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

29 March 2011

Mr. Noriyuki Shikata, Deputy Cabinet Secretary for Public Relations: Let us start today's briefing for international press at the Prime Minister's Office. My name is Noriyuki Shikata, I am Deputy Cabinet Secretary for Public Relations at the Prime Minister's Office.

Let me introduce our briefers. To my right is Mr. Hidehiko Nishiyama, Deputy Director-General of the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA) and to his 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 to his left is Mr. Masanori Shinano, Counselor Secretariat of the Nuclear Safety Commission (NSC). And lastly, Ms. Noriko Iseki, she is Senior Technical Officer of the Food Safety Department of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW).

At the outset, let me recap some of the comments made by Chief Cabinet Secretary Mr. Edano today in the two press conferences that he held today. In the morning at the press conference that started from around 9:40, he referred to a couple of points regarding Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant.

The first point was that the radioactive levels of plutonium detected from soil samples taken at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant are almost the same as those from the fallout detected in background radiation. That is the levels of plutonium detected following past nuclear tests in the atmosphere.

He further mentioned that the plutonium in question was detected probably because the nuclear power plant was hit by a major earthquake and tsunami. We will continue to strengthen monitoring of the levels of plutonium at the periphery of the plant.

Also he mentioned that the NSC and NISA are examining various options to pump out highly-radioactive water that has been building up in the basement of the reactor's turbine building. And also, injecting water is critically important to cool down the

reactor and prevent the fuel rods inside the reactor from being exposed above water and it is necessary to strike a balance between removing highly-radiated water leaking from the turbine building and injecting appropriate amounts of water into the reactor to prevent the reactor from overheating.

And lastly he mentioned that given the fact that plutonium as well as highly-radioactive substances that may have leaked from the fuel rods from the reactor were detected in a puddle at the site, the molten fuel rods might have partially melted down.

And in the evening press conference starting from 4 pm, on the issue of the Japanese government's energy policy, he mentioned that in the review of the basic energy plan, the Japanese government is considering further promoting the use of clean energy such as bio-energy and solar energy.

And on the nuclear power plant's safety, he mentioned the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) is reviewing the safety of nuclear power plants around the nation based on the result of the study. METI is examining what kind of measures should be taken. The ministry is expected to wrap it up not far in the future.

And regarding those people who are working on-site at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, he mentioned nuclear power plant workers on-site have been working really hard and taking risks in tackling the situation. He wholeheartedly appreciates their hard work and dedication. And also preventing the increase of the incidents at Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant has been our top priority, but we will also make efforts to improve the working and living conditions of workers on-site.

That concludes some of my reference to Mr. Edano's press conference today. Then, I would like to turn to Mr. Nishiyama of NISA.

Mr. Nishiyama: Thank you, Mr. Shikata. I would like to update you on the status of the power plants of Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant.

First, regarding the reactor of Unit 1, the pressure of its containment vessel stabilized, but the temperature of the pressured vessel went up. Therefore, we increased the amount of water introduced from 113 liters per minute to 141 liters per minute. The temperature began to decline this morning.

We replaced fire engines with tentative electricity-driven pumps to introduce pure water to the reactor of Unit 1 today. Regarding the spent fuel pool of Unit 1, since we found some defects for the concrete pumping machine, we will repair it within a few days and hopefully we will pour pure water into the spent fuel pool of Unit 1 on 31 March.

Regarding power restoration, we are restoring power lines inside each unit. Regarding Unit 1, for example, we have a plan to connect cables from the radiation monitoring post in hope that we can see the monitoring data in the central control unit.

Regarding the irradiated stagnant water in the turbine building, we have been pumping out the irradiated water in the turbine building of Unit 1 and put it into a hot well. We are seeing some progress in reducing the amount of water, but it may take time to finish.

Regarding trench water, the water which we found in the trench attached to the plants of Units 1 to 3, we found this water in the trench attached to the turbine building of Unit 1. We see little change in its depth or the height of the water surface. We placed sandbags inside and concrete blocks to prevent the water from running into the sea, even if it spills out. But we do not expect a big change in the level of the surface of the trench water. TEPCO has been conducting nuclide analysis of the trench water and the results will be announced as early as tonight.

