

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

14 April 2011

Mr. Noriyuki Shikata, Deputy Cabinet Secretary for Public Relations: Good evening. We would like to start today's briefing for international press. The briefers include Mr. Hidehiko Nishiyama, Deputy Director-General of the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA) to my right, and to his right is Mr. Takeshi Matsunaga, Assistant Press Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), and to my left is Mr. Shinichi Kawarada, Advisor to 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). Lastly, to his left is Mr. Eiichi Yokota, Senior Technical Officer of the Food Safety Department of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW).

At the outset I would like to introduce to you the first Great East Japan Earthquake Reconstruction Design Council. This is the first time that this Reconstruction Design Council was held this afternoon. They held a discussion for two hours. This Reconstruction Design Council aims to put together ideas for the reconstruction of the Tohoku region, and the result of this discussion will be taken into account in the government's future reconstruction plans. As you are aware, this council is headed by Professor Makoto Iokibe, President of the National Defense Academy. At the same time, he is Professor Emeritus of Kobe University. He is a diplomatic historian by training.

Prime Minister Naoto Kan asked the chairperson of this Reconstruction Design Council to submit the council's opinions and ideas in terms of the rebuilding of the Tohoku region. Today was their first meeting and the next meeting is scheduled to be held on 23 April. The third meeting is currently scheduled for 30 April. At this juncture, the council is preparing to come up with a basic outline of the examination of issues by mid-May, and the first recommendation is expected to be compiled by the end of June. There will be a concurrent discussion of the working party under this council consisting of experts from a variety of fields, and this working party is scheduled to be held once or twice a week. They will come up with the results of discussions from an expert point of view, to be reported to these council meetings.

At the first council meeting that was held today, Chairperson Iokibe made a couple of

points. As the Chair submitting his ideas for the basic policy in discussing the reconstruction issues, I will just give you the salient points.

Number one is this Reconstruction Design Council should be bipartisan or ultra-partisan for all the people living in this country, obtain wisdom from various parties, and also respond to the expressions of support not only from inside Japan but also from all over the world.

Number two is to base the discussion on focusing on reconstruction of the affected areas. Having its (local) ownership, the central government will come up with a comprehensive plan for the region.

Number three is to not only discuss reconstruction issues, but also to intend to come up with creative reconstruction.

Number four is that it is necessary or indispensable to obtain nationwide support and burden-sharing. In this regard, Professor Iokibe referred to the issue of the possible introduction of a disaster reconstruction tax – this is the tentative translation. He made the point that it is necessary for all the people of Japan to bear the economic burden.

Lastly, it is necessary to come up with a blueprint that gives hope for the future of Japanese society, and there is a reference to the creation of a clean-energy-oriented society and coming up with cutting-edge models that could be the model for the rest of the country.

As for today's discussion, the acting Chairperson Professor Mikuriya of Tokyo University summarized four points.

Number one is the need to discuss this reconstruction issue from the viewpoint of civilization.

Number two is, the discussion would not be limited to only technical discussions – only technology would not solve the issue.

Number three is harmony among nature, human beings, and technology, and there was a discussion of the creation of employment and the rebuilding of manufacturing

capabilities, and coming up with a so-called “Tohoku model” that could become a model for other regions.

Lastly, there was importance attached to hearing voices from rural prefectures.

I should add that Professor Iokibe referred to some of the ideas for recreating cities or communities in Tohoku region. For example, in areas hit by the tsunami, we could come up with a new model of cities or towns where they will be tsunami-resistant. He was referring to, for example, building five-story condominiums and also making use of debris on the ground in those regions to create new parks inland so that in daily life the citizens can make use of those parks for their own leisure activities, but during times of disaster or tsunami, they could be areas where the people could evacuate to. So, I just introduced you to some of the discussions coming from this afternoon. Now, I would like to ask Mr. Nishiyama to go next.

Mr. Nishiyama: Thank you, Mr. Shikata. Good evening ladies and gentlemen. I would like to update you on the most recent status of Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station. Regarding Unit 1, we are continuing to inject nitrogen to the containment vessel of Unit 1, in order to avoid a hydrogen explosion. Although the pressure of the vessel became almost flat and there seems to be some leakage, we will continue this action, carefully watching the monitoring posts’ data.

Regarding Unit 2, parameters of the reactor are relatively stable. Regarding the trench water, we transferred 660m³ of the highly radiated trench water to the hot well yesterday. The level of the water surface in the trench went down once, but then went up, and is now at 3.5cm below the level before the transfer of the water. Our next action will be transfer of the trench water to the radioactive waste disposal system. As a precondition to do that, we are checking the waterproof treatment of the system.

