

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

30 March 2011

Mr. Noriyuki Shikata, Deputy Cabinet Secretary for Public Relations: Good evening. We are now holding an on-the-record press briefing for international media 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 the briefing on the issues of Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant and other issues related to the post-quake and tsunami situation by officials of the ministries and agencies concerned.

Today's briefers include, to my right, Mr. Hidehiko Nishiyama, Deputy Director-General of the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA); Mr. Takeshi Matsunaga to his right, he is Assistant Press Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA); and to my left is Mr. Shinichi Kawarada, Advisor to 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 on the very left end is 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.

At the outset, let me just do a recap of the press conferences that Chief Cabinet Secretary Mr. Edano held twice today, in the morning and evening. As for the morning press conference, he referred to issues regarding Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. The Japanese government is now examining various measures to bring the situation of Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant under control and reduce radioactivity levels in the vicinity of the plant to the minimum level. We are examining various options to tackle the situation.

Regarding food shipment and consumption regulations, Mr. Edano mentioned that there is a possibility that regulation on shipments and consumption of agricultural products can be lifted if food safety is secured continually based on radioactive readings. The timing of lifting such regulations is largely affected by weather conditions and other factors. We are closely examining and monitoring the situation.

Also regarding the situation of Fukushima Daini Nuclear Power Plant, he mentioned that it has been reported that cooling operations of all reactors at Fukushima Daini Nuclear Power Plant have been working without any problems.

On the issue of plutonium, he mentioned we will seek the advice of experts to decide whether monitoring for plutonium should be carried out in a wider area, but it is said that plutonium is a relatively heavy substance. Therefore, our current stance is to continue strong monitoring in the vicinity of Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant.

In the evening, Mr. Edano referred to the following points. Regarding the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, he mentioned that we will monitor the radioactivity levels within a radius of 20km from the plant while fully ensuring the safety of workers who enter the evacuation zone to conduct monitoring. Based on the monitoring results, we will explore the possibility whether evacuees whose houses are located within the evacuation zone can go home tentatively.

On the issue of possible impacts on marine resources, he mentioned that radioactive substances were detected in seawater around the nuclear power plant. At the present time, no serious risk to marine resources in the sea around the reactors can be seen, but we will thoroughly conduct monitoring on the radioactivity levels of seawater in the area.

And let me just touch upon two telephone conversations that Prime Minister Kan had today. One is with President Barack Obama. It was his third time to have a telephone conversation with the US President. Prime Minister Kan expressed his gratitude for the full support received from the United States, particularly from President Obama, in responding to the quake and tsunami and to the accidents at Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. He further conveyed his appreciation for the close consultations behind held between the relevant parties or institutions of Japan and the United States to respond to the accidents at Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant.

Prime Minister Kan also stated that Japan would like to continue to have close consultations with the United States and to receive assistance to further respond to the issues.

In response, President Obama repeatedly offered his deepest sympathy and expressed

his confidence that Japan will achieve reconstruction. He further stated that the US Government is prepared to provide the necessary assistance in both the short- and long-term.

Lastly, there was another telephone conversation between Prime Minister Kan and Chancellor Angela Merkel this evening. Chancellor Merkel mentioned that she extends condolences in the aftermath of the earthquake representing the German people, and individual German people are praying that Japan will overcome these difficulties and the Japanese disciplined response is highly appreciated in Germany and Germany wishes to support Japan in various ways.

Prime Minister Kan mentioned he appreciated the kind words of condolence and support from Germany, and also he explained the situation in Japan focusing on the situation in Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant and he mentioned that Japan would like to provide information to the international society with the maximum level of transparency.

Also, Prime Minister Kan mentioned that by improving the situation regarding the aftermath of the quakes and tsunamis and overcoming this crisis, he is very much looking forward to meeting with Chancellor Merkel at the occasion of the G8 Summit to be held at the end of May.

That is all from me and I would like to now turn to Mr. Nishiyama.

