morning. Regarding iodine 134, when we take into consideration the ratio with iodine 131, we tend to feel that the data that was made public by TEPCO today is a bit strange and a bit odd. I have been told that TEPCO is going to reevaluate the numbers and is going to make public the results of their reevaluation.

Regarding your question regarding total release going back to the beginning of the week for iodine 131, in the press release that we distributed during this press briefing yesterday, we distributed an estimate in the form of a map of the exposure to iodine 131 from the very beginning of the week, and even when we take into consideration the levels from the very beginning, it is our evaluation that there is no problem with the area concerned.

Mr. Shikata: Next question?

QUESTION (Sakurai, AP): Regarding the level of 10 million times the normal amount in the water in Unit 2, what are the risk factors that you assess for the ambient soil and for the general public in general, and is this a sign that the efforts to bring things under control are going badly awry?

Mr. Shinano: As I mentioned earlier, there is a need for us to see the data after it is reevaluated.

Also, the water that is now stagnant in the basement of the turbine building is going to be properly managed and controlled, so that it will not be released to the outside world. We are going to get it out of the way without having it released to the outside world. So the water itself will not have any effect on the lives of the people in the surrounding area.



Also, as the cooling work that we are now undertaking proceeds smoothly, going forward, I do not believe we will have any new creation of radioactive material.

QUESTION (Khaldon Azhari, Pan Orient News): I would like one comment first. Do you mean after the cooling is done the issue is finished, basically? That there is no problem in the Units, and there will be no more radiation after it is cooled? Secondly, I am planning to go to Fukushima, to Iwaki City, and it is inside the 50km, and I remember the United States made an advisory to be away from Fukushima up to 80km, so do you think there is a risk if somebody goes to Iwaki, which is 45km from the power station, tomorrow?

Mr. Nishiyama: First of all, even after cooling the plant, the radioactive material that has been generated up to now will still be there, so we will have to properly control the radioactive material that is already there. Regarding the advisory of the U.S. Government of up to 80km from the nuclear power plant, I understand that even in the United States the evacuation area is in principle 10 miles from the nuclear power plant, and the area that is 50 miles from the nuclear power plant is an area in which there is a limit on ingestion of food. Having said so, I just wanted to add that the reason why the United States gave an advisory of 80km, or 50 miles, in the very beginning is, as I understand it, because the incident happened in Japan which is a country that is different from their own country from the perspective of the U.S. Government, and since they were not able to know exactly the circumstances it is my understanding that in the beginning they took a very conservative stance. Currently in Japan the evacuation area is designated at a radius of 20km from the nuclear power generation plant, and as long as you can abide by that evacuation area there is no problem with Iwaki City.

Mr. Shikata: Regarding the radiation level in Iwaki City our colleague from MEXT has some comments.

Mr. Kawarada: From our observation, this morning near the center of Iwaki City, just south of 45km from the nuclear power plant, the radiation level is 0.8 $\mu$ Sv per hour.

QUESTION (Andrew Morse, Wall Street Journal): This is a question for Mr. Nishiyama. With regards to the pools of highly radioactive water in the buildings, how do you think it is escaping from the reactors and getting into the buildings itself? And also, could you

tell us how you think it is getting from the buildings into the sea? Thank you very much.

Mr. Nishiyama: The radioactive material that is found in that water is either from the reactor itself or the spent fuel pool, and at the moment we consider that the possibilities are higher that the water is from the reactor. Regarding where the water itself is coming from, I believe there are a variety of different possibilities regarding where the water itself is coming from, and if the water is coming from the reactor there is a possibility that it is coming from either the number of valves that we have in the container vessel, or through the areas or the open spaces that appear from the places where the pipes are placed. So if the water is from the reactor those may be possibilities that could be considered. I must say however, that from among the various possibilities that can be considered, we have not been able to reach a conclusion regarding which of these possibilities is the truth. We would have to do some further study.

Regarding the relationship between the water with the high level of radioactivity and seawater, at the moment we do not conceive of the possibility of the stagnant water in the building flowing into the sea. That is not possible.

QUESTION (Andrew Morse, Wall Street Journal): Some of it has already flown into the sea.

Mr. Nishiyama: First of all, anything that has flowed into the sea is water with only a very low level of radioactivity, and at the moment we do not believe it is possible that any of the stagnant water in the building has flowed into the sea. The possibility that we are considering is that radioactive material together with the steam has dropped into the sea, or that radioactive material from rain or any other source of water, or radioactive material on the ground, may have flown into the sea. We are considering such possibilities.