Next, I would like to explain Unit 2. Regarding the reactor, pure water introduction to the reactor of Unit 2 is now realized by tentative electricity-driven pumps instead of fire engines. Regarding the spent fuel pool of Unit 2, pure water will be introduced to the spent fuel pool of Unit 2 instead of sea water as early as today. Power restoration for Unit 2 – the monitoring post rated the electricity source, and tentative cables for the vital electricity source will be checked and placed.

Regarding radiated water/stagnant water in the turbine building of Unit 2, we began pumping up the highly radiated water in the turbine building and putting it into the hot well, the same as Unit 1. Regarding trench water, we found highly irradiated water in the trench attached to Unit 2, and we think that the radiation of Unit 2 trench water is higher than that of Unit 1. We think that removal of stagnant water in the turbine building may contribute to lessening the amount of water in the trench, so our first priority is pumping up the stagnant irradiated water in the turbine building. Regarding

Unit 3, with respect to the reactor, yesterday, we began introducing fuel water with tentative electricity driven pumps to the pressure vessel of Unit 3. Regarding the spent fuel pool, we will introduce pure water to the spent fuel pool of Unit 3 with a concrete pumping machine or car that is from the outside.

Regarding power restoration, we will confirm or check the integrity of the board carrying 125 volt power charger. Also, we will continue to check the integrity of equipment and restore cables. Regarding the irradiated stagnant water in the turbine building of Unit 3, we are doing the same thing as Unit 2, which is pumping up the water and carrying it to the hot well.

Regarding trench water, the same as Unit 2, in which we see no big change in the level of the surface of the water. Therefore, the priority is to pump up the stagnant water in the turbine building. Unit 4, as you know, has no fuel core in the reactor, because all the fuel has been placed in the spent fuel pool because of the exchange of the shroud in the reactor. Regarding the spent fuel pool of Unit 4, we switched the water source of the concrete pumping machine from seawater to pure water yesterday, which is in preparation for water introduction in the future to the spent fuel pool of Unit 4. Regarding power restoration, the lights of the central controlling unit were turned on at 11:50 today regarding Unit 4.

Then, lastly, I would like to explain briefly about plutonium. Yesterday, it was confirmed that there was plutonium in the five samples from the soil of the Fukushima Daiichi Plant. The density of the plutonium was however almost equal level to fallout, which is irradiated falling objects created by nuclear bomb tests. Therefore, our environment has very little additional effect. Therefore, it will not harm people's health. However, we will continue our monitoring. That is all for my report today.

Mr. Shikata: I would like to ask Mr. Itaru Watanabe of MEXT.

Mr. Watanabe: As you know, MEXT is conducting environmental monitoring activities around the nuclear power plant and the papers we provided today show the updated data of the monitoring. I would like to add one point: In today's paper, one item added is readings of integrated doses at monitoring posts out of 20km zone. This shows, in page 10, several points of the accumulated or integrated dose of five days or four days or three days readings measured by the integrating dose measure. Thank you very much.

Mr. Shikata: Now, I would like to ask Mr. Masanori Shinano of the Nuclear Safety Commission to speak.

Mr. Shinano: Thank you. From the Secretariat of the Nuclear Safety Commission, I would like to give you the daily report concerning our evaluation of the environmental monitoring result. So the original data was released 6:45 pm, yesterday, and based on the data that was published by 4 pm, yesterday, we have carried out our evaluation. I don't have much to report to you, which I believe is very good news.

First of all, concerning the spatial radiation dose rate, there has been no major change in the level of the spatial radiation dose rate.

Secondly, the concentration of the radioactive substance in the air, this is based on the data collected until 4 pm the previous day, but we did not have such data available, so we don't have new evaluation result. This does not mean that monitoring was not carried out. There was no data made public by 4 pm one day prior to our evaluation.

And for aviation monitoring, there was no information update, thus we do not have new results of evaluation.