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

Regarding Unit 1, after we increased the volume of pure water to be introduced to the reactor of Unit 1, the temperature of the pressured vessel declined. This is a good sign. This water introduction is now carried out by a tentative electricity-driven pump. As for the spent fuel pool of Unit 1, we will throw pure water into the spent fuel pool of Unit 1 with a concrete-pumping machine on March 31, tomorrow.

Regarding power restoration, we will confirm the integrity of the auxiliary system and check trenches for lights in the turbine building. Regarding the stagnant water in the turbine building, we pumped radioactive stagnant water out from the turbine basement

into the hot well. The depth of the water is now 20cm, compared to 40cm a few days ago. However, we found that the hot well of Unit 1 is now full. Therefore, we need to find space in some other tanks.

Regarding the trench which is attached to Unit 1, where we found water, we will lead some of the water in the trench attached to Unit 1 to some place to lower the surface of the water by one meter.

Regarding Unit 2, the temperature of the pressure vessel went up and we increased the amount of pure water introduced there. Regarding the spent fuel pool, when we introduced pure water through the spent fuel pool cooling system powered by an electricity driven tentative pump, there was some trouble in the pump and we changed to fire engines for pumping. We will resume this introduction of water to the spent fuel pool very soon. Regarding power restoration, the situation is the same as Unit 1. Regarding the stagnant water of Unit 2, we have been moving water which remains in the tank where we have planned to move the stagnant water in the turbine building of Unit 2. Regarding reactors of Unit 3, its parameters are stable. Regarding the spent fuel pool, we threw pure water to the spent fuel pool of Unit 3 with a concrete pumping machine yesterday. For the power restoration of Unit 3, we will confirm the integrity of the auxiliary system and receive and charge power at the board of the direct current 125v electric charge board. Regarding stagnant water, the situation is almost the same as Unit 2.

Regarding Unit 4, we have been throwing water to the spent fuel pool of Unit 4 with a concrete pumping machine.

Regarding the monitoring of radiation, we found 2,572.5 times of Iodine 131 from the seawater sample taken at 8:20 AM yesterday at 330m south of the kennel attached to Units 1 through 4. We also found 3,355 times of iodine 131 from the seawater sample taken at 1:55 PM yesterday at the same place. From the seawater samples taken at 8:40 AM and 2:10 PM yesterday 30m north of the kennel attached to Units 5 and 6, we found 1234.5 and 1262.5 times of iodine 131, respectively. Those figures show no immediate negative effects for human health nearby, because the area 20km from the Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant is designated as an area for evacuation and no such activities as fishing is conducted there. Also, it is expected that the seawater will not be directly consumed by the people, and its effects on the seaweed will be minimal because

it will dissipate within eight days, and iodine's radiation level will be halved. However, we will closely monitor the data.

And one new piece of information: We will spray synthetic plastic to make radiated dust not to fly over to other places or the sea. We will begin the trial experimental usage tomorrow, and after seeing the results, we will use it in the other places of the site. Thank you very much.

Mr. Shikata: Now, I would like to turn to my colleague from MEXT.

Mr. Kawabata: Kawabata is my name. Next, at a point beyond the 20km radius from Fukushima Daiichi, we have been monitoring both the land as well as the sea zone, at monitoring points outside of the 20km zone of Fukushima Daiichi. So today I would like to briefly touch upon monitoring of the seas. Up to now, we have been monitoring the sea zone about 30km from Fukushima Daiichi and up to now we have been checking the surface seawater radionuclide concentration, but this time we also started to measure the nuclide concentration at lower levels, deeper levels. And, the iodine 131 and cesium 137 have been detected through these monitoring, but they are relatively low levels and they have been fully dissipated, we believe. Thank you.

Mr. Shikata: Then, I would like to ask Mr. Shinano of the Nuclear Safety Commission. Please listen to the simultaneous interpretation during the initial remarks.

Mr. Shinano: Thank you. Good evening. I am from the Secretariat of the Nuclear Safety Commission. So, this is the update of the daily evaluation result of the environmental radiation monitoring results. Overall, we have no findings that would suggest immediate health risks on the human body. Now, I would like to report each item. The original data that we have assessed was published at 6:45 PM yesterday, starting with the spatial radiation dose rate. There was a slight difference from the previous rate, but overall this does not affect people's health.

