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

28 March 2011

Mr. Noriyuki Shikata, Deputy Cabinet Secretary for Public Relations: Good evening. Thank you for coming to the Prime Minister's Office. We are now holding an on-the-record press briefing for international press at the Prime Minister's Office.

In order to listen to simultaneous translation into English, please switch your listening device to channel one. This is a briefing on the issues of Fukushima Daichi Nuclear Power Plant and other issues related to post-quake and tsunami by officials of the Japanese government from different ministries and agencies concerned.

After initial remarks from the respective ministries, we will move on to a question and answer session. When you ask a question, please identify your name and affiliation. Please limit your question to only one, and please use the microphone when you ask a question.

Today's briefers are, on my right, Mr. Hidehiko Nishiyama, Deputy Director-General of the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA) of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), and Mr. Masanori Shinano, Counselor Secretariat of the Nuclear Safety Commission (NSC). On my far right is Mr. Takeshi Matsunaga, Assistant Press Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA).

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 lastly Ms. Noriko Iseki, Senior Technical Officer of the 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.

Let me just at the outset recap some of the comments made by Chief Cabinet Secretary Mr. Edano today at the press conference that he held from 16:00. He made a reference to following three points. Number one is, regarding Unit 2 of Fukushima Daichi Nuclear Power Plant, he mentioned that regarding the highly-contaminated stagnant water detected in Unit 2, there has been a report from the Nuclear Safety Commission

that it is assumed that the water that had been in contact with temporarily melted fuel in the containment vessel may have been leaked directly out through a certain route. And he further mentioned that regarding the leakage of such water, he has not received any report from the Nuclear Safety Commission that the pressure vessel in the containment vessel was breached.

Regarding the issue of food safety, he mentioned that Japan's provisional standard values for the radioactive levels of agricultural products including vegetables have been set based on the standard values established under the International Commission on Radiological Protection (ICRP). The provisional standard values are precautionary measures; even if a person continues to have an intake of radioactive levels exceeding the Japanese provisional standard values for one year, it would not pose risks to human health.

And just a few points from his morning press conference from 11:30. Regarding the residents of the designated evacuation area within 20km of Fukushima Daichi Nuclear Power Plant, he mentioned it has been reported that residents who have evacuated from within the 20km radius of the nuclear power plant have entered the evacuation zone to pick up their belongings. He urges them never to enter the area without permission because there is a big potential risk of radiation exposure.

At the same time, he mentioned that he thinks that temporary entry into the evacuation zone within the 20km radius from the nuclear plant might be possible in the future under certain conditions. We continue to conduct monitoring and if the radiation levels within the air of the region stabilize, we may be able to allow the residents to go back to certain areas of the evacuation zone for a short period of time.

That is all from myself regarding the comments made by Mr. Edano today, and now I would like to turn to Mr. Nishiyama of NISA.

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

First, with respect to reactors, first of all the temperature of the pressured vessel of Unit 1 slightly went up and we adjusted the amount of pure water introduced there. For Unit 1, we still have some concerns about the temperature, pressure, and their balance.

Regarding the replacement of fire engines with tentative electricity-driven pumps powered by a generator, we have a sequence starting with Unit 2 which was finished yesterday because we took the opportunity of changing from a tentative pure water pool to a permanent pure water pool. We will do the same thing for Unit 3 on 28 March, and Unit 1 on 29 March. This means we will change from fire engine-driven water introduction to electricity-driven water introduction.

Next, spent fuel pool. Regarding the spent fuel pool, we plan to replace the seawater with pure water on 29 March. Next, electricity restoration. With respect to electricity restoration, examples of activities are: confirming the integrity of direct current power distribution, and placing cables for monitoring posts and other instruments.

Our fourth item is the highly-radiated water pool, stagnated water in Units 1-4. Regarding Unit 1, we have been pumping up the radioactive stagnant water to condensation tanks. We increased then number of pumps from 1 to 3 yesterday.

