

## Sweden national day

## Swedish innovation could help Japan

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STAFF WRITER

On March 11, Swedish Ambassador Stefan Noreén was in a forest in Asahikawa, Hokkaido, during his official visit to attend the annual Vasaloppet Japan event of the traditional Swedish cross-country ski race. After the earthquake occurred, he returned as soon as possible to Tokyo.

"I came back to Tokyo on the morning of March 13, as flights became available then," Noreén said in the recent interview with The Japan Times. "Since then, I have been here all the time."

## Sweden's assistance

In the aftermath of the March 11 earthquake and tsunami, the Swedish Embassy decided to maintain its operations in Tokyo as "it gave us a better possibility to support the Swedish community," Noreén said.

"For about five or six weeks we were in a kind of crisis operation," Noreén added.

The embassy set up a situation room to discuss how to handle the problems and asked the Swedish government to dispatch staff members to Tokyo to reinforce the embassy's 24-hour shift operation.

"We issued a travel advisory for people in Sweden. First, we advised people not to make any unnecessary trips to Japan, then we restricted the area to the Tohoku region," Noreén said.

In consultation with the Swedish Radiation Safety Authority, the advisory was changed in May to advise against all travel to the area within an 80-km radius of the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, the same standard as many other countries are using.



Stefan Noreén, ambassador of Sweden to Japan

As for Swedish residents in Japan, the embassy did not advise them to leave the country. While some of them temporarily left Japan, most Swedes have returned to Japan and most Swedish companies continue to operate, according to Noreén.

Sweden mainly channeled their relief assistance through the European Union.

"One of the reasons for this was that it would be easier for Japan to deal with one organization rather than 27 separate countries," Noreén said.

Swedish experts were brought in to help the EU and United Nations rescue teams.

At the request of Japanese authorities, the Swedish government supplied boots, gloves and blankets to devastated areas in Miyagi and Ibaraki prefectures. Besides these governmental relief efforts, assistance was also offered by many Swedish companies, such as

Ericsson, which provided a helicopter to help in the repair of telephone base stations affected by the tsunami.

In April, Noreén went to Sendai by train. He visited Swedes living in Sendai and traveled around to see some of the devastation.

"It made a very strong impression on me," Noreén said. "What you don't realize until you get there is the extent of the damage. Especially in Miyagi, the whole coast has been flooded."

Noreén also met Shuichi Miura, the vice governor of Miyagi Prefecture, and Emiko Okuyama, the mayor of Sendai. Noreén recalls what Okuyama answered when he asked her what her priorities were.

"No. 1 is to provide temporary housing for the people who lost their houses; No. 2 is to get children back into school; and No. 3 is to clean up the agricultural land, which has been (polluted by) seawater, oil and chemicals, the mayor said," according to Noreén.

"I think it is very important to go there," Noreén insisted. "We are planning to have more delegations coming from Sweden in the next few months to see how Sweden can further assist the Tohoku region."

Thanks to the stable Scandinavian landmass, Sweden has rarely experienced earthquakes or tsunamis, "but we are using nuclear power and are much aware of the importance of safety," Noreén said.

## Swedish nuclear policy

There was a change in Swedish nuclear policy in 2010, when Parliament decided to allow the replacement of existing nuclear



Natural: Sweden's rich forests provide bioenergy, which is the country's main resource for heating homes. EMBASSY OF SWEDEN

reactors with new ones, starting from January 2011.

"It does not mean that we necessarily will build new reactors," Noreén said.

In Sweden, there was a decision back in 1980 when a referendum about the future of nuclear power took place following the nuclear accident at Three Mile Island in the United States in 1979. There were two main options in the referendum: to dismantle nuclear power in 10 years, or in the longer term but without a fixed timetable. Around 60 percent of the population voted in favor of dismantling in a "reasonable manner," without rushing to do so, Noreén explained.

"The decision to dismantle has not been canceled, but we extended the period longer than most people predicted in 1980 for using nuclear power. Now you can invest in the 10 existing reactors to upgrade and improve in order to make production more safe and efficient," Noreén said. "Of course, we are all watching very carefully what will happen in Japan, as Japan's safety standards will be reinforced. We will all be influenced by what Japan does."

For Sweden, earthquakes and tsunami are not in the disaster scenario, but how to handle the cooling systems in an emergency is highly important.

Extending his sincere sympathy with the evacuees from Fukushima, Noreén suggested he will visit the prefecture in the near future.

Sweden continues to be dependent on nuclear energy. Forty-five percent of Sweden's electricity comes from nuclear



Assistance: Swedish Ambassador Stefan Noreén meets Sendai Mayor Emiko Okuyama (right), at Sendai City Hall in April. EMBASSY OF SWEDEN

power, while equally 45 percent is generated by hydropower.

Bioenergy is the main source for heating homes. Oil and gas have more or less been taken out of the heating system. In Sweden, the use of oil as an energy source is largely limited to the transport system. The carbon dioxide tax, which came into effect 20 years ago, has dramatically changed Sweden's energy use.