Secondly, the radioactivity in the area, that is, the concentration of radioactivity in the air. And since the day before yesterday, in the measurements that were collected, the level had seen some increase, but overall this would not affect people's health in the current conditions.

Going on to aviation monitoring data, we have received a new set of data, but in order to identify the level of diffusion of radioactive material, the data needs to be collected by airplanes or aircrafts flying at low altitudes and low speed, which we have instructed MEXT to do.

Now, moving on to environmental sample: For pond water, rainwater, soil fallout, and seawater, the measurements were relatively high, continuously. For tap water and food, there needs to be continuous monitoring.

Going on to the fifth item, that is the environmental radioactivity level survey by prefecture: So, not only in the periphery of the nuclear power station in each prefecture, measurements have been made for the environmental radioactivity level, but none would suggest health risk hazards.

Now, turning to tap water. At some monitoring ports, iodine 131 and radioactive cesium 137 had been collected, but these are lower than the indices concerning the limited ingestion of food and drink. Also, the readings of other radioactive material have come down. So this would not be an immediate health risk. However, we need to continue the monitoring. That's all, thank you.

Mr. Shikata: And Noriko Iseki of MHLW please.

Ms. Iseki: I would like to briefly provide the test results reported from prefectures in food safety monitoring tests as of yesterday, 29 March. From eight prefectures, which are Chiba, Niigata, Saitama, Gunma, Ibaraki, Nagano, Kanagawa, and Yamagata, we have test results for 35 food samples. None of them are found reported at levels exceeding the maximum limits. I just draw attention to the fish samples tested in Chiba Prefecture and Kanagawa Prefecture. We have six samples in total and in none of them have radionuclides been detected. Thank you.

Mr. Shikata: Then Mr. Matsunaga from the Foreign Ministry, please.

Mr. Matsunaga: Thank you, Mr. Shikata. I'd like to add one event expected tomorrow with relation to foreign affairs. Tomorrow His Excellency Mr. Nicolas Sarkozy, President of the French Republic will pay a visit to Japan. During his stay in Japan, The President will hold a meeting with Prime Minister Kan. Upon the Tohoku-Pacific Ocean

Earthquake, as the Chair of the G8 and G20 Summit this year, President Sarkozy has been expressing his intention to visit Japan to express the support and solidarity of the international community with Japan.

Then I'd like to update about the assistance from other countries and territories as well as by international organizations. As of yesterday, relief supplies from 29 countries, territories, and international organizations have arrived in Japan and have been delivered gradually to the area affected by the earthquake.

Today I'd like to focus on assistance of international organizations. Please refer to the matrix updated today. A seven-member team of United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) and three-member team of Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) worked from 13 to 14 March. Three UNDAC members, who are UNOCHA officials, have been continuing their work as disaster response coordinators. The United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination is part of the international emergency response system for sudden-onset emergencies. It is designed to help the United Nations and governments of disaster-affected countries during the first phase of a sudden-onset emergency.

Next, eight World Food Programme (WFP) logistical support personnel arrived in Narita on March 15. Since then, they have been working to assist logistics in Tokyo and Miyagi Prefecture.

And eight International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) radiation-monitoring experts arrived in Narita on March 18, 22, and 23. They have been working mainly in Fukushima Prefecture. They have also been undertaking radiation monitoring in Tokyo, Kanagawa, Chiba, Saitama and Tochigi Prefectures. A part of the readings of their monitoring has been made public in IAEA's technical briefings and in IAEA website.

IAEA has been working on food monitoring, too. Three IAEA food-monitoring experts, including one Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) official, arrived in Narita on March 26. Since then, they have been working in Fukushima Prefecture and Ibaraki Prefecture, consulting with relevant Japanese officials.

IAEA is further considering the possibility of dispatching experts on maritime radiation monitoring.

