



Asia-Pacific water summit to be held next week to prevent crisis

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TOKYO, Nov. 30 -- Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda and other Asia-Pacific government leaders will gather for a summit in Japan early next week to exchange opinions on possible measures against **water** shortages, lack of **water** infrastructure, disasters and other related challenges facing the region.

Nearly 300 people, including environmental experts, from 49 Asia-Pacific countries and regions are scheduled to attend the first Asia-Pacific **Water** Summit to be held in the Beppu hot-spring resort in Oita Prefecture in southern Japan.

The Asia-Pacific **Water** Forum, the organizing body of the summit, was proposed at the Fourth World **Water** Forum in Mexico in March 2006 and launched six months later. It is planning to hold the summit every two to three years.

The forum, citing reports from international health organizations, said 700 million people are without access to safe drinking **water** and 1.9 billion people do not have hygienic toilet facilities in the region. The figures account for 61 percent and 74 percent, respectively, of the corresponding worldwide figures.

More than 80 percent of the annual average world death tolls from **water**-related disasters in the five years from 2001 were concentrated in the Asia-Pacific region, according to the forum.

High on the agenda at the summit will be management of **water** and sewage infrastructure, measures against **water** disasters, and **water** for ecosystems. A total of 10 sessions will be held under the main topics.

At its opening ceremony Monday, former Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori, who serves as chairman of the forum, is set to deliver an opening speech, followed by an address by Crown Prince Naruhito, who assumed the honorary presidency of the U.N. Secretary General Advisory Board on **Water** and Sanitation on Nov. 1.

Fukuda is scheduled to give a welcoming speech during the ceremony, while a keynote speech will be made by Prince Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands, chairman of the **water** advisory board.

A video message from U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki Moon will also be presented.

Among key presenters, Ken Noguchi, a Japanese alpinist who has actively worked for the preservation of mountain environments, will address in a session Monday the melting of glaciers in the Himalayas, which is feared to be accelerating amid global warming. He will also address the impact of the melting on local ecosystems and residents.

In a session slated for Tuesday, Kiribati President Anote Tong and other members from Pacific islands whose survival is being threatened by climate change and the resultant sea level rise will hold discussions on strategies against the pressing crisis.

Also on the second day will be another session focusing on **water** sanitation problems in Asia, where many people still die of diarrhea stemming from unhygienic **water**. During the session, Prince Willem-Alexander will make a speech on the issue.

Prior to the meeting, the Manila-based **Asian Development Bank**, a member of the steering committee of the summit, in its report released Thursday, urged leaders of developing Asian nations to review their **water** management policies.

In the Asian **Water** Development Outlook 2007, researcher Asit Biswas said that a possible **water** crisis should be blamed on "inappropriate **water** governance, including management practices, institutional arrangements and sociopolitical conditions," not "physical scarcity."

ADB President Haruhiko Kuroda will make a presentation based on the report Tuesday.

Taikan Oki, a University of Tokyo professor of **water** resources engineering who is also set to take part in the summit, said in a lecture held in Tokyo on Wednesday, "Ensuring **water** resources will eventually lead to economic growth in the region, creating ripple effects throughout all industrial areas."

The forum is hoping that the outcome will lay the groundwork for the summit of the Group of Eight major nations to be held in the Lake Toya hot spring area in Hokkaido in July next year, where climate change is expected to top the agenda, and the Fifth World **Water** Summit in Istanbul in 2009.