For Units 2 and 3, we have been searching for appropriate ways to remove the radioactive water in a way that isolates it from the outside environment.

Mr. Nishiyama: For Units 2 and 3, we have been searching for appropriate ways to remove the radiated water in a way isolated from the outside environment. In this context, today, from yesterday to today, we found highly radiated water in the trench adjacent to the turbine building and we are now thinking about searching the contents of the newly found water in the trench. However, basically, we think that removing the stagnant water in the turbine building will also contribute to dealing with this water in the trench.

Lastly, I would like to comment on radiated materials in the seawater which were obtained in the vicinity of the canal of the number one site. From the seawater samples obtained near the canal attached to Units 5 and 6, not 1 to 4, we found 1,150 times of Iodine 131 compared with maximum density to be detected in the ordinary atmosphere. On the other hand, the level of radiated materials detected in the seawater near the canal attached to Units 1 to 4 is not so high as we detected in the past. We will strengthen monitoring efforts for the seawater and other areas. That is all for my report today. Thank you.

Mr. Shikata: Thank you, Mr. Nishiyama. Then, I would like to ask Mr. Itaru Watanabe of MEXT to have an opening remark.

Mr. Watanabe: Well, MEXT is continuing monitoring activities on the land around the nuclear power plant, and every prefecture in Japan, and the monitoring at the offshore seawater monitoring about 30km from the nuclear power plant, and the airborne monitoring continuing, and updated data you can see on the webpage of MEXT. And, I would like to add one point: New data of the results of the sea monitoring. The results are stable, or slightly declining of the radioactivity on the sample gained yesterday. This is my today's first point. Thank you.

Mr. Shikata: Thank you, Mr. Watanabe. Then, let us move on to Mr. Masanori Shinano of the Nuclear Safety Commission.

Mr. Shinano: Thank you. I am from the NSC and I would like to make two reports. And I have brought two written materials. The first set of papers is bilingual. There is English and Japanese. This is the advice that our commission has provided to the government earlier this morning today. And the next material is the daily report of our evaluation of the environmental radiation monitoring results.

And I would like to begin with the evaluation of the environmental radiation monitoring results. I shall be very succinct. Since this is a daily report, I would only highlight any difference with yesterday. For your information the original report in Japanese was published at 6:45 in the evening yesterday. And this is the data as of 4:00 in the afternoon yesterday. So the data as of 4:00 was evaluated by the commission and made public at 6:45.

First, the spatial radiation dose rate. We have not observed any difference. The second is radioactivity in the air. There was some points which have shown the increase but again we would like to assure you it does not have any impact on human health. The third is the aviation monitoring. Since we did not have a new set of data yesterday, we have not conducted any evaluation today. But for your information, we have included the evaluation we have made vis-à-vis the data obtained two days ago.

The fourth is the environmental samples. We have looked at the fall-out soil and fall-out

seawater. There has not been any material change. And the top water and food we believe that we will have to continue monitoring.

The fifth is the radioactivity level by prefecture. For the spatial radiation dose rate, no significant change has been observed. Again, it will not affect people's health.

For the drinking water or tap water, we would like to invite all people to be aware of the information related with the requirement announced by MHLW. As well as the data put together by MEXT is concerned, drinking water/tap water measurement below the standard level or regulated level, but we believe we will have to continue to be vigilant and continue the monitoring. This is the report that we have put together on the results of the evaluation.

Let me turn to another piece of paper. The NSC formulated its opinion to the government on the elevated radiation levels in water which were discovered on the underground floor of the turbine building at Unit 2, which was 100,000 times more than water ordinarily found in the reactors. In Unit 2, as was explained earlier, it seems that the water within the containment vessel which had come into contact with the water was directly released out of containment through an unidentified pathway. In addition, the radiation levels in the air have been limited to areas within buildings and have not been detected outside of buildings. And even if the leakage of water from the reactor core continues, it will be impossible to continue to cool it by injecting water using temporary installed pumps. However, because the ambient dose rate in the basement floor of the turbine building is very high, we have to promptly remove the stagnant water. At the same time we should pay due heed to radiation protection for the workers.

