

4TH LD: 1st Asia-Pacific water summit opens to tackle water problems

Mariko Yasumoto Mariko Yasumoto

Kyodo News

3 December 2007

BEPPU, Japan, Dec. 3 -- Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda and other Asia-Pacific government leaders launched a two-day regional **water** summit in southwestern Japan on Monday in a bid to boost their political commitment to solving **water**-related challenges increasingly facing the region amid rapid population growth and global warming.

The First Asia-Pacific **Water** Summit is bringing together about 300 people, including industry leaders and environmental experts, from around 40 countries and territories in the Beppu hot-spring resort city in Oita Prefecture.

Under the main theme of "**Water** Security: Leadership and Commitment," participants will exchange opinions on **water** shortages, disasters, insufficient infrastructure and governance, and other **water**-related issues.

A total of 10 panel sessions are being held, with **water** sanitation and disaster measures scheduled to be discussed in Tuesday's sessions.

In a welcoming speech at the opening ceremony, Fukuda said, "I hope active discussions at the Asia-Pacific summit will provide enormous power and wisdom for the G-8 meeting," where he said climate change will top the agenda. The Group of Eight summit will be held in the Lake Toya hot-spring area of Hokkaido next July.

Following the ceremony, Fukuda told reporters, "I believe that Japan should play a leadership role in this field," noting that the Japanese government has been making substantial diplomatic efforts to resolve the global **water** problem.

The regional summit is also expected to serve as a precursor to other upcoming international events such as the Fifth World **Water** Summit in Istanbul in 2009.

The Asia-Pacific **Water** Forum, the organizing body of the **water** summit, was proposed in March last year at the Fourth World **Water** Forum in Mexico as a regional counterpart and began operating six months later.

The forum, an independent and nonprofit network where such organizations as the **Asian Development Bank**, UNESCO and the World Conservation Organization have been exchanging their achievements mainly on the Internet, is planning to hold the summit every two to three years.

In an address to participants at the ceremony, Crown Prince Naruhito said **water** has an "influence on various other problems such as women's empowerment and the achievement of universal primary education and therefore is a vital issue that affects the very survival of every nation."

Former Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori, chairman of the summit's steering committee, said in his speech, "Management of **water** is a huge factor determining the direction of a nation," and stressed the importance of international cooperation to tackle the issue.

In speeches in the afternoon, government leaders also called on participants to strengthen their cooperation and commitment over **water** management after explaining the situations facing their countries and measures currently being taken by the governments.

Palau President Tommy Remengesau said, "Tsunamis, floods, landslides, waterborne diseases and epidemics are on the rise, not diminishing (in the Asia-Pacific region). With climate uncertainties of global proportions, we all must be ready to float in the same very large boat." The Pacific island of Palau is experiencing a deterioration of its marine environment partly due to global warming.

Among the key presenters in the panel sessions is Ken Noguchi, a Japanese alpinist who has actively worked for the preservation of mountain environments and has climbed in the Himalayas many times.

On Monday, he addressed the melting of glaciers in the Himalayas, which is feared to be accelerating amid global warming, and the impact of the melting on local ecosystems and residents.

"I have participated in (environmental) symposiums many times, but I always feel a huge gap in the sense of crisis between researchers and people in the Himalayas, who are in the grip of fears over possible flooding from glacial lakes," he said, adding that he hopes his presentation will help to raise awareness of the issue.

In a session slated for Tuesday, Kiribati President Anote Tong and other delegates from Pacific islands, the survival of which is being threatened by climate change and the resultant rise in sea levels, will discuss strategies to combat the crisis.

The second day will also feature a session focusing on **water** sanitation problems in Asia, where many people still die of diarrhea stemming from unclean **water**.

International statistics show that 700 million people do not have access to safe drinking **water** and 1.9 billion people do not have hygienic toilet facilities in the Asia-Pacific region.

The Asia-Pacific region accounted for more than 80 percent of the annual average world death toll from **water**-related disasters in the five years from 2001.