Fourth is environmental sample. Weed, pond water, and rain water have shown relatively higher levels of radioactivity. And if you refer to the fourth paragraph , this is the data that we are looking at anew. As we have reported yesterday, in the trench, they have observed water of high radioactivity. And our commission has given advice to the government yesterday, in order to confirm that it has not dissipated into the air or the ambient, that they strengthen the surveillance and monitoring as a result. Iodine 131 and cesium 137, that data will be watched by our commission in the seawater of the offshore monitoring. The data that we have obtained do not suggest any harm on the human health.

The fifth point is the environmental radioactivity level surveyed by prefecture. The first in terms of the spatial radiation dose rate, there has not been any significant change. Drinking water or tap water, we believe that we will have to continue to observe carefully the information provided by MHLW. Within the scope of the data that we have evaluated, those values are below the provisional regulated value, and all values are

lower than the values that we have seen the day before yesterday. Thank you.

Mr. Shikata: I'd like to ask Noriko Iseki of MHLW to go next.

Ms. Iseki: I would like to provide the test results reported yesterday, 28 March. In total, 27 samples were tested and reported from five prefectures, and none of these levels are exceeding the maximum limits. I have distributed one document which is printed on both sides. On the back side, this provides a sum-up of the test results since 19 March. There are no additional reports indicating levels exceeding maximum limits. Thank you.

Mr. Shikata: Then, lastly, I'd like to ask Mr. Matsunaga of the Foreign Ministry to speak.

Mr. Takeshi Matsunaga, Assistant Press Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Thank you, Mr. Shikata. As always, I'd like to update you about assistance from other countries and territories. First of all, I would like to explain about new information with respect to relief supplies. Yesterday, I made a detailed explanation as to the relief supplies from China, Republic of Korea, as well as the United Kingdom. Please refer to the updated chart circulated for you. We added relief supplies from Mexico as well as the United Kingdom. Without going into details about the matrix, I'd like to give you the latest information as to the relief supplies. India yesterday provided 10 tons of biscuits. It is an additional relief supply provided by the Republic of India. They have already provided a lot of blankets as well as drinking water. Those 10 tons of biscuits are headed to Miyagi Prefecture. Bangladesh is providing 2,000 blankets as well as 500 pairs of boots as well as 1,000 pairs of rubber gloves on the date of 31 March. The packaged power station provided by the Republic of Korea, which I explained yesterday, is scheduled to arrive at Anegasaki city, Chiba Prefecture. Those packaged power stations are designed to provide electricity for as many as 8,000 households. And lastly with respect to relief supply, I would like to mention the contribution of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). They are to provide about 1,800 solar lamps. Please refer to the sheet which gives you the picture of those solar lamps. They are to arrive in Ishinomaki city tomorrow. In addition, I would like to mention the countries and territories I haven't mentioned, which have provided monetary donations. They are Equatorial Guinea, Georgia, Rwanda, and Taiwan. Thank you very much.

Mr. Shikata: Now, I'd like to open the floor to questions. When you ask a question,

please identify yourself with your name and affiliation, and please limit your question to only one question per time.

QUESTION (Mr. Li, Weibing, Central Chinese TV): Question to Mr. Nishiyama. You mentioned earlier that you detected a high level of plutonium. As countermeasures to deal with the plutonium, what are measures that you need to take urgently?

Mr. Nishiyama: There seems to be some misunderstanding, The level of plutonium that has been detected is around the same level as the fallout into the environmental atmosphere as a result of nuclear tests, and it is a level that would not have any adverse effect on the surrounding environment or on human health.

QUESTION (Mr. Lloyd Parry, The Times): Question for Mr. Nishiyama. Could you give us some idea of the amount of water that's going in and out of the plant? So in other words, what volume are you putting in to cool the reactors, say over 24 hours? How much are taken out of the pools and puddles and trenches at the bottom, and is the overall level of radioactive water at the bottom and the water that's causing the problem, increasing or decreasing, or remaining the same?

Mr. Nishiyama: First of all, we have to make sure that we always cool the fuel by filling it with water. That is for the spent fuel pool as well as for the reactor itself. And at the current time, we are not sure about the volume of the stagnant water. And what we are doing now is to introduce as many pumps as possible to pump out the stagnant water to be able to know how the water is flowing and to come up with measures to deal with that issue.

