

Foreign Media Briefing

Remarks by Minister Masayoshi Yoshino

to the Foreign Press Corps

(March 7, 2018. Venue: Foreign Press Center)

Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon. I am Masayoshi Yoshino, Minister for Reconstruction. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to talk to you about the current state of reconstruction from the Great East Japan Earthquake, and about future prospects.

About 10 months have passed since becoming minister. During this time, I have actively visited affected areas, and worked on measures designed to meet the needs of victims, with a focus on what is happening on the ground.

There are three messages that I want to share with you today.

First is that reconstruction is moving steadily ahead.

Second is that food in Japan is safe.

And third is that we want many foreign visitors to come to the Tohoku region and taste its specialties.

1. Events of March 11, 2011

Nearly seven years have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake.

On March 11, 2011, the Great East Japan Earthquake struck Japan, and the coastal areas of the Tohoku region, including Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima, suffered extensive damage from the tsunami. Simultaneously, the nuclear power station accident happened, causing significant damage especially in Fukushima Prefecture.

My home in Iwaki City, Fukushima Prefecture was also damaged by the tsunami.

2. Gratitude for support provided by the international community

From immediately after the disaster until now, more than 160 countries and regions, and more than 40 international organizations, have provided us various forms of assistance. We have received much support from people all over the world, including from friendly nations and from nearby countries and regions in Asia.

Take, for example, the Republic of Benin. Located in West Africa, Benin has a national economy of about one-hundredth the size of Tokyo's. In May 2011—two months after the earthquake disaster—the Director General of

Benin's National University Hospital Center visited the Embassy of Japan in Benin. Director General Abdoulaye said, "Japan is a donor nation of legendary status, and has been generous in the economic and technical cooperation it has afforded Benin. The development of our country is thanks to Japan. So, wanting to do something for Japan in this instance is a natural feeling felt by all Beninese. After discussing with the hospital staff, we made an appeal for donations. I hope this money can be put to use for the victims of the earthquake and tsunami." With these remarks, Professor Abdoulaye then handed over the contributions raised. There have been many other similar episodes.

It is thanks to the various forms of assistance provided by the international community that Japanese in the affected areas—myself included—were able to push ahead for reconstruction with such energy. Again, I would like to express my sincere gratitude.

3. Current state of reconstruction

Reconstruction is moving steadily ahead. Infrastructure in the disaster-affected areas, such as schools, hospitals, and roads, has mostly been restored and the number of evacuees, which was 470,000 at its peak, is currently in the order of 70,000.

Steady progress is also being made in the rebuilding of housing. The rebuilding of towns and housing is expected to be about 90% complete by this spring. Our aim is to complete the reconstruction of the tsunami-affected areas in Miyagi and Iwate within 10 years after the earthquake, that is, by March 2021.

The revitalization of industry and livelihoods is also moving ahead step-by-step. The value of shipments of manufactured goods in the three affected prefectures has almost recovered. More than 80% of farmland is available for planting again, and more than 90% of marine product processing facilities have restarted their operations.

4. Challenges

State of reconstruction, however, varies from industry to industry. There are challenges in the marine product processing industry, food processing industry, wholesale, retail and services industry, and the tourism industry. Underlying these challenges are negative reputation for agricultural, forestry and fishery products from Fukushima Prefecture, difficulties in restoring sales channels once lost by the earthquake, and a shortage of workers.

Therefore, we will especially support and facilitate the

elimination of negative rumors, the opening up of new sales channels, the promotion of tourism, as well as the private sector securing human resources, locating to new sites and expanding their facilities.

As reconstruction proceeds, another key issue is to provide support for mental and physical care and for community-building, to those who have been unwillingly living the life of an evacuee for a long period of time, and to those who relocate into public housing for disaster victims. The Government will tackle these issues together with municipalities and other stakeholders.

5. Reconstruction from the nuclear accident

Next, I would like to talk about the state of reconstruction from the nuclear accident.

Immediately after the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station, the dispersal of radioactive substances led to evacuation orders being issued in 11 municipalities surrounding the power plant. Currently, decontamination, radioactivity attenuation and natural factors have resulted in the air dose rates within an 80-kilometer radius of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power

Station decreasing by about 74% compared to November 2011—eight months after the accident.

Fukushima Prefecture is 13,780 square kilometers in size, slightly larger than Qatar. Of this, areas under evacuation orders is 370 square kilometers, about the size of six Manhattan islands in the US.

This slide shows the comparison of air dose rates in various places in the world. We can see that the rates in major cities in Fukushima Prefecture do not differ much from many cities around the world.

The rate in Iwaki City, my home town, which is within the 50-kilometer radius from the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, is 0.06 microsieverts per hour, which is almost the same as the rate in New York.

6. Areas where evacuation orders were lifted, and areas where returning is difficult

In spring last year, evacuation orders were lifted in most districts, except those areas where returning is difficult. The lifting of orders is a new start for full-scale reconstruction. In the areas where evacuation orders were lifted, number of residents is steadily increasing.

With an aim of developing communities where residents feel glad to have returned or want to return, we will continue providing careful support for the improvement of people's living environments—such as medical and nursing care, shopping and education—as well as for the revitalization of industry and livelihoods.