And the last paragraph is NSC's biggest concern, that we have to prevent the tainted water from leaking into the underground soil's water and seawater. And for this purpose, the NCS is determined to request to take all measures to prevent the leaks, but also to undertake underground water samplings as well as more precise seawater samplings. And that is the gist of the NSC's advice, which was formulated this morning and delivered to the government. Thank you.

Mr. Shikata: Thank you, Mr. Shinano. Now, let us move on to Ms. Noriko Iseki of MHLW.

Ms. Iseki: I would like to briefly provide test results reported yesterday, 27 March, from Fukushima, Niigata, Tochigi, Gunma, and Yamagata Prefectures. In total, 33 samples were tested and found that the provisional regulation limits were not exceeded. I would also sum up the results of tests reported from 19 to 27 March. In total, 531 samples were tested and 99 test results were found to be exceeding the regulatory limits. In detail, 76 leafy vegetables, for example spinach and some other vegetables such as broccoli, as well as 23 fresh raw milks. Those are found to be exceeding the regulatory limits. Other products, for example, fish, meat, egg, leek, cucumber, strawberry, etc., were all below the limit. Thank you.

Mr. Shikata: Then, lastly, Mr. Matsunaga of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Matsunaga: Thank you, Mr. Shikata. As always, I'd like to explain about additional information about overseas assistance generously extended to Japan. Firstly, please refer to the colorful map chart, which indicates the locations of activities by rescue teams and some others. As you see, many of them have already completed their activities but there are some which are still in operation. And as you see, the medical assistance team provided by Israel, as I explained yesterday, is in activity in Miyagi Prefecture. More specifically, they are working in Minamisanriku town of the prefecture. And as I indicated previously, the rescue team of the Republic of India is scheduled to arrive tonight.

Secondly, please refer to the long matrix which explains the assistance in kind. This is the list of assistance for the provisions of materials and relief supplies. I refrain from explaining the contents of the matrix. I just rather would like to add some latest information with respect to relief supplies. One of them is the provision of mobile generators from the Republic of Korea. Four mobile generators are planned to arrive at Yokohama Port tomorrow. Each generator produces 1.4Mw and it is the outcome of close coordination between TEPCO and Hyundai. These generators are made by Hyundai and provided by the government of the Republic of Korea. I understand these mobile generators will be used in the area under the responsibility of TEPCO. Next, I'd like to explain about the additional provision of relief supply from the United Kingdom. In addition to the rescue team dispatched by the United Kingdom government, relief supply is arriving this afternoon. The supply consists of 100 tons of drinking water. They are scheduled to arrive at 9 pm tonight. In addition I'd also like to mention the second batch of relief supply from the People's Republic of China. They have already

provided the first batch of relief supply on 14th of March. That consisted of 900 pieces of tent, as well as 2,000 pieces of blanket and also 200 pieces of lantern. This time, the People's Republic of China is providing 60,000 bottles of mineral water as well as 3.5 million pairs of disposable rubber gloves. These supplies are provided for the use in Ibaraki Prefecture as well as through Japan Red Cross.

Lastly, I'd like to add two countries which expressed the intention for monetary donation. These are Iceland and Serbia. That's all from me and we are very grateful for all these assistance. Thank you very much.

Mr. Shikata: Thank you. Now, let's open the floor to questions. Christoph?

QUESTION (Christoph Neidhart, Sueddeutsche Zeitung): A question for Mr. Nishiyama. Yesterday, there was this weird iodine 134 measurement that you said the ratio between 134 and 131 in the stagnant water wasn't correct and it was later corrected. Do you have an explanation for that mistake and how that could happen to TEPCO? And you have not mentioned Block 3 and 4 today and yesterday – no, Block 4, sorry – today and yesterday, except for the spent fuel rod pool. Is Block 4 totally under control?

