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Press Conference by the Chief Cabinet Secretary

Thursday, April 1 at 9:54am, 2011
[Provisional Translation]
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Opening Statement by Chief Cabinet Secretary Edano

CHIEF CABINET SECRETARY EDANO: First of all I would like to report on the Cabinet meeting that was held today.

The meeting approved eight general and other measures, and also approved the issuance of Cabinet orders and personnel decisions.

There were a number of statements by ministers. The Minister of Justice and Minister for the Abduction Issue Nakano gave a report on the partial changes to the Basic Plan for Human Rights Education and Encouragement. It has been decided to include reference to the abduction issue in this Basic Plan.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs gave a report on the 2011 Diplomatic Bluebook.

Minister Renho made a statement on the law relating to the management of official documents and others, which goes into force from today. Minister Renho requested that all government ministries and agencies make thorough efforts to manage official documents.

The Minister for Internal Affairs and Communications made a statement on advance provision of the June portion of local allocation taxes for FY2011. The minister reported that in view of the current disaster it has been decided to bring forward the June payment of local allocation taxes and provide it together with the April payment for those local governments that have been affected by the disaster. This will allow slightly less than one trillion yen to be allocated promptly. For further details please direct your questions to the Minister for Internal Affairs and Communications.

The Minister of Finance made a statement concerning the passage of the FY2011 budget. He reported that a mechanism has been put in place to ensure that approximately 5% of budget allocated for public works projects will be targeted specifically to deal with the disaster. For further details please direct your questions to the Minister of Finance.

In ministerial discussions I made a statement concerning the partial return of Cabinet members' salaries.

To date Cabinet members have been repaying 10% of their salaries. In addition, yesterday a law was passed to reduce remuneration to Diet members, stipulating that each Diet member should return 500,000 yen per month of their remuneration package for a period of six months. If the current system is used the 500,000 yen reduction will not affect Cabinet members who are members of the Diet, as their remuneration reflects their ministerial level status. For this reason Cabinet members are requested to voluntarily repay an additional

monthly sum of 500,000 yen equivalent to the deduction being made from Diet members' salaries.

Similar measures will also be implemented sequentially from the same perspective for parliamentary vice ministers, parliamentary secretaries of state and advisors and all efforts will be made to ensure there are no discrepancies.

I would also like to report on the visit by the Prime Minister to the disaster-affected areas.

During the morning of Saturday, April 2, Prime Minister Kan will depart from the Prime Minister's Office on a helicopter of the Self-Defense Forces (SDF). During this one-day visit, the Prime Minister is scheduled to visit the disaster-affected areas and evacuation centers in Rikuzentakata in Iwate Prefecture, after which he will visit the J Village in Futaba, Fukushima Prefecture to offer his encouragement to members of the SDF, fire service and employees of Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) who are working to contain the nuclear power plant accident.

If weather conditions do not permit the SDF helicopter to fly on Saturday, the visit will be postponed until Sunday, April 3.

That is all from me for now.

Q&As

REPORTER: I am Kuribayashi of the Yomiuri Shimbun. I have a question about the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. Yesterday evening TEPCO reported that groundwater with high concentrations of radioactive materials had been detected in the grounds of the power plant. However, they subsequently retracted the figures, stating that they were wrong and that they would announce revised figures in due course. Can you tell us what kind of response the government is requiring to this situation?

CHIEF CABINET SECRETARY EDANO: This was also the first time that I heard about such details since the start of the power plant accident. Nuclide analysis and measurements of the levels of radioactive materials in various water sources and investigation into how they got into the water is not something that can be clarified by mechanical means alone. I believe that a judgment on what radioactive materials are present and in what concentrations will be made based on analysis of various data.

The report I have received is that looking at the overall situation, it was thought that some of the readings obtained were not necessarily consistent in comparison with other measurements of radioactive materials. TEPCO therefore decided to recalculate the readings and reassess the situation with careful and precise studies.

However, whatever the figures may be, it is the case that certain levels of radioactive materials are present in the groundwater. We must therefore naturally continue to engage in stringent monitoring to assess the impact on seawater and the surrounding area.

