

A-BOMB SURVIVORS WANT OBAMA TO MEET, APOLOGIZE IN HIROSHIMA

TOKYO: A group representing Japanese survivors of US atomic bombings urged President Barack Obama to hear their stories and apologize when he visits Hiroshima next week.

Two leaders of the Tokyo-based nationwide group told a news conference yesterday that many survivors still want an apology, though they have long avoided an outright demand for one out of fear that it would be counterproductive.

Toshiki Fujimori, a survivor of the Hiroshima atomic bombing, said he found it awkward to hear local and central government officials say they are not asking for an apology. "I suspect there was a pressure (not to seek an apology) to create an atmosphere that would make it easier for Obama to visit Hiroshima," Fujimori said, declining to identify where the pressure was coming from. "But many of the survivors don't think they can do without an apology at all."

He said the survivors want Obama to know that their suffering is not limited to immediate damage and visible, physical scars. They also suffered discrimination at work, in marriage and in other areas of their lives, from their own people in Japan, said Fujimori, who nearly died in the blast at age 1.

The US atomic bombing of Hiroshima on Aug. 6, 1945, killed 140,000 people and nearly destroyed the city. A second atomic attack three days later on Nagasaki in southern Japan killed 73,000 more people.

About 180,000 people recognized by the government as survivors are still alive. Many have remained unmarried and without children because of concerns about birth defects, or have suffered from cancer and other radiation-induced illnesses.

Obama is to visit Hiroshima on May 27 after the Group of Seven summit in central Japan, becoming the first serving American president to do so. In announcing Obama's visit, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said he will escort him and suggested that no apology is necessary.

A Cabinet-approved statement signed by Abe last August states that the US atomic bombings "caused an extremely regrettable humanitarian situation because of its widespread damage," but does not call them war crimes. It says it is more important to make an effort toward achieving a nuclear-free world "rather than seeking an apology and remorse from the United States at this point, 70 years after the war."

Washington said Obama won't apologize and a meeting with survivors is unlikely. Japan's government has also told US officials that it is not expecting an apology, according to Japanese and American officials.

That apparently prompted the survivors to try to let Obama know their feelings and hope that he will be committed to a nuclear-free world, which they say can be achieved only by learning and coming to terms with the past.



TOKYO: Terumi Tanaka, a survivor of the Nagasaki atomic bombing who serves secretary-general of Japan Confederation of A and H Bomb Sufferers Organizations, speaks during a press conference yesterday. — AP

Terumi Tanaka, a survivor of the Nagasaki atomic bombing who serves as secretary-general of the Japan Confederation of A and H Bomb Sufferers Organizations, said he wishes that Obama will apologize at least to the survivors. — AP



CHILGOK, SOUTH KOREA: Firefighters extinguish a fire at Camp Carroll yesterday. — AP

OXYGEN TANKS EXPLODE AT US MILITARY BASE IN SOUTH KOREA

SEOUL: More than 20 oxygen tanks exploded at a US military base in South Korea on Thursday, triggering a fire, but there were no reports of casualties, South Korean officials said.

The US military said it was investigating the cause of the incident at Camp Carroll, 280 kilometers (175 miles) south-east of Seoul. It said one building at the US base was damaged, but no other structures on or off the base were harmed. South Korean media photos showed a nearly burned-out building that had housed the tanks.

South Korean fire officials, however,

said shrapnel scattered by the blasts fell on a nearby farming village and triggered separate fires there. Those fires were quickly contained and there were no reports of injuries, they said.

About 20 medical oxygen tanks, each weighing 50 kilograms, exploded, said officials at South Korea's Ministry of Public Safety and Security who requested anonymity, citing department rules. They said an unknown number of a smaller oxygen tanks also blew up.

The US military statement said there was "an oxygen tank explosion," without specifying how many tanks were

involved. The South Korean safety officials said they obtained their information from local fire officials who helped extinguish the blaze triggered by the blasts.

Fire officials said they sent 18 firetrucks to the scene and extinguished the fire in less than an hour. A South Korean resident told the YTN television network that the windows of his house, about 200-300 meters (660-980 feet) from the US base, were shaken by a series of loud explosions. The United States stations about 28,500 troops in South Korea as deterrence against potential aggression by North Korea. — AP

TAIWAN'S LEADER FACES THORNIER TIES WITH CHINA, GROWTH WOES

BEIJING: When Taiwan inaugurates Tsai Ing-wen as the self-ruled island's first female president today, she'll confront major challenges including navigating increasingly fractious relations with Beijing and rejuvenating the flagging economy.

Beijing has responded to the January election of Tsai and her pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party by intensifying pressure on Taiwan with military exercises, diplomatic moves and cross-border deportations and prosecutions. At home, Tsai faces an economy that has fallen into a recession as exports have dropped due to sluggish demand from China and elsewhere.

"The challenges are enormous and I think that she does not underestimate them," said Bonnie Glaser, senior adviser for Asia at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C. With declining economic growth and exports, "it is a difficult time, and China is not making it any easier, of course," Glaser said.

Tsai's election served as a resounding rejection by voters of the China-friendly party that has led Taiwan for eight years. The polls, which also gave the DPP its first parliamentary majority, were also seen as an expression of concern that the island's economy is under threat from the Chinese mainland's economic juggernaut.

Beijing has warned that delicate relations between the sides would be destabilized unless Tsai explicitly endorses Beijing's stance that the island and the mainland are part of a single Chinese nation, which it calls the "92 Consensus." Tsai has avoided doing so, but has promised not to pursue changes to the current status of de facto independence.

Tsai's inauguration speech will be closely watched for remarks on relations with the mainland. Analysts say she's unlikely to deliver any surprises, neither deliberately antagonizing Beijing nor wholly satisfying its demands.

"China's got a wide range of retaliatory measures waiting for Taiwan," said Alexander Huang, a strategic studies expert at Tamkang University in Taiwan. "I believe Dr. Tsai understands that and she will not step on the tripwire and cause trouble." — AP



TAIPEI, TAIWAN: Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party, DPP, presidential candidate Tsai Ing-wen. — AP