

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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Japan's Nuclear Danger Zone Widens; More Experts Work the Crisis

By Charlene Porter
Staff Writer

Washington — The Japanese government is telling citizens within 30 kilometers of a damaged nuclear power plant to stay indoors to protect themselves. The March 15 advisory said people near the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Plant should attempt to prevent exposure to the colorless, odorless radiation that escaped from reactors.

The warning followed a March 12 government-ordered evacuation for people within 20 kilometers of the plant.

At the same time, the government has reported to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that radiation levels around the damaged plant are falling. Measured at a point between two of the damaged reactors early on March 15, ambient radiation delivered a dose of 400 millisieverts (mSv) per hour. IAEA characterizes this as a "high dose-level," compared to the 3 mSv annual dose that a person receives from natural sources in the environment, such as radon gas. A chest X-ray exposes a person to 0.1 mSv of radiation.

Results of tests taken hours later showed declining radioactivity levels.

As safety precautions are heightened around the reactor and monitoring continues, U.S. and international officials are boosting their commitment to help. The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) has sent eight more experts to Tokyo to lend their expertise to the containment of the power plant. Two NRC reactor experts were deployed initially after the March 11 earthquake.

In a continuous stream of updates on the crisis, the IAEA has pledged its direct support and coordination of international assistance. The Geneva-based agency takes on that role in keeping with an international convention on nuclear accidents.

Earlier March 15, Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO), the plant operators, fought a fire that occurred in the spent-fuel storage pond at the Unit 4 reactor. The pond reportedly spewed radiation directly into the atmosphere. In the Unit 2 reactor, an explosion occurred, the latest in a series of explosions caused by hydrogen build-ups since the earthquake and tsunami caused the failure of the critical plant-cooling system and two back-up systems. The IAEA reports that the reactor containment building may have been damaged in this most recent explosion, but the agency reports confidence that containment buildings on units 1 and 3 are still sound.

RESCUE, RECOVERY, REBUILD

Malfunction at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Plant keeps a sharp edge on this four-day old catastrophe, but the painful work begins to count the dead and the missing and to begin cleanup and rebuilding. The number of confirmed dead approached 2,000 March 15, but many people remain unaccounted for. Some estimates project that total fatalities will mount to 10,000.

The accounting of property damage is likewise incomplete, but some preliminary figures are calculated by the National Police Agency. Almost 60,000 buildings were damaged or destroyed, as well as more than 700 roads, 26 bridges and eight railways in northeastern Japan.

The Ministry of Defense reported March 14 that it will deploy some 100,000 people in search-and-rescue activities, with more than 60,000 already combing through the rubble in search of survivors.

Two search-and-rescue units from the United States are among that number. The teams, from Los Angeles County, California, and Fairfax County, Virginia, have established a base of operations for their 144 personnel and 12 trained search dogs.

A status report from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), which is leading the U.S. component of the humanitarian assistance effort, says that the government of Japan has accepted offers of assistance from 15 countries, including search-and-rescue teams from Australia, China, New Zealand, South Korea and Singapore.

Millions of households remain without power or adequate supplies of natural gas. TEPCO has suspended plans to impose rolling blackouts.

ASSISTANCE FLOWS

Meanwhile, Americans watch the catastrophe unfold with sympathy and compassion. The Council of Philanthropy, a national clearinghouse on charitable activities, reports that people in the United States so far have pledged \$24 million to groups providing assistance. The American Red Cross reported March 15 that it has given an initial \$10 million to its Japanese counterpart, which is "playing a critical humanitarian role and comforting the survivors," according to David Meltzer, senior vice president of international services at the American Red Cross.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, attending a meeting in Paris, issued a brief statement after a meeting with Japanese Foreign Minister Takeaki Matsumoto, who thanked the United States for its support and

encouragement.

Clinton responded, "Japan is always a very generous donor to any disaster anywhere in the world, and today, the world comes together to support Japan in its hour of need."

President Obama to Deepen Financial Ties in Latin America

By MacKenzie C. Babb
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama's March 19–23 visit to Latin America will focus on deepening financial ties with the region, and will play a vital role in Obama's strategy to rebalance the U.S. approach to national and international economic security.