Mr. Nishiyama: First, regarding the fact that TEPCO revised their number for iodine 134. As the cause of this mistake, TEPCO is telling us that the first cause of the mistake is the way in which the data was read. Ever since the occurrence of the earthquake, the reading of the data has become very complicated. The reading of this very complicated data was not properly done. That's the first reason TEPCO has given us. The second reason TEPCO has given us is that they did not have an organizational system to check the reading of the data. These are considered to be the two main causes for the mistake in the data and the NISA has given guidance to TEPCO to improve these two factors.

Also, regarding Unit 4, all of the fuel in the reactor of Unit 4 had already been moved to the spent fuel pool. Therefore, there is no need to deal with the reactor itself, but rather, since all of the fuel has been spent to the spent fuel pool, the spent fuel pool in Unit 4 is prone to increase its temperature, and that is why it is important to appropriately cool the spent fuel pool in the case of Unit 4. After repeatedly injecting and pouring sea water into the spent fuel pool of Unit 4, we have been able to successfully deal with the situation.

Mr. Shikata: Let me just add, regarding your first question that Mr. Edano mentioned this morning at the press conference that there was an erroneous reporting about the radiation levels in the stagnant water in Unit 2, that reporting appropriate radioactive readings is an indispensible prerequisite for taking various safety measures. Such an error is unacceptable. The government urged TEPCO not to repeat such a mistake and to take thorough measures against preventing another erroneous reading.

QUESTION (Christoph Neidhart, Sueddeutsche Zeitung): Mr. Nishiyama, does that mean that we have to assume that this is a false positive measurement and that some TEPCO measurements so far might be false negatives in the same dimensions that TEPCO has measured? Obviously TEPCO's measurement is not reliable. Is that conclusion correct?

Mr. Nishiyama: This time, the cause was the mistake in how to read the complicated data which is involved in the analysis of nuclides. For other data, such as measurements of the level of radiation or the dose rate, the measurement work is done under a proper working environment. TEPCO is saying that they will recheck other data as well, but the main problem that was encountered in this case was a mistake in reading the very complicated data that had to be handled.

QUESTION (Lloyd Parry, The Times): This may be a question for Mr. Nishiyama or Mr. Shikata. The environmental organization Greenpeace has been taking radiation measurements with a team of experts in Fukushima Prefecture and they have reported that in the town of Iitate, they have detected very high levels of radiation, as high as 10mSv or higher. They claim that these measurements, which are at a distance of 40km from the nuclear power plant, are higher than measurements in some places much closer than that. They further claim that this represents a danger to the population and that this area should be evacuated in the same way that places closer to the reactor have been evacuated. Could you comment please on those measurements and tell us why Iitate has not been evacuated?

Mr. Nishiyama: We also have been undertaking monitoring in Fukushima Prefecture as well as other areas nationwide. We are already aware that Iitate village tends to give a reading that is higher compared to other locations. Regarding this area in question, according to the data that has been measured by Japan, the data that we have is a level, at most, of 50μSv in the area that you have indicated.

It is difficult for us to comment on the measurement taken by Greenpeace, because we do not know at what timing and what method was used for the measurement done by Greenpeace. We would have to say however, that basically speaking, the measurements that have been reported by Greenpeace we cannot consider to be a reliable measurement.

One last point I wish to make is that, this is not Greenpeace data, but generally speaking, measurements show a relatively high level in the area around Iitate village. Many people living in this village have already voluntarily evacuated, so there are hardly any people actually residing and living in this area anymore, at the moment.

QUESTION (Andrew Morse, The Wall Street Journal): This is a question for Mr. Nishiyama. How significant is the trouble at Unit 2? Do you think there is damage to the RPV? And with regard to the water that is building up in the trench, are you concerned that it might flow into the broader environment, including the sea?