REPORTER: I am Sato of the Asahi Shimbun. In terms of the mid to long-term response of the administration to the power plant accident, what is the target for achieving the cold shutdown of the power plant? Also could you tell us of the current government target, in broad terms, for the length of time the residents in the vicinity of the plant will have to remain evacuated?

CHIEF CABINET SECRETARY EDANO: At the current point our target is to make every effort to deal with the situation as soon as possible. However, various situations are becoming clearer day by day and the people who have evacuated must be provided with as clear an outlook as possible. Based on how long the situation will last and the requirements for evacuation, the government will continue to provide support to the evacuated residents.

If an outlook can be gained, the government will share that information as early as possible.

However, currently it is not possible to state a specific period and regrettably it would seem that the situation is set to continue for the long term. In that sense the government must make a response to help with various matters, including the schooling of children, school facilities and employment. Instructions to ensure such a response is made have been given to officials at the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry.

We are also consulting with the various local governments on the possibilities for achieving a temporary return home for the residents, given the current outlook that the situation will continue for a considerable period of time. That is the current status.

REPORTER: When you say considerable period of time, are you talking in terms of months or years? What is your projection for a "considerable period of time"?

CHIEF CABINET SECRETARY EDANO: This is an issue for which the outcome will change depending on how the situation at the nuclear power plant is able to be contained. Needless to say, all efforts are being concentrated on containing the situation as early as possible. We have reached a point where the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency and other bodies must work to come up with a tentative outlook, however it is definitely not the case we will be able to totally lift the evacuation orders in a few days or a few weeks. It is for this reason that the government is making a response to provide support for schooling and employment and other measures. Instructions have already been issued for such support to be provided.

REPORTER: I am Hirokawa of Bloomberg. Yesterday evening in your press conference you mentioned government support measures for TEPCO, so that the company can continue to fulfill its responsibilities. In some press reports today it is suggested that the government is considering the injection of capital to TEPCO. What is the actual status of this issue and what is the government considering?

CHIEF CABINET SECRETARY EDANO: At the current point the clear direction of the government is as I mentioned yesterday. TEPCO is making every effort to bring the current situation under control, including the hard work being implemented by teams on site at the power plant. The government expects TEPCO to acquit its responsibilities fully to those people who have been evacuated and others who have been affected. Another large responsibility of TEPCO is to ensure the supply of power to all customers who live in the company's jurisdiction. The government will provide support to ensure that TEPCO fulfils these responsibilities. At the current point no definitive decisions have been made on the specific nature of this support and what it will entail.

REPORTER: When do you expect to decide on the funding for TEPCO?

CHIEF CABINET SECRETARY EDANO: This must be decided based on various objective considerations. Firstly it is imperative to bring the situation at the nuclear power plant under control. TEPCO is making tremendous efforts in this sense, including such measures as the rotating power cuts, and the nuclear-related government authorities are also making various diligent efforts. In these circumstances we must make considerations on the basis of how the situation progresses and stabilizes. Naturally the various authorities are already considering various possibilities and a political decision on the way forward will be made based on the developing situation.

REPORTER: Do the various possibilities being considered include the injection of capital?

CHIEF CABINET SECRETARY EDANO: When I have stated in these press conferences that something is a possibility, it is my experience that my words have then been reported as being the definitive version of government policy. With that experience in mind, if I were to answer your question accurately it would be to say that such an option has not yet been ruled

out.

REPORTER: I am Koketsu of Jiji Press. Changing the topic a bit, today you are not wearing a disaster relief uniform. What purpose, or rather, what message are you trying to send by doing this?

CHIEF CABINET SECRETARY EDANO: Today, even right now, a large number of people are carrying out a variety of work in the disaster-stricken regions.

Our role, or the role of the entire Government, is to support and encourage those people. At the same time, we must plan and work for the reconstruction of the region. I believe that it is time for us to move toward the next step.

I think there are two sides to the job of the Government. We must act as one with those working in the disaster-stricken region, and we must set our eyes on the next phase. Although I think it is difficult to draw a clear line as to how long we will wear the same clothes as those working on site, and when we will start looking toward the future, making a decision on this is the responsibility of the Government and politicians. There is a point where we have to draw a line between the two phases. I changed into regular work clothes with the intent of signifying that the Government is taking steps toward the role of encouraging reconstruction in addition to emergency response.