Deputy National Security Advisor for International Economic Affairs Michael Froman told reporters at the White House March 15 that Latin America has "fundamentally sound finances, relatively low inflation, flexible exchange rates, reduced debt, strong banking regulation, deep capital markets." He said the region is playing an "increasingly important role" in the economic well-being of the United States. Froman discussed the president's trip in a joint press conference with White House spokesman Jay Carney.

Carney called the visit to Brazil, Chile and El Salvador very important, and said the president is "deeply engaged in the region."

Froman said the trip will underscore "the critical relationship that Latin America plays in our economic future and jobs here in the United States." He said the United States exports about \$160 billion to Central and South America each year, with a trade surplus that supports about 900,000 U.S. jobs.

Froman commended Brazil's economic turnaround, noting that "it's gone from a country that needed an [International Monetary Fund] loan just a matter of years ago to now having \$300 billion in reserves, and having come through the economic crisis in a very strong and stable manner." He said the country's economy is the seventh-largest in the world, growing at a 7.5 percent rate in 2010.

He also highlighted the \$80 billion U.S.-Brazil trading relationship, which supports about 250,000 jobs in the United States.

"We're on a very good trajectory in our economic relationship, but there's greater potential still to be had," Froman said.

He said the president will discuss increasing cooperation with Brazil in areas such as energy, oil and infrastructure.

"As the host of the World Cup in 2014 and the Olympics in 2016, Brazil is expected to invest over \$200 billion in additional infrastructure ... across the country, and particularly in Rio. We believe we can be a major partner of theirs in terms of providing infrastructure services and infrastructure-related exports as they go about that effort," Froman said.

In Chile, Obama will work to tap the "great economic potential that's there." Froman said the South American country is "an important partner of the United States" and a "good example of a country that's gone through meaningful economic reform and continues to grow." He also emphasized an increase in U.S. exports to Chile since the two countries signed a free-trade agreement in 2004.

Froman said Obama will also speak about strengthening the U.S. economic and trade relationship while in El Salvador, as well as key development and security issues.

He commended the region for its good leadership, and praised it for coming through the global economic crisis "quite well and quite strong."

"We welcome the strength that Latin America has shown and look forward to working with them ... to deepen the bilateral relationship and to cooperate on other issues," Froman said.

The president will be joined on the trip by first lady Michelle Obama, Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner, Commerce Secretary Gary Locke and Energy Secretary Steven Chu.

Secretary Clinton Offers More U.S. Support for Egypt's Economic Growth

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton announced new U.S. support for Egypt's economy that is designed to expand opportunities in the country and benefit all sectors of Egyptian society as the country plans its political and economic future.

Clinton arrived in Egypt March 15, becoming the first Cabinet-level U.S. official to visit the country following the peaceful protests that forced President Hosni Mubarak to relinquish power on February 11.

Speaking with Egyptian Foreign Minister Nabil Elaraby in Cairo, Clinton said she is "deeply inspired" by the actions of the Egyptian people, and said the United States is pledging \$90 million in emergency economic assistance to

the country, as well as additional measures to bolster the Egyptian economy.

“One of the best ways to create jobs is to support small and medium-sized enterprises, which represent 99 percent of the jobs in Egypt,” Clinton said, adding that the United States wants to “encourage foreign direct investment that will help these businesses grow.”

According to a March 15 State Department fact sheet, the \$90 million will be used for “near-term economic assistance” in support of projects to generate jobs and economic growth. In addition, the U.S. Export-Import Bank has approved \$80 million in insurance that will support Egypt’s economic recovery by backing letters of credit issued by Egyptian financial institutions.

The fact sheet also said the United States and Egypt are trying to work out an agreement that will expand the Qualified Investment Zone (QIZ) program. There are currently seven QIZs in Egypt hosting more than 300 facilities that export to the United States. Exports from these zones can enter the United States duty-free.

In addition, the Obama administration is working with the U.S. Congress to establish an Egypt-American enterprise fund to “stimulate private sector investment, support competitive markets, and provide business with access to low-cost capital,” the fact sheet said. If Congress approves, the United States plans to start the fund with up to \$60 million in grants and will allow the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) to partner with the fund “to offer co-financing downstream for OPIC-eligible investments.”

The fact sheet said that to support investment in Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East and North Africa, OPIC will also be providing up to \$2 billion in financial support to encourage private sector investments and build partnerships between U.S. and Arab businesses.

Following her talks with Elaraby, Clinton told Egyptians, “This moment of history belongs to you.”