UNICEF has been providing relief supplies. They have provided 40,000 bottles of water, 200,000 articles of underwear for children, toys, education kits, recreation kits, and picture books. These supplies have been provided in Miyagi Prefecture, Iwate Prefecture, and Fukushima Prefecture.

International Telecommunication Union (ITU) has released 152 units of satellite telecommunication terminals, etc., from 17 to 22 March.

WFP provided 50 tons of nutrient-enhanced biscuits, which is 500,000 pieces, on March 24. They also transported relief supplies such as blankets and foodstuffs received from foreign countries, etc. These supplies were provided in Miyagi Prefecture and Ishinomaki city.

In addition, as I mentioned yesterday, UNHCR provided 1,794 pieces of solar lamp to Ishinomaki city of Miyagi Prefecture.

Lastly, I'd like to mention agricultural products. In yesterday's WTO Trade Negotiations Committee meeting, the Government of Japan requested the cooperation of other countries and territories not to respond to the issue of food safety concerning Japan's nuclear power plant incident in an excessive manner, and not to take measures such as unjustifiable trade bans. Addressing the WTO Trade Negotiations Committee, Ambassador Yoichi Otabe, Japanese representative, stated that, "We regret that we have caused some sense of uneasiness associated with the export of Japanese products due to the damage at the nuclear power plant. We continue to try to provide accurate information for the international community as quickly as possible with a view to ensure maximum transparency. We kindly request," he said, "members not to overreact by implementing unfair import regulations and restrictions". The Government of Japan intends to continue to seek other countries' cooperation in other relevant WTO committees, including the forthcoming Sanitary and Phytosanitary Committee meetings that are scheduled today and tomorrow. Thank you very much.

Mr. Shikata: I would like to open the floor for questions. When you ask a question, please identify yourself with your affiliation.

QUESTION (Mr. Henry Tricks, The Economist): Just two days ago, I think it was Mr.



Nishiyama who mentioned that the biggest worry at that stage was the leakage of tainted water into the sea. Now two days later there are sign that iodine levels are very high or have risen considerably in the sea. And yet, you seem to be quite relaxed about that now, saying that there is no damage to human health, no worry to human health or to fish or anything. I'm wondering, what has changed? Why were you so worried about it two days ago, and now that it has happened, you're not worried about it? Is that because it's just very easily dilutable or do you think that it's not likely to continue? Why do you seem so relaxed?

Mr. Nishiyama: Regarding what I said, my memory is partly not all that clear. But the greatest difficulty we face now is how we can strike a balance between the need to inject water in order to cool fuel on the one hand, and on the other hand how to deal with the possibility of the accumulation of that water that could lead to an overflow.

And we do not yet have anything that shows us for certain whether that water is leaking into the sea or not. In any event, we believe that we need to keep any such flow into the sea as little as possible.

It is a matter of great concern, however, that the level of radioactive material in the sea is rising. The levels that we detect at the current moment, however, are not levels that would have any negative effect on human health, and we wanted everyone to understand that as a fact.

Mr. Shikata: Just to supplement, you have already probably seen the paper distributed by the Nuclear Safety Commission where on page number two under "environmental sample" bullet number four there is a viewpoint expressed from the Nuclear Safety Commission which I quote, "It is considered that the concentration of radioactive materials emitted into the sea water will be considerably thin since it is proliferated along with the tidal current before actually being ingested by marine life such as fish and seaweed. Since I-131 has a relatively shorter half life period, eight days, it is assumed that its concentration will be substantially decreased before taking such marine food."

QUESTION (Mr. John Boyd, IEEE Spectrum): This is for Nishiyama-san. About the pumping of the stagnant water from the turbine basements, I am confused about what is being reported by NISA, TEPCO, and also NHK which they base their reports on those

two organizations. Yesterday evening, you said that stagnant water in the three basements of the turbine buildings was being pumped into the hot wells. Could you please define what you mean by hot well? And NHK was reporting today, and I understood that you also had said yesterday morning, in the case of Units 2 and 3, the water could not be pumped into the condensation tanks because they were already full, and then the storage tanks located outside the turbine buildings that would normally receive the water from the condenser tanks, they were also full. So as I understand it, TEPCO was then planning to pump water from these outside tanks to surge tanks normally used to remove the water from the suppression pool in the reactors in order to free up the tanks outside so that the condenser water could then be moved to the outside tanks. So when you said last night that the stagnant water was being pumped directly into the hot well, it seemed to contradict this, and so I am confused. I am writing for engineers, so I have to be really exact in explaining this. Thank you.