Mr. Nishiyama: Regarding Unit 2, we do have the fact that the sound of an explosion was heard around the suppression chamber of the pressure vessel of Unit 2. Accordingly there is the possibility that the suppression chamber, which is part of the pressure vessel may have been damaged.

Regarding the pressure vessel, first of all, when the fuel was damaged slightly, it is possible that radioactive material flowed from the pressure vessel to the containment vessel. But other than that, we don't have any clear-cut data that shows any damage to the pressure vessel.

Regarding the concern of the stagnant water with high levels of radioactivity flowing into the sea, at the moment we are not observing any such flow into the sea. We intend to move the highly radioactive water safely to an isolated location in order to prevent it from flowing into the sea.

QUESTION (Jonathan Soble, The Financial Times): I would just like to clarify something from Andrew's question. It sounds like, if the damage is to the suppression chamber in Unit 2, then it seems unlikely that water that would have come directly into contact with the fuel, which is inside the pressure vessel, would have flown out. Am I

right in understanding that, your interpretation of what is happening inside that unit, is different from the Nuclear Safety Council's (NSC)? They are suggesting that water that has come into direct contact with the fuel inside has come out, which suggest that there is some kind of breach in the pressure vessel. Do you have competing interpretations here?

Mr. Nishiyama: No, I don't think there is any difference in my interpretation and the view of the NSC. The reason is because I mentioned that the water that has come into contact with the fuel in the pressure vessel will probably have moved to the containment vessel in the form of steam. Since the suppression chamber, which is part of the containment vessel was damaged, it will flow outside for that reason. Therefore, the water that has directly come into contact with the fuel has flowed outside via the containment vessel.

QUESTION (Jonathan Soble, The Financial Times): Mr. Shinano could you also address that? Is that your interpretation too, that it was steam and not water flowing from the pressure vessel?

Mr. Shinano: As is written in the document that I have distributed to you today, the NSC does not specify through which route the water in the pressure chamber flowed out to either the containment vessels or the outside. We just mentioned that the water in the pressure vessel flowed into the containment vessel through some route, and the scenario described just a moment ago by Mr. Nishiyama we consider as one possible scenario.

QUESTION (Reuters): I have a question for Mr. Nishiyama. Could you please explain in simple terms what a trench is, and what purpose they serve? Can they be considered tunnels? And are they sealed – in other words, are the contents inside the trenches able to come into contact with the air outside? Thank you.

Mr. Nishiyama: Yes, it is like a tunnel, as you say. What it is, is essentially, the pipes, which until then used to be submerged in the soil, now take the shape of a tunnel so that the maintenance will be easier to do.

And the walls of the tunnel are made of concrete, and are painted over as well.

It is in this tunnel-like trench that we have found stagnant water with a certain level of

radioactivity. And we wish to make sure that this water does not overflow and as a result flow into the sea. And also we want to prevent it from being absorbed underground. And the best way to do that, we consider, is to pump out the stagnant water from the turbine building as soon as possible.

QUESTION (Khaldon Azhari, Pan Orient News): I have a question for the MHLW official. You said that you found traces below the limit in food like meat and fish. So you mean you found radiation in these products because of the problem, and these radiation numbers are below the limit? Or you didn't find any radiation in that food? And if I may ask just a quick question for Mr. Nishiyama, I heard many times you say that the tsunami was unexpectedly big. So how big – how many meters was the nuclear power plant designed to resist? Did you expect a tsunami of two meters only or three meters? What meters were in your plans to resist a tsunami?

Ms. Iseki: Perhaps my explanation earlier was not accurate. Actually the test results for fish, meat and eggs – no nuclides were detected. None.

Mr. Nishiyama: Regarding what kind of tsunami was expected in the design of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, although I do not have the exact numbers, I believe a tsunami of somewhere below 10 meters was the level that was expected, but the tsunami we had this time was far beyond that number.