As for the areas where returning is difficult, access has been restricted and the habitation within the areas will, in principle, be restricted in the future. It takes long time for these areas to completely recover. However, just like any other regions in the world, these areas have the culture that has been developed over many years. Such cultures are invaluable. No matter how long it takes, we are committed to lifting evacuation orders for all the areas at some stage in the future, and tackling reconstruction and revitalization there with determination and responsibility.

7. Damages caused by negative reputation

The biggest challenge in promoting reconstruction in areas affected by the disaster, and in particular, reconstruction in Fukushima Prefecture, is the elimination of negative reputation associated with the nuclear accident.

Safety is ensured for Japan's agricultural, forestry and fishery

products through thorough testing for radioactive substances and thorough production and distribution management based on this testing.

Moreover, Japan's standard limits for radioactive substances in food are of the strictest level in the world. Necessary measures are in place to ensure that foods are not distributed in the market if the testing confirms that a standard limit has been exceeded.

The standard limit in Japan is that general foods that exceed the limit of 100 Becquerels per kilogram are not released on the market.

In comparison, the upper limit set in the United States is 1,200 Becquerels per kilogram, and in the EU, it is 1,250 Becquerels.

Speaking of radioactive substances contained in the food produced in Japan, the figures for vegetables, tea, and livestock products have not exceeded the standard limits for the five years since fiscal year 2013.

No bags of rice produced in Fukushima Prefecture have exceeded the standard limits since 2015. This slide shows how the bags of rice were inspected one-by-one.

As for marine products of Fukushima Prefecture, test operations and their surveys are conducted by the Prefecture. According to the results of these surveys, the proportion of marine products of Fukushima Prefecture exceeding standard limits has also been zero % since April 2015.

Japan's monitoring of food has also been evaluated as appropriate by the IAEA and FAO.

Though the demand for food products from Fukushima fell immediately after the Earthquake, the demand is recovering among Japanese consumers.

The use of local products in school meals in Fukushima Prefecture has now recovered to nearly the same level as before the Earthquake.

The Prime Minister of Japan, too, regularly eats Fukushima rice at his residence.

Fukushima Prefecture is an area that produces safe and tasty foods, as exemplified by its rice, *sake*, fruit, and marine products.

Its peaches are especially well known. The *Akatsuki* variety of peach accounts for about half the volume of peaches

grown in Fukushima Prefecture, and has been selected as an offering presented to the Imperial Family for 24 consecutive years since 1994.

Last year, peaches grown in Fukushima Prefecture again boasted the top share of Japanese peaches exported to Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia for the second year in a row.

Peach juices produced in Fukushima Prefecture have been handed out to everyone here today.

In producing these delicious foods, the people from the areas affected by the disaster take all possible care for food safety. Hoping that overseas consumers would also experience our delicious foods, I would be grateful if you would tell the people of your country about these initiatives for food safety that I have presented here today.

8. Fukushima's future (Fukushima Innovation Coast Framework)

The Government is working on the Fukushima Innovation Coast Framework as a national project for the reconstruction and revitalization of Fukushima. The aim of the framework is to create new industries along the coast of Fukushima Prefecture that was damaged by the nuclear accident. I believe this is a decisive project in Fukushima's

reconstruction.

For example, at the Collaborative Laboratories for Advanced Decommissioning Science (CLADS) and the Naraha Remote Technology Development Center, which have already started operations, the wisdom of experts from Japan and overseas is assembled in research and development on decommissioning of nuclear reactors.

Another example is the Fukushima Robot Test Field—part of which will open this summer. This is a research and development base without parallel elsewhere in the world, where verification testing and performance evaluation can be carried out in one site for robots and drones used in various fields.

A demonstration program has also commenced to produce hydrogen from renewable energy, using one of the world's largest hydrogen production facilities. Work on plant construction is scheduled to begin in this summer.

Through these initiatives, our efforts will lead to the accumulation of new industries.

9. Invitation to visit Tohoku

Lastly, I would like to tell you about the appeal of the Tohoku region as a tourist destination.

In the Tohoku region, you can enjoy leisure activities in attractive natural settings. There are also a number of heritage sites.

If you have an opportunity to visit the Tohoku region, please enjoy the gourmet food made from fresh seafood and delectable farm produce.

The Tohoku region is also famous for Japanese *sake*. Fukushima Prefecture took first place and Miyagi Prefecture ranked second in the number of gold medals awarded for new *sake* at last year's exhibitions. Fukushima Prefecture has also held on to the top position for five consecutive years at this competition.

On a different note, Kamaishi City in Iwate Prefecture will host one of the venues for the 2019 Rugby World Cup.

And the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games will be promoted as the "Reconstruction Olympics," with baseball and softball events being held in Fukushima Prefecture, and soccer events in Miyagi Prefecture.

We will utilize these international sporting events, to broadcast sights of our reconstruction to the world, and to express our thanks to the international community that helped us.

I also hope that tourists and journalists will also take these

opportunities to visit the Tohoku region and experience its appeal first-hand. (EOF)