"Nuclear power still remains an important energy source for many years to come, but I think we will not get acceptance in Sweden or in Europe for the continued use of nuclear energy until we can say we have acceptable safety standards. And there, Japan's experience is extremely important," Noreén said.

## Highlights 2011

Unlike 2010, which was a kind of musical year for Sweden in

Japan with performances by major Swedish musical institutions such as the Stockholm Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Swedish Radio Choir and the Orphei Dränger male choir, this year will see more events related to daily life.

"Of course, most of these events had already been planned last year, but they have become even more relevant after the March 11 disaster occurred," Noreén said.

In the middle of June, a Swedish food and beverage event will highlight "healthy food"; at the end of September, there will be an event on health care and elderly care.

"I have seen references in the Japanese press to health care being part of rebuilding the society in Tohoku," Noreén said.

And in November, a major exhibition on clean technology will be held, organized for the

## Highlights of Swedish events in 2011

"The World of Astrid Lindgren," at the Setagaya Literary Museum through June 26, introduces the world of renowned Swedish author and screenwriter Astrid Lindgren (1907-2002), displaying about 200 illustrations such as those for the Pippi series as well as Ilon Wikland's illustrations for the six Bullerby Children series.

"Swedish Food & Beverage in Japan" will be held at the Swedish Embassy in Tokyo from June 13 to 17, highlighting Swedish goods with a special focus on functional food for a healthy life. On June 15, a seminar featuring presentations by the participating companies from Sweden will be held for invited guests only.

"Aging societies in Japan and South Korea—Effective Swedish welfare solutions" will take place in Tokyo and Seoul from Sept. 26 to 30. This event mixes an exhibition with business meetings and seminars focusing on the problems aging Japan and South Korea are facing. In Japan, it will be held from Sept. 28 to 30, at the Swedish Embassy in Tokyo.

"Clean Tech" will be held in Tokyo with the objective of promoting business opportunities, strategic cooperation and investment in renewable energy and environmental technology, from Nov. 7 to 11. On the first two days of the event (Nov. 7-8), a conference called "Nordic Green" will take place at Miraikan covering a broad spectrum of green technologies in which Nordic companies have world-leading innovations. The Nordic Green program is followed by "Green Sweden" (Nov. 9-11), in which leading Swedish "clean-tech" companies will undertake study visits at leading Japanese companies and governmental agencies. There will be exhibitions of Swedish company products, high-level seminars, individual networking, and business meetings with Japanese companies, organizations and academia.

"Alfred Nobel" at the National Museum of Nature and Science in Tokyo marks the 110th anniversary of the Nobel Prize and explores the life of the famous Swede from Nov. 1 to Jan. 22, 2012. Visitors can trace Nobel's life as an inventor as well as an entrepreneur, and learn about the background to the establishment of the Nobel Prize through his will.



An illustration for Astrid Lindgren's "The Children in Noisy Village" (1954-1961) by Ilon Wikland. LAANEMAA MUUSEUM, ILONI IMEEMAA, ESTONIA

## Seminar explores nuclear issues

A seminar titled "Swedish nuclear power policy — the situation after Fukushima No. 1" was held by The Japan Institute of Scandinavian Studies (JISS) on May 26 at the Swedish Embassy's auditorium in Tokyo.

The seminar provided the capacity crowd of 100 participants, including JISS members, with aspects of nuclear policy to discuss the future of nuclear power, which is drawing a higher degree of attention worldwide.

Swedish Ambassador Stefan Noreén gave an outline on Swedish energy policy, which was followed by a detailed lecture by Dr. Anders Karlsson, who serves as science and technology counselor at the embassy.

According to Karlsson, the Swedish Radiation Safety Authority received a special assignment on May 12 to assess the consequences of the Fukushima nuclear accident for Sweden.

"It is a new situation after March 11. There really has to be emergency preparedness for multiple scenarios — plural reactors going wrong at the same time. Also we have to rethink about the long-term operation of plants. It is to be noted that Fukushima No. 1's license to operate was extended just before the earthquake," Karlsson said.

Karlsson added, "Communication with the public is extremely important."

After these presentations, there was a screening of the documentary film "Into Eternity," which



Hidden danger: Michael Madsen's documentary film "Into Eternity" questions the safety of nuclear waste storage.

was produced by Denmark, Finland, Italy and Sweden. Directed by Danish filmmaker Michael Madsen, the documentary focuses on Onkalo, the underground "eternal repository" for spent nuclear fuel rods, which is under construction in Finland, and questions the safety of nuclear waste storage for our descendants, even 100,000 years later.

At the end of the seminar, Toshio Yamazaki, president of Studsvik Japan, insisted on the importance of the human mind over economy and technology, and suggested that people take this opportunity to question anew our views and energy-consuming ways of living.

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our two nations for years to come.



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