Mr. Nishiyama: The containers that are available and can be used are the hot well, the condensed water storage tank, and the surge tank of the suppression pool. These are the three water containers that we can use.

And it is only for Unit 1 that we were able to directly pump the stagnant water into the hot well.

While for Units 2 and 3, of the three types of containers that we can use, what we have to do is to move the water in the condensed water storage tank into the storage tank for the suppression pool, and then move the water in the hot well into the condensed water storage tank so that we can empty the hot well, and then we can move the stagnant water into the hot well. For Units 2 and 3, we have just embarked upon the very first stage in that three stage operation.

It is true that last night in my explanation I thought that if I explained all of these three stages it would be complicated, so I only explained the final objective which was to move the stagnant water into the hot well. So I did not go through all of the three stages yesterday, I only mentioned the very last stage which is our final objective. I am sorry for confusing you.

QUESTION (Mr. John Boyd, IEEE Spectrum): Please could you define hot well?

Mr. Nishiyama: It is an equipment that cools the steam coming out of the turbine and cools it with seawater. The hot well is the area in the condenser where the steam comes in.

And also if I may add, earlier in my explanation I mentioned that for Unit 1 we are pumping the stagnant water into the hot well. We did start to directly pump the stagnant water into the hot well for Unit 1, but subsequently we found that the hot well eventually became full. So after all, we are in a situation where we have to go through the same three stages for Unit 1 as well.

QUESTION (Mr. John Boyd, IEEE Spectrum): I'm sorry, I am still not clear. So the hot well is inside the condenser tank?

Mr. Nishiyama: Yes, that is correct.

Mr. Shikata: Next question please.

QUESTION (Mr. Kosaku Narioka, Dow Jones Newswires): I have a question to Mr. Nishiyama, and this is more of a broader question in a broader context. Do you think the Government response to this nuclear crisis was late? It appears to me that your response is only on a day-by-day basis. Do you have any long-term strategy for addressing the issue? If so, what is your long-term strategy?

Mr. Nishiyama: The cause of the incident that we have this time is: 1) because we were not able to – because the tsunami made it difficult for us to secure emergency power sources; and 2) the cooling function which would have enabled the heat from the reactor to be released into the sea was lost; and 3) because we were not able to secure the cooling water for the spent fuel pool.

And as means to deal with the situation when we have been faced with the difficult condition that was left after we suffered the tsunami: first of all, we tried to secure cooling water for the reactor as well as the spent fuel pool by using seawater, and number two, at the same time, in parallel with that, we tried to restore the power source in order to be able to achieve a sustainable cooling function. This was our first strategy.

And we have been taking action in accordance with that strategy. However, in that

process we have faced various constraints. For instance, we were a little bit late in being able to secure the cooling function which resulted in some damage to the core and spent fuel. Taking that into account, we are now working with the objective of establishing a sustainable cooling function. As far as I am concerned, I do not believe that there is any other measure beyond what we are now doing.

What we have in mind as work goes forward is: 1) we are now cooling the plant, and our objective is to continue to cool the plant and stabilize the plant and bring it to a cold shutdown; and 2) to prevent any further release of any additional radioactive material from the nuclear power plant.

And the other important objectives that we have going forward is regarding the area within a radius of 20km which is designated as an evacuation area, for residents that are living in that area, we wish to be able to reconfirm the safety of that area so that we can create a situation where the residents can return to that area as soon as possible. And also since we have placed limits on the ingestion of food from certain areas we wish to be able to review the limitations that we have placed on the ingestion of food from certain areas and be able to lift that limit as soon as possible. And at the same time we intend to move ahead with the treatment and management of the contamination within the nuclear power station.