As long as we can cool the reactor and the spent fuel pool by injecting adequate water, while the radiation that has been created up to now from the damage to the fuel up to now may still continue to ooze out a little bit, at least by cooling with the injection of water, we will be able to prevent the generation of any new radiation.

QUESTION (Mr. Lloyd Parry, The Times): Sorry, may I follow this up? On the question of the water in the trench, you said that you are putting up concrete blocks and sandbags around the mouth of that trench to prevent any overspill into the ocean. Does that mean that the level of water in that trench is still rising?

Mr. Nishiyama: To the extent that we can see visually by our eyes, there is no change in the water level in the trench for all the three units: Units 1, 2, and 3. And in the case of unit number one, the current level of water is a level in which there is only 0.1m until it overflows. That is why for Unit 1 we are taking measures in case the level of water reaches a level that may cause it to overflow.

And let me make one clarification just in case my earlier explanation was not clear. The work of pumping out the stagnant water is most advanced in Unit 1. However, we have already started pumping out the stagnant water, both for Units 2 and 3 as well.

QUESTION (Mr. Wallace, The Australian): Thank you. It is a question for Mr. Nishiyama. I am wondering if you can tell us what specific problem or which specific reactor poses the greatest threat that you believe at the plant, and if you could also tell us whether the spent fuel pools of Unit 3 and 4 are actually holding water. Or is the water you spray on them sort of passing straight through them?

Mr. Nishiyama: At the present stage, in all of the reactors from Units 1 to 3, there is some damage to the fuel. Also, for the containment vessel and others as well, there is a high possibility that there is some leakage for all of these units. At the present moment, we cannot attach any order of importance regarding all of these reactors. All I can say is that we have to make sure to cool all of the reactors.

And regarding the spent fuel pools of Units 3 and 4, the spent fuel pool is able to hold water, and the spent fuel is submerged in the water.

QUESTION (Ms. Lee, Phoenix Television): I have a question to Mr. Nishiyama. At the moment, there has been a level of 1,000mSv detected from the stagnant water, and we have information that 11 doors for the building(sic), the turbine building, have been lost due to the tsunami. Can you confirm whether this information is accurate? And also, if you have any information for sure that the stagnant water is not flowing into the sea, could you tell us?

Mr. Nishiyama: First of all, at the moment we do not know for sure whether the stagnant water in the turbine building is the same as the stagnant water found in the trench. We are currently doing nuclide analysis to confirm whether the stagnant water in these two places is the same.

Having said so however, it is also true that both the stagnant water in the turbine building and the stagnant water in the trench show a reading of more than 1000mSV on the surface of the water. It is highly likely that it is the same water, in the case of Unit 2.

On that premise, regarding the door that we have on the vertical shaft, I am not sure if it was 11 doors or not, but it is true that many doors on the vertical shaft have been destroyed by the tsunami.

QUESTION: In Unit 2?

Mr. Nishiyama: That point I made about the door to the vertical shaft is not only Unit 2 but for other units as well.

Regarding the latter part of your question, as to whether the water from the trench has actually flowed into the sea or not, we do not know whether it has flowed into the sea, but we do not have any data that shows that it has flowed into the sea.

QUESTION(Lee, Phoenix TV): If I may ask a related question, do you have any grounds for saying that the water from the trench is not flowing into the sea?

Briefer: In response to that question, we do not have any clear grounds at the moment. But as far as we can see, from the monitoring of samples from the sea water, high doses are not detected. But of course, we cannot say anything for sure.

QUESTION (Mr. Osawa, Dow Jones): When we look at the current situation, I understand that you have to inject water in order to cool the fuel. But at the same time, you have to reduce the flow of contaminated water into the sea, or you have to reduce any possibility of contaminated water flowing into the sea. It seems to be rather difficult to address these two contradicting objectives. Which of the two do you give more priority to? May I understand that the priority is on cooling the fuel?

Briefer: Yes, as you mentioned a moment ago, our number one priority is to cool the fuel, first and foremost, to avoid any more damage to the fuel. To the extent that we are able to meet the objective, we intend to also deal with the other objective of trying not to release large amounts of radiated water. And in order to meet that objective we will

try to reduce the amount of water to the extent that we can.