“This is your achievement and you broke barriers and overcame obstacles to pursue the dream of democracy,” she said.

Although Egypt and the United States do not agree on all key issues, they “have many strategic interests in common,” and it is important to maintain lines of communication and enjoy an open relationship, she said.

Clinton also applauded the Egyptian interim government’s March 15 announcement that it is dismantling the state’s security apparatus. Clinton urged the Egyptian people to prepare for free elections that will

empower “leaders that will be able to respond to [your] aspirations.”

USE OF FORCE IN BAHRAIN WILL MAKE SITUATION WORSE

Clinton also mentioned the unrest in Bahrain, which has called on its neighbors in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to send troops to confront popular protests, led by the country’s Shiite majority against the Sunni regime.

Clinton said the “use of force and violence from any sources will only worsen the situation” and urged all sides to negotiate a political solution.

At the White House, spokesman Jay Carney said March 15 that there is “no military solution” to the unrest in Bahrain or other countries in the region and urged governments to “meet peace with peace.”

Many countries in the Middle East are experiencing unrest “precisely because their populations ... crave more participation in the political process. They want more freedom, they want more economic possibilities, and they want to be heard. And we support that,” Carney said.

The United States maintains close partnerships with some governments in the region, he said. “It is precisely out of friendship that we are encouraging governments in the region who are our partners to pursue political dialogue and to respond to the legitimate aspirations and grievances of their people because we believe therein lies ... the positive future of the countries in the region,” he said. By undertaking reforms, Carney added, “the likelihood of further unrest is diminished because the people are feeling that their government is listening to them and responding.”

“Green” Growth, Stronger Integration Top APEC Agenda

By Sadie May Davis
Staff Writer

Washington — Preliminary meetings of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum concluded March 12, setting an ambitious agenda for enhanced partnership in 2011.

APEC’s 21 member economies convened for the first Senior Officials Meeting (SOM1) at the Ronald Reagan Building in Washington February 27. The two-week gathering offered seminars covering a variety of economic concerns, and addresses from meeting chairman Michael Froman, Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton.

The APEC forum is the premier economic organization in

the Asia-Pacific region. Established in 1989 by 12 economies, including the United States, APEC fosters growth and prosperity by facilitating economic cooperation and expanding trade and investment throughout the region.

Besides the United States, APEC members include Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Peru, the Philippines, Russia, Singapore, South Korea, Chinese Taipei, Thailand and Vietnam. The United States is hosting APEC in 2011; it last hosted the economic forum in 1993.

Secretary Clinton spoke to APEC senior officials March 9 about opportunities for members to work together and succeed together. She said the United States will help lead the Asia-Pacific region to a "spirit of true partnership" and will use its year as host of the APEC summit to "push this organization to do more to deliver useful, tangible results."

Froman, the deputy national security adviser for international economic affairs, recapped APEC 2011 goals in a press conference March 14. He said that, in an effort to build a "seamless regional economy," the United States will focus on specific initiatives aimed at strengthening regional economic integration and expanding trade, promoting green growth, and increasing regulatory cooperation and convergence.

SOM1 went "a long way" toward making APEC 2011 a "successful and productive year," Froman said.

Additional APEC meetings are scheduled for Big Sky, Montana, in May and San Francisco in September. The culminating APEC Economic Leaders meeting is planned for Honolulu in November.

A 21ST CENTURY TRADE AGREEMENT

A major goal of APEC 2011 is to "focus this year on next-generation trade and investment issues such as supply chain, performance, innovation, and trade and technology, and what the 21st century trade agreements in the region might look like," Froman said.

This goal complements the objectives of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), created in 2006 by Singapore, New Zealand and Chile. The TPP aims to promote regionwide economic cooperation. Officials from the eight current TPP member economies – Australia, Brunei, Chile, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, Vietnam and the United States – aim to revise and refine the TPP to reflect modern standards, which include ensuring worker rights and protecting the environment.

Several seminars at SOM1 explored what 21st century trade standards might mean in practice, addressing nontariff trade barriers in environmental goods and services, easing exchange of technologies of vehicles with reduced greenhouse gas emissions and allowing more access and collaboration to emerging green innovations, including smart-grid technology.

To accomplish these goals, the United States is determined to push APEC to achieve even more meaningful results. "We are always looking for opportunities to reform, upgrade and revitalize international institutions. And APEC is one of those where we are looking for – from the agenda perspective, we're looking for ways of making it as concrete as possible," Froman said.

