

Saturday, March 19, 2011

Other nations continue moving their people out

By **MASAMI ITO**
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Embassies continued Friday to evacuate citizens and shut down or relocate diplomatic offices in Tokyo amid grave international concern over the nuclear crisis in Fukushima Prefecture and the lack of timely, credible information on what is happening.

The Japanese government has told residents within 20 km of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 power station to evacuate, but the United States and the United Kingdom are telling nationals within 80 km of the plant to leave "as a precaution" or to take shelter indoors if safe relocation is not possible.



Temporary morgue: Coffins containing victims of the March 11 killer tsunami fill a gymnasium in Rifu, Miyagi Prefecture, on Friday. KYODO PHOTO

According to the French Embassy, 280 citizens have been flown back to France and 10,000 iodine tablets are ready to be distributed to French residents in Japan to protect their thyroid glands. French ex-pats have also been advised to either return to France or go farther south in Japan.

The United States began evacuating Americans and their family members to "safe havens" in East Asia on Thursday and "strongly urges U.S. citizens to

defer travel to Japan at this time." It also said "those in Japan should consider departing" and a flight to Saipan for U.S. citizens was to leave Narita airport on Friday night. In Sendai meanwhile, a bus for U.S. evacuees was set to leave for Tokyo Friday morning. No data were available on the number of American evacuees as of Friday.

The British Embassy has increased staff to deal with the crisis, and some have been sent to Sendai to locate citizens in the disaster area. On Thursday, a bus returned from the quake-hit Tohoku region with 24 British nationals and two more were expected to return to Tokyo by Friday evening. The U.K. also chartered a flight from Tokyo to Hong Kong on Friday night for those wishing to leave Japan.

Meanwhile, the embassies of Germany, Panama, Austria and Nepal have relocated all or some of their functions from Tokyo to the Kansai region amid fear that radiation from the Fukushima plant about 230 km north may reach Tokyo.

As of Friday afternoon, the U.S., U.K. and European Union embassies hadn't budged.

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One person recommended this.

According to a representative at the U.K. Embassy in Tokyo, the decision to stay put was based on an analysis made by U.K. Chief Scientific Adviser John Beddington, who said the U.K.'s 80-km exclusion zone was sufficient "even in a worst case scenario."

"It's obviously for every country to make their own decision," said a British official. "At the moment, we don't see any reason to relocate the embassy to somewhere else."

According to the Foreign Ministry, it had received word as of Friday afternoon that the embassies of Croatia, Kosovo, Bahrain, Angola, Liberia, Lesotho and Mozambique had temporarily closed their offices.

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Scared or prepared?

The government [upped its casualty estimate for a killer quake-tsunami combo](#) by more than a factor of 10. What's your take?

- Forewarned is forearmed. This information will save lives.**
- All this does is scare people. It's not helpful.**
- It's inspired me to think more seriously about possible evacuation routes.**
- Numbers like these aren't much more than a guess.**

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