QUESTION (Mr. Osawa, Dow Jones): Probably the only measure that can be taken as a basic solution to that issue is to find some way of removing large amounts of contaminated water at once. Do you think that can be arranged?

Mr. Nishiyama: It would be very good if we could find a means of doing so. What we are considering doing at the moment is the method of using tanks that we have nearby. Looking at the progress and evolution of the approach that we are now taking, we may have to consider a different approach. We do not know.

QUESTION (Mr. Arita, BNN): This question is to Mr. Nishiyama. In dealing with this issue, you mentioned that your first priority is cooling. If the cooling fails, what would be the next best practice? If the temperature starts to rise again, what is going to happen in the next stage?

Mr. Nishiyama: In response to that question, if the cooling of the fuel does not work out and we are not successful in cooling the fuel, there would be even greater damage done to the fuel, leading to a release of the various radioactive materials that are included within the fuel. That must be avoided the most. We intend to cool the fuel in a way that we do not fail.

QUESTION (Ms. Chandler, Washington Post): One little question and a regular question. How deep is the water in the turbine rooms? Is it waist high? How many meters high is it? Also, there was a press conference yesterday, I believe, given by a nuclear regulator who talked about the working conditions at the plant, about the fatigue of the workers, the very long hours they are working, and the limited food, and I was hoping you could talk about what you have observed, Mr. Nishiyama, if you have been there. What you think is the status of the health and safety of the workers on the plant.

Mr. Nishiyama: In response to the first part of your question about the depth of the stagnant water in the turbine building, we do not know for sure, in part because of the darkness, because it is dark inside, and also because there seems to be different levels of water, depending on the place.

In response to the second part of your question regarding the fatigue and working

conditions of the workers, I also heard the report that was given yesterday. We are very aware that the workers are having a hard time. It is already a considerably long time since the work began and there is the possibility that the work is still going to take a certain amount of time. I have discussed with TEPCO, regarding giving due consideration to the supply of food, and for providing time for rest for the workers.

QUESTION (Mr. Jones, Reuters): Mr. Nishiyama, if you could clarify again and be a little more detailed about what you said about the plutonium that was detected? I'm not sure I understood right. You said it was similar to what the fallout would be from a nuclear test. Do you mean an atmospheric test or an underground test? In either case that level is equivalent to being how far from the center of such a test? I think you said fallouts. Was there an issue about whether plutonium was discovered in two samples out of five samples, or did you say four samples? I was wondering if you could just go through that again and give us the detail about that, and I did have one follow-up after that.

Mr. Nishiyama: First of all, from five samples that have been taken from the soil, plutonium was detected in each of the samples.

Regarding the level of plutonium, I mentioned that the level of plutonium that was detected is the level that is normally found in the atmosphere as radioactive fallout, at around the same level as in the case of an atmospheric nuclear test; and when I say an atmospheric test, I mean a nuclear test that was done far away and that would not have any direct effect, and in which the level of plutonium would be very small. In other words, what I mean is, it would be around the same level as the environment in which we normally live in.

There is a description about the point I have made on the very last page of the documents that have been distributed from the Ministry of Economy Trade and Industry (METI). Can you please refer to the last page of our news release?

Question (Mr. Jones, Reuters)I would also like to follow up with a question to Mr. Nishiyama, and also the Cabinet Secretary. I don't exactly understand the reasons that the evacuation radius has not been expanded to 30km. That has been a debate over the last several days; if it should be increased from 20 to 30km. My question to both of you is why has it not, and what is the latest thinking on what change might occur? I add also

that groups such as Greenpeace have tested what they say is 40km out, and reported alleged high levels of radiation. If you could tell us your thinking?

Mr. Nishiyama: First of all, we consider that what we had expected at the time we designated an evacuation area of 20km, has not changed, basically, even now. And so we consider that an evacuation area of a radius of 20km still holds at the present moment. Actually, the level of radiation in the air, in the atmosphere, is gradually starting to decline. While the situation at the nuclear power plant itself has not yet stabilized, the level of radiation in the air is slightly declining, so we consider that an evacuation area of 20km would be adequate.

