

Queen Margrethe II's birthday

Japan's way forward to recovery, renewal

Franz-Michael Skjold Mellbin
AMBASSADOR OF DENMARK

The triple tragedy of earthquake, tsunami and the threat of nuclear disaster brought out some of the best in the Japanese people. At the same time the overwhelming international sympathy and support underlined that the world values Japan as a friend and an important partner. But the tragedy also proved that Japan not only needs to recover and rebuild, but also to reconsider and renew in order to move forward. Thus, Japan should use the current challenges as an opportunity to embrace the need for change, turn the Japanese economy around and emerge stronger than before.



Since the first days after the disaster the Embassy of Denmark has been focused on helping Japan recover and rebuild. While the extremely serious nuclear accident at the Fukushima nuclear power plant also demands our attention and vigilance, it is essential to remember that thousands of Japanese every day — every hour — suffer the consequences of the destruction and loss of life, many of them being displaced from their homes and lives.

Denmark actively participated in the massive search-and-rescue and recovery operations as well as provided humanitarian support to people in need. The Danish Emergency Management Agency (DEMA) also contributed with radiation experts and a Technical Assis-

tance Support Team for the European Union's emergency mission to Japan. Danish citizens and companies have also made timely, significant and generous contributions, including free transport of international relief goods to Japan as well as large cash donations.

A few weeks ago I visited Higashimatsushima, north of Sendai, to hand over two such private donations directly for the many displaced and orphaned children as well as toys for the children in the evacuation centers.

The destruction at Higashimatsushima is heartbreaking. The remains of what had once been people's lives were hanging down from the trees: cars, clothes and household goods. Everywhere the water had gone I saw mountains of mangled and mingled debris. And in all this the occasional recognizable pieces that makes you wonder: What happened to the owner of that book? What happened to the girl who once held this doll?

It was an emotional but also positive visit that demonstrated the importance of acting quickly and decisively to reach out to those in need.

Bringing business back

When I recently held a business dinner, each and every guest said that it was the first time "since" they had been out for a regular gathering. It is an ominous sign of what has happened. My calendar, always brimming, is suddenly littered with white spaces. Everyone seems to think that canceling events, meetings, seminars, etc., is "the right thing to do."

It is not. Life needs to go on. Japan's

businesses need to come back on track.

Helping Japan do so as quickly as possible is the international community's most important and efficient contribution to Japan's recovery and future.

Therefore, shortly after the disaster, Danish Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen repeated his earlier calls for the immediate launch of negotiations on an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) between Japan and the EU, a call that soon after was shared by several other EU leaders in a joint statement.

An EPA with the EU would increase trade, boost both Japan's and the EU's economy and help business relations recover and grow even stronger than before. It would also help Japan embark on an economic reform path that is long overdue and bring it back on a solid growth track.

Economic reform will not come easy to Japan — there is much to do and some of the change will be painful. But I take heart from the fact that "crisis" in kanji combines the symbols for "danger" and "opportunity." And so I am hopeful that Japan will see the crisis as an opportunity to reinvent itself.

Meanwhile, nothing we can do is more important than helping keep the factory wheels spinning in Tokyo, Osaka, Hiroshima and all the many, many other places that are not directly affected by the disasters. I am therefore happy that the Danish companies in Japan remained both present and active throughout the crisis and that they remain committed to the Japanese market and to

helping keep Japan and its economy running.

The energy crisis

The ongoing crisis at Fukushima No. 1 has exposed serious failures in Japan's energy policies that may be the biggest obstacle to recovery. For far too long, powerful utility companies were allowed to hijack Japan's once world-class energy policy. Under the guise of providing the "world's most reliable electrical power," these companies in fact have been jealously protecting their monopolies. This has undermined the nation's energy security. Their mistaken goals have left Japan with a fragile centralized power production linked up to a feeble transmission system that literally has left parts of Japan in the dark.

Nothing short of dramatic reform of the energy production sector is needed. First and foremost the question is what kind of future nuclear energy faces in Japan.

The earthquake and its aftermath poses the question of how much disaster-rife Japan can allow itself to rely on nuclear power. Even with only 30 percent of electricity coming from nuclear power, Japan is suffering train stoppages, industrial standstill and blackouts that may continue for months on end.