REPORTER: I am Oda of the Sankei Shimbun. Related to that, the majority of the people who attended this morning's Cabinet meeting did not wear disaster relief uniforms. Was there a consensus among the Cabinet to stop wearing the uniforms from today?

CHIEF CABINET SECRETARY EDANO: On the contrary, people such as the Minister of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism and the Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry continued to wear the uniforms. However, yesterday the Prime Minister and I expressed our intention to switch to business suits starting from today.

REPORTER: I am Wakui of TBS. In relation to that, many newspapers reported this morning that there are plans to establish what is being called the "Reconstruction Agency" and to submit bills for special measures laws related to reconstruction. Has the Government made any concrete decision about this?

CHIEF CABINET SECRETARY EDANO: I am aware that many things have been reported. As I understand it and as is befitting of such a disaster, for a while now the ruling parties, opposition parties, private enterprises and relevant government organizations have been discussing their knowledge and ideas on reconstruction as well as sorting out these ideas.

We are just about to enter a period of intense work to fix the policy of Japan based on the ideas we have received. At the current moment in time nothing has been set in stone. I am overseeing the compilation work. As long as I have not decided yet, there is no doubt that a decision has not yet been made.

REPORTER: I think the Government will submit a supplementary budget to the Diet. By when do you intend to do so?

CHIEF CABINET SECRETARY EDANO: The Minister of Finance and the Policy Research Council Chairman of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) have begun to consult with me a little on that, but nothing has yet been decided about scheduling. There is no doubt that this is of course something we need to do, as I have already shared with all of you in the past. I hope to offer more information about this as soon as I can.

REPORTER: Concerning the Prime Minister's observation trip, given the immense size of the areas affected by the disaster, what reasons were there for selecting the two places

chosen?

CHIEF CABINET SECRETARY EDANO: It is true that the disaster-stricken areas are very large. With each location having its own problems and situation - and considering the difficulty of visiting every single quake-hit place and lack of a clear standard for selecting where to visit - we considered the entire area comprehensively, and made a judgment based on a comprehensive consideration. I think this is all I can tell you.

REPORTER: I am Kageyama of the Asahi Shimbun. There are reports that it has been decided to successively offer 1 million yen grants from next month to households that lost their homes in the tsunami. Please tell us about the timeframe of this measure.

CHIEF CABINET SECRETARY EDANO: Given the wide-spread nature of the damage caused by the tsunami, compared to even the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, it is likely to take a considerably long time for those affected by the disasters to be able to reconstruct their houses and return to their former jobs or find new ones. It is unfortunate, but I think this situation could be expected given the circumstances. We must make considerations for the livelihoods of these people in the near term in addition to separate considerations for those in evacuation shelters. We are diligently proceeding forward with discussion on this. We are currently still considering what the final amount to be offered will be and in what form it will be offered.

REPORTER: I am from Fuji TV. Radioactive cesium exceeding provisional limits was found in some of the beef produced in Fukushima Prefecture. Although the beef is currently being retested, this is the first case that radiation has been detected in beef or any kind of meat, causing great concern among the public about whether meat is really safe. Could you comment on this?

CHIEF CABINET SECRETARY EDANO: I want everyone to first understand that we are very thoroughly testing beef and other products. The values reported were only found once. We are currently looking into the details of this, such as how and where the cows were raised, and carefully analyzing whether the beef poses a wide-spread threat to human health if consumed.

Looking at the values being reported right now, I do not think that eating the meat once or twice would pose any risk to human health. I have said this many times before, but there is a difference between cases in which a high dose of radiation is received for a brief moment leading to ill health, and cases in which the levels of radiation are not high but may pose a risk to health if exposure is prolonged. At the least, we are not talking about large, momentary levels this time. The values reported were very low. Still, if such radiation was absorbed into the body for a long period of time, there is the possibility that it may have an affect on one's health. We are currently carefully examining this possibility. Regarding concerns over whether the meat currently on the market is safe, I can assure you that it is absolutely fine.

CHIEF CABINET SECRETARY EDANO: Thank you for your attention.

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