Regarding Unit 3, parameters of the reactor are relatively stable, except for the temperature of the connecting part of the pressured vessel’s cap on the body, which went up. We are closely looking at this temperature rise. Regarding the spent fuel pool, we threw pure water to the spent fuel pool of Unit 3 this afternoon.

Regarding Unit 4, we took a sample of the water of the spent fuel pool of Unit 4. We analyzed and temporarily found that the spent fuel rods of Unit 4 are not so damaged,

but this is a very temporary result. Therefore we need more in-depth analysis to identify the precise status of the spent fuel of Unit 4.

In addition to this information, I would like to inform you about the following things. We sprayed synthetic plastic emulsion over about 1,000m² at the west side of the common pool for the spent fuel to settle the radiated dust. We placed silt fences in front of the intakes of Units 1 and 2 today, and also we placed the silt fences in the northern part of the lagoon-type place. I think we enclosed the place where the most radiated water will come from the plant. Lastly, we are removing radiated debris with a remotely controlled system today, also. Thank you very much.

Mr. Shikata: Next, I would like to ask Mr. Kawarada of MEXT to go next.

Mr. Kawarada: Thank you very much. We are carrying the readings of monitoring posts out of the 20km zone of Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station from the land, sea, and the air. We have also obtained the results of the radioactivity monitoring from the prefectures. You will find the results in the material distributed. The overall trend is that, first of all, in the area beyond the 20km zone of Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station, there is a graph that you will see on page 4, as indicated here. The spatial radiation dosage is declining and during the past 10 days, it has leveled off. In other prefectures, the spatial radiation dosage in areas near Fukushima prefecture, the radiation dosage is somewhat higher than that of the normal time, but for the other prefectures, they are the same as in the normal situation for drinking water and fall-out. Similarly, in the area near Fukushima, there is somewhat of an increase for iodine and cesium, but in other prefectures, there is no detection of iodine and cesium. So that is the overall situation.

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

Mr. Shinano: Thank you very much. I would like to give you the daily report of the evaluation of the environmental radiation monitoring results. Today's report covers information published between 10:00 a.m. of 12 April and 10:00 a.m. of 13 April. The general trend is that there was no data that was detected or monitored that would have an impact on human health.

As for ambient dust sampling in the air around Fukushima there was somewhat of an increase for iodine but a decline for cesium. But, all is under the concentration limit.

Number four, if you look at the very end of the paper, you will see the statement regarding strontium. From 11 March to 17 to 19 March, from the samples of soil and plants, there was strontium detected. But it is much, much lower than 1/10 of the value found for cesium, and we believe that it will have no impact on human health.

As for sea water, in the lower part of the ocean, there is some iodine increase, but for others, there is no increase.

The fifth item is the environmental radioactivity level survey by prefecture. For drinking water, iodine saw somewhat of an increase, but for cesium there was somewhat of a decrease. That concludes my report for today.

Mr. Shikata: Mr. Yokota of MHLW, please.

Mr. Yokota: I would like to give you some results that we obtained yesterday. Local authorities have given us the results of the 98 samples. The dark portion on the right hand side indicates the samples that exceeded the levels (set by the MHLW for withdrawal from markets). In the total, there are 22 samples which exceeded the level. They are from Fukushima Prefecture and for the others, they were all under the provisional rate. At the very bottom, the other paper actually gives you the result of what we have compiled up until now. We have had the sampling of 1,444, of which 193 actually exceeded the provisional regulation limits.

Mr. Shikata: Next Mr. Matsunaga of MOFA, please.

Mr. Matsunaga: Thank you Mr. Shikata. Good evening. I would like to make three announcements today. First, from lunch time tomorrow, MOFA starts an event “Hang in Japan, Cheer up Tohoku & Kanto Regions” offering a menu in its restaurant Sakura and other places, with vegetables from Fukushima Prefecture and other places suffering from harmful rumors related to the nuclear power plant accident. Also, from noon to 2 p.m. tomorrow, MOFA is opening a farmers’ market at its restaurant Nagomitei selling vegetables from six prefectures in the Tohoku and Kanto regions, in collaboration with the National Federation of Agricultural Cooperative Associations (Zenno). Through

these activities MOFA will actively support the disaster stricken and production areas suffering from harmful rumors.