Also we are urging residents in the area between 20 to 30km to stay indoors and take shelter indoors. However, we do anticipate that this may lead to some inconveniences in their daily lives, so in case the residents in the area between 20 to 30km feel inconvenience in staying indoors, we are suggesting that in that case they voluntarily move outside the 30km area. And regarding the data made public by Greenpeace, we do not know the actual method they used for their measurement, and we consider that the data that they have made public is not necessarily reliable.

Mr. Shikata: Let me just add that in line with what Mr. Nishiyama mentioned we think the current measures are appropriate, but at the same time, as has been explained by our colleague from MEXT, we are monitoring the radiation levels in that vicinity very closely and we take appropriate actions according to the environment emerging. And also regarding the news release that Mr. Nishiyama mentioned, I think this news release is titled “Regarding the detection of radioactive material in the soil on the side of Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant”, and if you turn the page there is a reference in the fourth bullet, which I quote, “the density of detected plutonium is equivalent to the density in the soil under normal environmental conditions, and therefore poses no major impact on human health.”

Okay, we are running out of time, last two questions, Richard and Michael.

QUESTION (Lloyd Parry, The Times): A question I suppose for Mr. Shikata about the evacuation zone. What is the legal basis of the evacuation zones? In other words, do the authorities have any powers to require people to keep to these 20km and 30km demarcations, or does it in fact represent no more than a strong request for people to

cooperate. And a rather small technical question for Mr. Nishiyama about the white suits which we see the workers in the plant wearing. What exactly are those white suits, and what sort of protection do they provide?

Mr. Nishiyama: Let me respond to those questions. First of all, the legal basis for the evacuation is the Act on Special Measures Concerning Nuclear Emergency Preparedness. Based on that law the NSC has developed a guideline for in-house shelter and evacuation, and based on this guideline, when a certain dose level is expected, the evacuation zone or in-house shelter zone will be established. And when an area is designated as an evacuation area the people living in that area are obligated to abide by the evacuation. The approach that we are taking is the same as the approach that is taken in the United States. The suit that the workers are wearing is called a Tyvek Suit. It prevents the radioactive material becoming attached to the skin, and also it comes with a full face mask in order to prevent the ingestion of any radioactive material.

Mr. Shikata: Let me just supplement that. Regarding the original legal basis, the current instruction was issued by the Prime Minister on 15 March, from the Prime Minister to the Governor of Fukushima and other relevant mayors in Fukushima prefecture. This is based on Article 15 of the Act on Special Measures Concerning Nuclear Emergency Preparedness.

QUESTION (Lloyd Parry, The Times): If people are obligated to comply with these evacuation areas, why are there still people in that area, as we have seen on television and in the media?

Mr. Nishiyama: The people living in that area are to evacuate, but in the case of Japan we do not take any coercive measures to make the people move.

Mr. Shikata: A very last question from Michael Penn.

QUESTION (Michael Penn, Press TV and Shingetsu News Agency): This is more of a kind of a political question, and I realize that there are no politicians up at the board, but it regards some comments that came out I believe yesterday and today about TEPCO. Mr. Edano, the Chief Cabinet Secretary, apparently said that the nationalization of TEPCO is not being considered at the current time, but Kyodo News reported earlier today that Mr. Gemba, the National Strategy Minister, said it is an option in this case.

So my question basically is two-fold. Is the nationalization of TEPCO being considered by the government at all at this time? And if it is, what would be the justification, and if it is not, why not?

Mr. Nishiyama: Since this is a political question I really wonder if I should be the one to respond to this question, but as far as I understand I do not know of any situation where the Japanese government is considering the nationalization of TEPCO at the current moment. What we should be doing at the moment is to stabilize the situation, and both TEPCO and the Japanese government are doing everything we can to stabilize the situation.

Mr. Shikata: I may just add that Mr. Edano, as you are probably aware, mentioned along the lines that he is not aware of the examination to nationalize TEPCO at this juncture.

Let us conclude today's briefing. I guess that we will be having a similar press briefing, most likely, tomorrow. Thank you very much for coming.

(END)