QUESTION (Khaldon Azhari, Pan Orient News): How high was it? 14 meters?

Mr. Nishiyama: At least 14 meters.

Mr. Shikata: Let me just supplement what our colleagues from MHLW mentioned regarding marine products. In the area of the sea around Fukushima Prefecture, there are no fishing activities being conducted, including those fishermen from Fukushima, Miyagi, or Iwate, or other nearby prefectures. There are some fishing activities that could be conducted in the contiguous waters of Fukushima Prefecture, but based on the instruction of MHLW, there is going to be monitoring based on the provisional limit values. So based on confirming the safety of those marine products, there could be the resumption of fishing activities. Chiba Prefecture came out with an announcement last Thursday and Friday, and I will just give you some examples. Last Thursday, the Splendid Alfonsino was sampled and there was nothing found. On Friday, Pacific

Mackerel, Squid, Flounder – there was no cesium found. The only identifiable value was found for anchovy, which was 3.0Bq/kg. But as far as the provisional limit value for fish is concerned, it is 500Bq/kg. Again, let me just mention that the anchovy was 3.0Bq/kg, in comparison to 500Bq/kg. Thank you.

QUESTION (Henry Tricks, The Economist): I just want to ask you about the longevity of this. We have had radiation now seeping out in high and low doses for a couple of weeks now, and you are increasingly hearing talk of this going on for further weeks more, perhaps even months. I wonder what the cumulative damage is? What is the biggest risk of a very long-term scenario here? And do you have any thought of capping the nuclear power plant with a giant tent or something like that?

Mr. Nishiyama: I believe that any risks there may be have all been dealt with. For instance we have been urging evacuation of residents in areas that may be affected by the radiation directly, and also we have taken action that will limit from a very conservative level anything that we consider of having any risks of ingesting that product. As long as these actions are being taken, we do not foresee any long-term affect to the people that are living in those areas. Except in the short-term it may be hard to have to leave an area in which they have become accustomed to living. Besides that, we believe we are able to keep any effect of the radiation to a minimum.

What we should be doing at the moment is to bring the reactor itself and the spent fuel pool to a safe state, eventually leading to a cold shut down. I think what is important at the moment is to do everything we can in order to do so.

Mr. Shikata: I am afraid that we have to conclude, and that this will be the last question.

QUESTION (Jonathan Soble, The Financial Times): A question for Mr. Shikata and Mr. Nishiyama I think. It has been revealed today that the President of TEPCO has been indisposed for a considerable period through this crisis, and I would like to ask – did TEPCO inform NISA and the Government about his indisposition? Do you think it affected TEPCO's ability to respond to this crisis at all? And are you confident that he is now well enough to continue in his position?

Mr. Nishiyama: Actually I saw with my own eyes that President Shimizu was present at the integrated headquarters which is located in the TEPCO building and discusses and

draws up strategy. I saw President Shimizu attending the meetings in the integrated headquarters, and he has a good knowledge and grasp of the overall situation.

QUESTION: What about the six days when he wasn't there? From the 16th to the 21st he was not there. We want to know about that time.

Mr. Nishiyama: I have not been informed about the details regarding that period of time, but for anybody who has been working without any sleep or rest since the earthquake occurred since 11 March, I believe that it cannot be helped that the person might choose to take some rest before he moves on to developing the next strategy.

Mr. Shikata: Let me just supplement that, as you are aware, in order to work very closely between the Government and TEPCO, we have established joint headquarters, and the actual headquarters itself is located inside the headquarters of TEPCO. So we are attentive to the need for working very closely, sharing information simultaneously, and coming up with a joint response. We have been able to do that, and I believe that TEPCO and the Japanese Government are having a meeting of minds in terms of the need to tackle the situation jointly.

Let us conclude this evening's press briefing. I assume that we will be holding this kind of briefing again tomorrow. Thank you very much for coming.

(END)