Secondly, the Hon. Hillary Rodham Clinton, Secretary of State of the United States will visit Japan on Sunday. During her visit, Secretary Clinton will pay a courtesy call on Prime Minister Naoto Kan and hold a meeting with Minister for Foreign Affairs Takeaki Matsumoto, among other events. Secretary Clinton has expressed, at every occasion, that the United States is willing to provide any assistance to Japan, including at the G8 Foreign Ministers Meeting held in Paris, immediately after the Great East Japan Earthquake. The government of Japan heartily welcomes Secretary Clinton's visit to Japan.

Lastly, I would like to mention the assistance from Sri Lanka. To date, the government of Sri Lanka has provided monetary donations through the Japanese Red Cross and in addition, the government has conveyed a letter expressing the provision of 3 million tea bags to the disaster stricken areas and sufferers in those areas. That is all from me. Thank you.

Mr. Shikata: Now I would like to open the floor for questions. Christoph?

QUESTION (Mr. Neidhart, Sueddeutsche Zeitung): A question for Mr. Nishiyama – would you please elaborate on the problems you have with the cooling pool in Unit 4? The temperature rose up to 90 or more than 90 degrees there and you have quite a serious amount of radiation above the cooling pool. I understand you don't know how much water is in the cooling pool, is that correct? What are the reasons for these more severe problems than a few days ago?

Mr. Nishiyama: Regarding the spent fuel pool of Unit 4, when water was injected two times ago, which I believe was on 9 April, we injected less water than the amount we essentially should have injected. This was because the skimmer surge tank showed a sign that it was full, although in reality it was not full.

I would assume that that is what led to the increase in the temperature. Regarding the radiation dose that was measured above the spent fuel pool, we consider that the radiation dose that was measured was probably due to the debris, considering the results of the analysis of the water itself.

The results of the analysis of the water in the spent fuel pool indicated a level of 220Bq/cm³ for iodine 131, so we consider that the radiation dose that was measured above the pool was probably due to the debris and not from the water itself.

As we can see from this value, we consider that most of the spent fuel has not suffered any particular damage, but we still wish to continue to do a thorough analysis, because there may be the possibility that there may be some damage to the fuel.

QUESTION (Shanghai Media Group): I have two questions. The first question is to Mr. Nishiyama. When we consider that the Hamaoka Nuclear Power Station is standing on top of an active plate, we consider that the risks are high. If there were to be an earthquake in Tokyo that was of the order experienced in Fukushima, what level of damage would you expect? The second question is to the participant from MOFA. You said that from tomorrow you will be having a Fukushima food event, and Chief Cabinet Secretary Edano was also participating in a Fukushima event. What message do you wish to convey through these events? What kind of effect has there been on Fukushima? When do you expect to be able to achieve a recovery?

Mr. Nishiyama: In response to your first question, first of all, the Hamaoka Nuclear Power Station is not located on top of an active plate. We have confirmed that the nuclear power station has a structure that can withstand the tremor, taking into account Tokai earthquakes.

Regarding tsunamis, taking into account the tsunami we experienced in Fukushima this time, we will be taking measures that will enable the nuclear power station to maintain its cooling function, even if all the power sources and the cooling function are lost.

Some examples of the measures that will be taken would be, for instance, to place power source vehicles, emergency diesel generators and pump vehicles at a high altitude location where the tsunami can never reach.

Mr. Matsunaga: Thank you for the question. The event that I referred to is aimed at actively supporting disaster-stricken production areas, providing a menu using vegetables in areas including Fukushima Prefecture where harmful rumors are preventing the normal consumption of those agricultural products, despite the fact that

these products are safe for consumption, because we have an arrangement for regular and thorough monitoring and checking, with respect to potential risk. All those products with potential risk are checked and stopped from being shipped to the market. Therefore it is safe. All those products with potential risk are not going into the market. At the same, those producers in areas such as Fukushima Prefecture are suffering from harmful and irrational rumors. In that respect we would like to convey the message that the products in the market are safe. We would like to encourage decisions and rational judgment based on accurate information

QUESTION (Mr. Belson, New York Times): A question from Mr. Nishiyama. Some people have suggested that NISA lacks the strong mandate to oversee the nuclear industry, which has led to some safety problems at Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station. For example, a recommendation that the tsunami protections be stronger was supposedly not followed by Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO). What is your reaction to this point of view? How can you force TEPCO to implement real safety changes?

Mr. Nishiyama: First of all, to deal with tsunamis we have anti-seismic design inspection guidelines, which require a setup to deal with the largest tsunami that can be anticipated, based on the knowledge and the findings that we have experienced so far. There is no room for compromise regarding these guidelines.