Mr. Shikata: Next question please.

QUESTION (Ms. Fu, Singapore Press Holdings): I would like to ask Mr. Nishiyama a follow up to the last question, because up until these things happen most of the overseas people really care about it and want to know when everything is over and everything will be sorted out. So if you have completed your strategy I would like to know do you count it as weeks or months, you can tell me roughly, so that we will when the overseas people and my country we can do something on that.

Mr. Nishiyama: Well, that would be rather difficult to tell at the moment. Perhaps we will be able to have a better picture once the work we are doing with the accumulated water gets to a certain point where we can see what will happen next. So at the present moment it is difficult for me to tell whether it is going to be weeks or months.

QUESTION (Ms. Yamaguchi, AP): Mr. Nishiyama you mentioned that the objectives

would be, one, to bring the reactors to a cold shutdown, and then to treat and manage the contamination in the nuclear power station. Can you give us in more concrete terms what kind of process you will be following, in outline would be fine, and how long that process is going to take?

Mr. Nishiyama: If Units 1 to 4 are going to be decommissioned most probably as Chairman Katsumata of TEPCO stated today, the procedures for decommissioning of these reactors will have to be undertaken properly in accordance to the relevant laws. Just to give you a rough outline, the treatment and the disposal will start with the outer periphery where there is no or very little radioactivity, and then gradually move on to the areas with the highest levels of radioactivity, and it will take a considerable amount of time to dismantle, and so roughly speaking the time that will be required will probably be more than 10 years.

Mr. Shikata: Any other questions?

QUESTION (Yamaguchi, AP): I have another question, also to Mr. Nishiyama. Today, NISA gave instructions to all the electric power utilities to take measures to inspect the safety of other power generation plants. In concrete terms, what kind of inspection was included in the instructions, and what kind of improvements were included in the instructions, and what kind of measures were required or requested in the instructions? And also by when are these inspections to take place, and by when is the report to be submitted? Can you give us a more detailed account of these points?

Mr. Nishiyama: The emergency safety measures that we have required of the electric power utilities are the following: 1) to arrange for a power source vehicle in order to secure the necessary power source in times of emergency; 2) to arrange for a fire extinguishing vehicle, and secure a water supply route through the fire extinguishing hose in order to secure the cooling function for both the reactor and the spent fuel pool; and 3) to develop an implementation manual including these points to deal with any emergencies and to undertake training.

And upon having all of the electric power utilities take the measures that I have mentioned above NISA will inspect the status of implementation of these emergency safety measures by each of the electric power utilities, and confirm its effectiveness. Regarding the time span for these activities, including the development by the electric

power utilities of the measures that will be able to deal with the requirements that we have instructed, and also the inspection by NISA, including this entire process we are assuming a period of about one month for all of these measures.

QUESTION: Another question for Mr. Nishiyama. Yesterday in the Guardian newspaper there was an article based on a research head of GE at the time when I think two of GE's reactors were installed in the Fukushima plant, and this guy said that according to what he could see of the different radiation measurements, etc., he felt that there had been a meltdown through the reactor vessel, through the containing vessel, and onto the concrete floor. I don't think you would agree with this. If that is the case, could you tell me why?

Mr. Nishiyama: First of all, we consider that there is no doubt that at one time part of the fuel was not submerged in water and as a result the fuel was not cooled during that time and some damage probably was suffered by the fuel. But after that we have been making an effort to cool the fuel by continuously injecting or spraying water, and so since we have started to inject and spray water, we do not have any data that shows any further damage to the fuel. And also, when we look at the release of radioactive material up to now, while we do not believe there is any major breach to either the pressure vessel or the containment vessel, we consider that it is pretty certain that there is some leakage and at the moment we wish to bring the facility to a cold shutdown as it is now.

Mr. Shikata: Given the time limitations we would like to conclude this evening's press briefing. We will be holding a similar briefing probably tomorrow. Thank you.

(END)