QUESTION (Neidhard, Suddeutsche Zeitung): A question to Mr. Nishiyama and Mr. Shinano. Those people in the 20 to 30km zone, they have been in their houses for about two weeks now. European experts say that to stay indoors and close the windows is a very good protection for up to 48 hours; after that you have the circulation of air in through closed windows. Do you think they are still protected in this area? And as a second question – the Asahi Shimbun predicts that the Government will raise the INES level to six. What has stopped the Government from doing that? Because it is clearly a

greater accident than Three Mile Island.

Mr. Nishiyama: Let me respond to your question regarding the INES rating. In the very beginning at the stage when we had to register within the first 24 hours, we registered a level of 4. Subsequently, taking into consideration the damage that we assumed had occurred in the reactor core, we registered a level of 5.

The current level of 5 that we have registered is a tentative rating. Going forward, once the efforts that we have been taking to deal with the emergency settles down, and when we are able to take a good look at the situation in the reactor core, we intend to once again register a ranking. And at that point, if we see a need, we may revise the level that we will be registering at that point.

Mr. Shinano: Let me respond to the question regarding indoor shelter. You have mentioned a number of routes of air circulation. It is our position however that as long as you stay indoors you will be able to shut out the special radiation dose rate. And therefore we consider that there will be a certain level of effect by staying indoors.

QUESTION (Malik, Muslim World News): I would like to ask a question to TEPCO. Is there any arrangement if one or two reactors stop working so that other reactors in the country are connected so that in a short period of time they can supply energy to the areas where this reactor has failed to work or so sometimes it can be closed for overhaul or maintenance or something? Because I experienced – it was the second or third day – that even in Tokyo and all parts of Japan, even the traffic signals and everything was stopped. There was huge load sharing only because one reactor stopped working. And all others, they were functioning, they were still working, but the problem was really great. I think because of connections between these reactors and each other.

Mr. Nishiyama: Since we do not have anybody from TEPCO here today, let me respond to your question to the extent I can as a representative of the Government.

Between the electric power companies, there is a mechanism whereby when one electric power company has a shortage of a supply of electricity, it can purchase that electricity from another electric power company and supply that electricity to its supply area.

And when that happens, regardless of whether the shortage of electricity was caused by

a nuclear power generation plant or not, the electricity will be shared and supplied from a mix of electricity that is generated by various types of power generation plants, including thermal power generation plants and hydropower generation plants.

Mr. Shikata: I guess we are running out of time.

QUESTION (Malik, Muslim World News): Why was that not the case in this situation? Why?

Mr. Nishiyama: This time, we still had a shortfall of supply even if we shared electricity in the way I just mentioned. And that is why we had to introduce what I called rolling blackouts, to have blackouts taking turns from area to area.

Mr. Shikata: Is there anybody who has not asked a question?

QUESTION (Nomiya, Reuters): I have a question regarding how you will get the stagnant water out of the way. I believe you mentioned that temporarily you will store the stagnant water in the building in the makeup water tank. But you also mentioned that you do not know how much stagnant water there is. So there is the possibility that all of the stagnant water will not fit into that tank, and when that happens, what other options are conceivable? Examples would be fine, so can you give us what other options there are?

Mr. Nishiyama: I believe there are various possibilities that we could consider. One example might be to use things in the nuclear power plant that are similar to tanks other than the makeup water tank. Those can be used. Also, we could obtain some kind of a tank that can be placed outside, if that can be obtained in a short period of time.

Mr. Shikata: The last question.

QUESTION (Andrew Morse, Wall Street Journal): This is for Mr. Nishiyama. You said that if the puddles of highly radioactive water came from the reactor, you believe they most likely came either from valves or holes in old pipes. Is that another way of saying that you do not believe that the containment vessel has been breached? Thank you.

Mr. Nishiyama: Yes, that is right. At the current point, we believe that there are no

cracks or any parts that are broken in the containment vessel. Having said so however, for Unit 2, at one time we did hear the noise of some kind of explosion in the suppression chamber, so that point alone we will have to keep in mind.

Mr. Shikata: I am afraid that we have to conclude today's briefing. I guess that this week we will continue to hold this kind of press briefing, either in the evening or at night, as the situation develops for the time being. Thank you very much for coming.

(END)