

I.H.T. OP-ED CONTRIBUTOR

Japan Is Open for Business

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TOKYO — After the earthquake and tsunami disaster, many foreign dignitaries, including French President Nicolas Sarkozy and U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, have expressed their solidarity with Japan. “The Japanese are indomitable and courageous,” Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard said when she visited an evacuation shelter in the afflicted region.

The Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami are the worst natural disasters Japan has encountered since the end of the Second World War. However, Japan will not simply rebuild what used to be, but aim for an innovative reconstruction that focuses on the future by fully mobilizing its signature strength: a society with high levels of technology, safety and security.

We promise all of you that Japan will reshape itself into a more dynamic country, harnessing the support and solidarity offered to us from all over the world.

Japan is and will remain open for business and travel. International organizations such as the International Civil Aviation Organization, the International Maritime Organization and the World Health Organization have been making objective assessments, and state that excessive travel restriction measures are unnecessary.

I would call on all readers to trust such information, rather than being misguided by sensational media reports, and come to Japan with peace of mind for sightseeing, study, business or any other purposes.

Regarding the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station, a roadmap was released by the Tokyo Electric Power Company (Tepco). We expect to move from the “emergency response phase” to the “planned and stabilizing action phase.”

The government will regularly follow up, monitoring the progress of the work and making necessary safety checks in order to ensure the implementation of the roadmap by Tepco in a steady and safe manner.

The government has been constantly monitoring air, water and food. Most of the radioactive materials were released in the first several days of the accident, and radiation levels in the air have been gradually declining since.

In Tokyo, for instance, the level of radiation has never reached a point at which it would affect human health. It is declining steadily, and has reached the level at which it was measured before the accident.

As for food products, measures have been taken to prevent domestic distribution of those products that have a higher radiation level than the standard set in accordance with the recommendations of the International Commission on Radiological Protection.

Naturally, such products will not be exported. Radiation levels that exceed the authorized threshold have thus far been found only in limited kinds of agricultural and fishery products in limited areas. When necessary, certification is issued to declare that a product does not originate in the affected region.

Industrial products are manufactured in factories outside of the no-entry zone, and remain under strict quality control. It is therefore unlikely that those products will be affected by radioactive materials, and their safety is ensured. Data on the radiation levels in ports and airports are published regularly. In addition, a guideline on radiation measurements for export containers and ships was published by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism. Attestation of measurement results started at the Yokohama port on April 28.

If you imagine that the whole of Japan is covered by debris, that is completely wrong. Most of Japan remains unharmed by the disaster, and the streets have leapt back to life. The major highway that runs through the most affected Tohoku region was reopened only two weeks after the earthquake. The Shinkansen, the bullet train that connects Tokyo and Tohoku region, became fully operational again on April 29.

Many affected companies and factories are recovering at surprising speed, helped by innovative approaches to tackling the crisis. Domestic and international supply chains are being reconnected. Japan's strength for manufacturing remains on full display.

Allow me to quote Dr. Donald Keene, professor emeritus at Columbia University, expressing his will to obtain Japanese nationality after the disaster: Japan was hit hard for the moment, but it "will surely resurrect to become an even more splendid country."

If you are thinking of supporting us in our path towards recovery, the most effective way would be to visit Japan and buy our excellent products, just as before. I call on all of you to be more engaged in the exchange with Japan.

Takeaki Matsumoto is Japan's minister for foreign affairs.

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