POWERFUL COOPERATION

APEC members account for 53 percent of the global gross domestic product, buy 58 percent of U.S. exported goods, and represent a market of 2.7 billion consumers. Through cooperation, APEC economies have made improvements in balancing growth and making it more inclusive, encouraging multilateral trading and ensuring that exchanged products are safer for consumers and for the planet.

In a March 2010 interview, Kurt Tong, the State Department's senior official for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, explained that APEC promotes long-term, sustainable growth throughout the entire Asia-Pacific region.

"APEC has a real capability to have the economies of the region learning from each other and studying each other's best practices to figure out how they can do a better job of adjusting to economic change in ways that workers and small or medium enterprises keep up with that change," he said.

The forum aims to maintain economic strength through partnership, working closely with the private sector and other interested parties to ensure that activities reflect the region's economic needs.

For Peace in Sri Lanka, Reconciliation Must Accompany Prosperity

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington – Sri Lanka's government needs to hold accountable those who committed injustices and abuses during the country's civil war and work to create a political climate that will facilitate healing and durable peace, a senior Obama administration official says.

Speaking in New York at the Asia Society March 14, Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Robert Blake said that after decades of conflict between the government and Tamil rebels, Sri Lanka is showing great economic and developmental promise that can benefit its whole population, but national reconciliation is critical to the country's success.

"Economic prosperity and development are necessary but not sufficient conditions for lasting peace and healing," Blake said. "The solution for lasting peace needs to include not just economic opportunity, but a political climate in which every Sri Lankan feels he or she has an equal stake in the country's future and the ability to realize his or her potential in an open and just society."

Blake said that perhaps the most critical action the government can take is to provide a full accounting of the whereabouts of individuals who are missing or in detention so that their families can know the status of their loved ones.

"The Sri Lankan government told the diplomatic community that it has compiled a database that will assist in the efforts to locate missing persons. We hope that families of those missing or detained will have access to this database," he said.

National reconciliation requires either charging or releasing people who remain in custody, Blake said. He added that he hopes the panel formed by the Sri Lankan attorney general's office will soon examine and expedite the cases of all those who are detained.

He said accountability "is an essential part of any reconciliation process." Allegations of killings, injustices and abuses that occurred during the conflict must be investigated "no matter which side committed them," and those who committed them must be brought to justice, Blake said. The primary responsibility for implementing a "credible and independent" accountability process "lies with Sri Lanka itself."

"Our strong preference is that the Sri Lankan government establishes its own transparent process that meets international standards. However, in the absence of such a mechanism, there will be mounting pressure for an international mechanism," he said.

The Obama administration welcomes President Mahinda Rajapaksa's appointment of the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) and the establishment of the Interagency Advisory Committee to implement the LLRC's interim recommendations as "an important step in the reconciliation process," Blake said.

The LLRC has heard testimony from hundreds of Sri

Lankans, and its work is expected to conclude in May. Blake said he hopes the LLRC's final report "will be made public and will include strong recommendations for national reconciliation." He encouraged the LLRC and the Sri Lankan government to consult with Sri Lankan Tamils and other minority communities to "find a way to resolve the often conflicting and tangled claims to land in former conflict zones so families may rebuild their lives."

Blake said the United States "has not wavered in our support for the people of Sri Lanka" and since 2009 has given nearly \$62 million in food aid, which has provided most of the nourishment for the estimated 250,000 people who were displaced at the end of the conflict. It has also given \$11 million to support, train and equip demining efforts in Sri Lanka, which have cleared more than 5 million square meters of mine-infested land in the northern provinces of Sri Lanka and destroyed more than 25,000 land mines and unexploded ordnance.

The United States is helping to create 20,000 full-time jobs in the north and east of the country through partnerships between the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and private companies, providing English language instruction to youth in rural areas, and giving grants to help youth organizations establish IT centers and promote science and technology, Blake said. He added that the United States "is the largest single importer of Sri Lankan goods worldwide, purchasing 22 percent of its exports," and U.S. entrepreneurs "are the largest investors in Sri Lankan bonds and other financial instruments."

The Obama administration "is ready to continue helping the Sri Lankans to restore their country, and there is still a great deal to be done," Blake said. "The end of the conflict presents an opening for everyone that is a friend and partner of the country to help realize the dream of opportunity for all Sri Lankans."

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