The tsunami that we experienced in Fukushima this time, which has led to the situation that we are now faced with, was a tsunami attack that was far larger than anything we could have anticipated, based on past knowledge and findings. The fact that we could not anticipate this tsunami is a common shared responsibility of all those involved but it was impossible to anticipate the tsunami we experienced this time from any past findings or knowledge.

Going forward, the tsunami that we experienced this time will become new knowledge for us, based on which we will anticipate the next tsunami that may be coming. Nuclear power stations will be constructed so that they can withstand the kind of tsunami that we experienced this time and there will be no room for compromise.

QUESTION (Mr. Knittel, Freelance): Mr. Nishiyama, you said that for the earthquakes you predict the Hamaoka plant is safe, but today there was an article about Onagawa

that said that the earthquake was stronger than expected. So is it possible to make any prediction for an earthquake near power plants?

Mr. Nishiyama: It is true that recently we are encountering cases where the actual earthquake that occurred was somewhat stronger than the standards, based on which nuclear power stations have been built to be able to withstand an earthquake of a certain level. It is our wish to be able to prevent any such cases as much as possible, but actually the earthquakes that we have experienced up to now have been of a level that the nuclear power stations are able to withstand very comfortably.

The earthquakes that have been experienced this time in Onagawa and Fukushima will be incorporated as updated knowledge to be used for predicting the strength of the earthquake that may be coming next, and construction work for reinforcement of the nuclear power stations will be done as necessary to be able to withstand that level of earthquake and we intend to periodically review these levels in order to maintain the safety of the nuclear power stations.

QUESTION (Mr. Neidhart, Sueddeutsche Zeitung): I would like to follow up on my colleague's question here to my left - Mr. Nishiyama, when you drive along the devastated coast now you pass the line up to which it is damaged, and then you climb another five to ten meters and then you pass signs that say up to here is a possible inundation due to a tsunami. That means the communities in the area planned for a tsunami higher than this tsunami. How do you explain that TEPCO didn't plan for the same kind of tsunami as the communities in this area? And then, we have discussed this here before, we have had tsunamis that were higher than this in 1896 and in 1933, and we have historical evidence for a higher tsunami in 1869. We all know that TEPCO has been fighting against improving the security of the tsunami security of this power plant and other power plants, so my question to this topic is, the text of the regulation so far is very fuzzy, it says something like catastrophes that can be expected, do you think this text will be more stringent, with numbers for example?

Mr. Nishiyama: Up to now it is true that the anti-seismic guidelines in themselves were not written in detail, but based on those anti-seismic guidelines we have always based ourselves on the most updated information in taking measures assuming the highest tsunami that could be expected. The guidelines have been revised, and all of the power generation plants throughout Japan have been checked for their resistance to tremors,

and we were about to also undertake a check regarding their resistance to tsunamis when the tsunami that we experienced occurred. So we will be taking into account the tsunami that we experienced in Fukushima this time and also the tsunami that occurred in 1869, and reconfirm, to what level we had past tsunamis that came in order to create the next guidelines.

The past tsunamis that were not taken into account, even though the tsunamis were large, were mostly because there was no agreement in views among experts regarding how to assess those tsunamis, or cases where the views of experts were coming in, or we were about to receive the assessments from experts, and so we intend to give consideration to our experience that we had this time, including these cases.

Mr. Shikata: Okay, last two questions.

QUESTION (Mr. Belson, New York Times): I would like to amplify my colleague's question here, but forget tsunamis for the moment. Do you think NISA has enough power to regulate TEPCO given the evidence that TEPCO seems to ignore NISA?

Mr. Nishiyama: TEPCO, according to law, cannot ignore NISA. The Japanese legal structure is one in which TEPCO would always have to gain the approval of NISA in taking certain actions. Nuclear power stations are very large facilities and we have a mechanism where we have basically TEPCO operating the facility and having government officials check the important points with the limited amount of people that we have, and I believe that this is a mechanism that is common throughout the world, and we in Japan also take that approach. When NISA checks TEPCO and their facilities, even TEPCO would not be able to ignore NISA.

Mr. Shikata: A very last question.

QUESTION: Because not only Japanese people but also Chinese people worry about the accident of nuclear power stations, so I want to confirm, do you have any plans to close any other nuclear power stations recently? This question is to Mr. Nishiyama.

Mr. Nishiyama: For Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station at least Units 1 to 4 will be closed down, but nothing has been decided for the other units. Going forward, safety checks based on the most updated knowledge, and also through explanation to the

residents in the surrounding area who have deep concerns, I believe will be the key to all of the nuclear power stations.

Mr. Shikata: We would like to conclude today's briefing. We will conduct another round of briefing tomorrow evening. Thank you very much for coming.