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U.S. to Aid Japanese, Push Deal on Korea

By CHESTER DAWSON And EVAN RAMSTAD

TOKYO—U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton met with senior Japanese leaders Sunday to express sympathy with Japan's people and support for its economy after last month's earthquake and tsunami. Earlier, she reiterated the Obama administration's support for a free-trade deal with South Korea in meetings with officials in Seoul.



Reuters

Japanese Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko greet U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton prior to tea at the Imperial Palace Residence.

On the second stop of a weekend trip to Asia, Mrs. Clinton announced in Tokyo a public-private partnership to help Japan's economic prospects, and sounded a note of optimism about the Japanese business community's ability to rebound in the wake of the magnitude-9 quake on March 11. The disaster has seriously disrupted supply chains and electricity supplies in Japan, and threatens to knock the wind out of a budding economic recovery.

"We are very confident that Japan will recover and that it will be a very strong economic and global player for years and decades to come," Mrs. Clinton told Japanese Prime Minister Naoto Kan after arriving from Seoul earlier in the day.

For his part, the Japanese leader voiced a "sincere appreciation" for U.S. military efforts to provide aid to disaster evacuees and also for advice from U.S. nuclear experts sent to Japan.

Five weeks after the quake, Tokyo has struggled to contain radiation being emitted from a nuclear-power plant damaged by tsunami waves. Separately on Sunday, the plant's operator, [Tokyo Electric Power Co.](#) said it expects to stabilize the reactors at its Fukushima Daiichi facility within six to nine months.



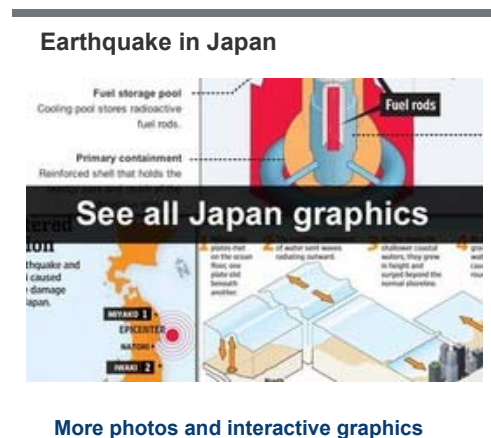
While visiting Tokyo, Hillary Clinton urges Japan to remain active on the world stage as it recovers from the triple disaster. Video courtesy Reuters.

Mr. Kan also said he was encouraged by Washington's decision Friday to end travel advisories that had cautioned Americans to avoid Japan in the wake of the nuclear crisis. The U.S. kept a ban

on travel within 50 miles of the plant, but lifted a general advisory about travel to Japan. It also ended a voluntary evacuation for families of U.S. Embassy employees in Tokyo. The State Department said in its latest advisory that radiation measurements "outside a 50-mile radius of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear-power plant are low and do not pose significant risks to U.S. citizens."

Japan has seen a rapid decline in the number of foreigners visiting since mid-March, something that comes a major blow to its tourism industry and threatens to harm its broader business climate. Japanese government and

business leaders have criticized fears of radioactive contamination as an overreaction. Tokyo lies about 125 miles south of the crippled power plant.



[More photos and interactive graphics](#)

Earlier Sunday, Mrs. Clinton met with Japan's Foreign Minister Takeaki Matsumoto and pledged to support private-sector and government initiatives to bolster the Japanese economy. Neither provided details about what that partnership would entail. However, the two top diplomats were joined at the meeting by representatives of big business, U.S. Chamber of Commerce head Tom Donohue and Hiromasa Yonekura, chair of the Nippon Keidanren business lobby.

Mr. Donohue said it was in the best interest of the U.S. and other countries to ensure the Japanese economy rebounds swiftly. "Japan is open for business and American companies have every reason to stay fully engaged in this economy," Mr. Donohue said.

In her prepared remarks, Mrs. Clinton stressed the strength of the U.S.-Japan military alliance, calling it a "cornerstone" of security in East Asia.

Japanese Foreign Minister Matsumoto thanked Mrs. Clinton for the U.S. military's disaster-relief and recovery efforts. "We would like to express gratitude for working with us around the clock since the earthquake," he said.

Mr. Matsumoto added Japan would strive to provide full and transparent disclosure at home and abroad about the continuing crisis at the Fukushima nuclear plant.

On an overnight trip to Seoul, Mrs. Clinton met with South Korean President Lee Myung-bak and Foreign Minister Kim Sung-hwan, emphasizing economic connections rather than security ties. That appeared to signal that the two countries are for the moment content with their relative strategies vis-à-vis North Korea.

Mrs. Clinton told her Korean hosts that the Obama administration is committed to pressing Congress to ratify the U.S.-South Korea free-trade pact this year. "It is important that we're meeting in the home stretch of the Korean free-trade agreement," she said.

Mrs. Clinton also spoke to Messrs. Lee and Kim about coordinating North Korea policy. U.S. and South Korea have been under some pressure from humanitarian groups to restart food aid to the North, where shortages are expected to be greater than usual in May and June.

Her push is part of a bigger campaign by the administration on the deal, which is under pressure partly because South Korea is close to ratification of a similar free-trade pact with the European Union. Later this month, U.S. Commerce Secretary Gary Locke will lead a bipartisan congressional delegation on a trip to South Korea to promote the deal, which is expected to boost the \$80 billion two-way trade relationship by 10% to 20% over a five-year period.

But leaders in neither country are under political pressure to change course on North Korea strategy, due to the North's belligerence as well as the greater importance of other events in the world, such as the unrest in the Middle East and disaster recovery in Japan.

North Korea twice last year attacked South Korea's military, both times scuttling quiet diplomacy that had been taking place between Seoul and Pyongyang. South Korean diplomats were hoping to reduce the North's anger at being cut off from unfettered economic aid in 2008, and to prod its authoritarian regime into substantive talks about development and disarmament.

North Korea in 2009 walked away from the so-called six-party talks between it and five other countries—China, Japan, Russia, South Korea and the U.S.—that were aimed at persuading it to end its pursuit of nuclear weapons in exchange for economic incentives and security guarantees.

In recent months, prodded by its ally China, North Korea has signaled a willingness to return to the talks. But South Korea, the U.S. and Japan have insisted that Pyongyang first deal with Seoul directly over its military attacks, which killed 50 South Koreans last year.

In addition, North Korea's revelation in November that it had significantly advanced a second method of building nuclear weapons, using enriched uranium, complicated the prospects for the six-party talks because it will be more difficult for the five countries to create a verifiable way to control that effort.

Another wrinkle emerged last week when the U.S. and North Korea revealed Pyongyang had been detaining for an unspecified crime an American citizen who visited the country in November. Pyongyang over the past two years has made a public show of the arrests of four other Americans who entered the country illegally, forcing the U.S. to twice send former presidents in exchange for the citizens' release.

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