Focusing on nuclear energy allows Japan to reduce its reliance on fossil fuels. However, it now seems unlikely that Japan will build new reactors for several years to come.

It seems to me that Japan cannot rely too much on such a fragile — and expensive — power source, more so because Fukushima is not a one-time, ran-

dom accident. Previous earthquakes have put Japanese nuclear reactors out of service for years. While I do not think that Japan should abandon nuclear energy, I do find it difficult to see how anyone would be comfortable with significantly increasing the present amount of nuclear energy.

A green growth strategy

If Japan had invested the billions lost to the Fukushima nuclear disaster into geothermal power plants, Japan today would have more, safer and cleaner energy.

But this was never a consideration. And in spite of much recent talk about a green growth strategy, nothing much has changed so far. However, Japan desperately needs a stable domestic energy production to reduce its huge and increasingly expensive energy imports. Here renewable energy could provide a substantial part of Japan's needs, while also promoting industrial growth and ensuring Japan a piece of the world's largest and fastest-growing energy segment.

Cost, reliability and availability are often quoted as reasons for not turning aggressively toward renewable energy. But what is lacking most of all is political will and vision.

Denmark faces the same energy challenge that Japan does. Our domestic sources are limited while we face increased demand and rapidly rising fossil fuel prices.

To meet this challenge the government has decided that half of Denmark's energy will come from renewable sources by 2020 and that by 2050 Denmark will be fossil-fuel free.

The transition to 100 percent renewable energy will focus on wind power, biomass, solar heating, heat pumps and geothermal heating combined with highly efficient energy consumption.

Yes, there are also costs and problems associated with going renewable. But in our view they are much more manageable than the costs and problems involved with staying dependent on fossil fuels or taking the nuclear path. And even though renewable energy today is more expensive than fossil fuels, the Danish strategy is fully financed, so that neither government, consumers nor business will be hit by added costs from the transition.

The Danish Energy Strategy is the first of its kind, not just in Denmark, but in the world. Could it also be replicated in Japan? I believe it could. But the renewable mix would have to be somewhat different.

In Japan, geothermal, biomass and large wind farms all have the potential to be commercially competitive sources of energy. Unfortunately, so far, solar energy has gotten all the government attention and support.

The coming years will provide a unique opportunity for combining the transition to a fossil-independent society with new growth for the many Japanese companies that produce green solutions. The Danish experience shows that small and medium-size companies especially can benefit from this transition creating both jobs and growth at the same time.

Partners with Japan

Thousands of Japanese have suffered and continue to suffer in the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami that devastated northeastern Japan on March 11. On behalf of all Danes, I wish to extend my sincere sympathies to all affected by this tragic disaster and to their families. The people of Denmark join with people around the world in our concern for those affected and in mourning the loss of life. We admire the resilience and focus of the Japanese people in overcoming this disaster.

I am confident that the Japanese people will recover fully from these tragic events. Rest assured that Denmark and the Danish Embassy will do their best to help Japan rebuild and recover. Through our cooperation in surmounting this crisis,



Queen Margrethe II of Denmark STEEN EVALD



Green power: Wind turbines are just one of the ways Denmark makes use of renewable energy sources. EMBASSY OF DENMARK



Aftermath: A doll lies among debris in Higashimatsushima, Miyagi Prefecture, on March 30, the same day (right photo) Danish Ambassador Franz-Michel Skjold Mellbin visits the area and hands over donations to Higashimatsushima Mayor Hideo Abe. EMBASSY OF DENMARK



Japan and Denmark can build an even stronger relationship and friendship for the future.

Finally, I would like to thank The Japan Times for giving me — on the occasion of the birthday of Her Majesty Queen Mar-

grethe II of Denmark — the opportunity to tell you about Denmark and the relations between Japan and Denmark.

Visit us at the Danish Embassy home page www.ambtokyo.um.dk and on Facebook.

Happy Birthday to H.M. Queen Margrethe II

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Makuhari Techno Garden CB-5
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Chiba-shi 251-8501 Japan

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Fax: 043-296-6760
www.novozymes.com
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