



Senate Republicans lay low as scandal rages

## Thai judge shoots self in court after railing at justice system



OKUMA: In this file photo taken on January 31, 2018 shows (from left) unit 1 to unit 4 reactor buildings and storage tanks for contaminated water at the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant. —AFP

# At Fukushima plant - a million-ton headache

## Tank after tank of water contaminated with radioactive elements

OKUMA: In the grounds of the ravaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant sits a million-ton headache for the plant's operators and Japan's government: tank after tank of water contaminated with radioactive elements. What to do with the enormous amount of water, which grows by around 150 tons a day, is a thorny question, with controversy surrounding a long-standing proposal to discharge it into the sea, after extensive decontamination.

The water comes from several different sources: some is used for cooling at the plant, which suffered a meltdown after it was hit by a tsunami triggered by a massive earthquake in March 2011. Groundwater that seeps into the plant daily, along with rainwater, add to the problem. A thousand, towering tanks have now replaced many of the cherry trees that once dotted the plant's ground. Each can hold 1,200 tons, and most of them are already full.

"We will build more on the site until the end of 2020, and we think all the tanks will be full by around the summer of 2022," said Junichi Matsumoto, an official with the unit of plant operator TEPCO in charge of dismantling the site. TEPCO has

been struggling with the problem for years, taking various measures to limit the amount of groundwater entering the site. There is also an extensive pumping and filtration system, that each day brings up tons of newly contaminated water and filters out as many of the radioactive elements as possible.

### Highly radioactive

The hangar where the decontamination system runs is designated "Zone Y" — a danger zone requiring special protections. All those entering must wear elaborate protection: a full body suit, three layers of socks, three layers of gloves, a double cap topped by a helmet, a vest with a pocket carrying a dosimeter, a full-face respirator mask and special shoes. Most of the outfit has to be burned after use.

"The machinery filters contain radionuclides, so you have to be very protected here, just like with the buildings where the reactors are," explained TEPCO risk communicator Katsutoshi Oyama. TEPCO has been filtering newly contaminated water for years, but much of it needs to go through the process again because early versions of the filtration process did

not fully remove some dangerous radioactive elements, including strontium 90. The current process is more effective, removing or reducing around 60 radionuclides to levels accepted by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for water being discharged. But there is one that remains, which cannot be removed with the current technology: tritium.

Tritium is naturally present in the environment, and has also been discharged in its artificial form into the environment by the nuclear industry around the world. There is little evidence that it causes harm to humans except in very high concentrations and the IAEA argues that properly filtered Fukushima water could be diluted with seawater and then safely released into the ocean without causing environmental problems.

### 'Absolutely against it'

But those assurances are of little comfort to many in the region, particularly Fukushima's fishing industry which, like local farmers, has suffered from the outside perception that food from the region is unsafe. Kyoichi Kamiyama, director of the radioactiv-

ity research department at the regional government's Fisheries and Marine Science Research Centre, points out that local fishermen are still struggling eight years after the disaster. "Discharging into the ocean? I'm absolutely against it," he said.

At the national government level, the view is more sanguine. "We want to study how to minimize the damage (from a potential discharge) to the region's reputation and Fukushima products," an Industry Ministry official said. The government is sensitive to fears that people inside Japan and further afield will view any discharge as sending radioactive waste into the sea.

No decisions are likely in the near-term, with the country sensitive to the international spotlight that will fall on Japan as it hosts the Olympic Games next year. Environmentalists are also resolutely opposed to any discharge into the sea, and Greenpeace argues that TEPCO cannot be trusted to properly decontaminate the water. The solution, said Greenpeace senior nuclear specialist Shaun Burnie, "ultimately can only be long-term storage and processing." —AFP

## Prince Harry sues UK tabloids over 'phone hacking'

LONDON: Prince Harry has launched legal action against two British tabloid newspaper publishers, they confirmed Friday, over alleged phone hacking — just days after he condemned the press for critical coverage of his wife. Harry, 35, extended his campaign against the tabloids with fresh action after suing another newspaper for alleged invasion of privacy. Reports said the new claims concerned phone hacking allegations.

"We can confirm that a claim has been issued by the Duke of Sussex," News Group Newspapers, which publishes The Sun daily and the now-defunct News of the World, said in a statement. "We have no further comment to make at the current time," it added. A source at the Daily Mirror newspaper's publishers Reach told AFP they were aware that proceedings had been issued but they had not yet received them. Britain's domestic Press Association (PA) news agency said a royal source confirmed the claims were "regarding the illegal interception of voicemail messages". Sky News television carried the same confirmation.

### 'Relentless propaganda'

The move comes three days after Harry, sixth in line to the throne, launched legal

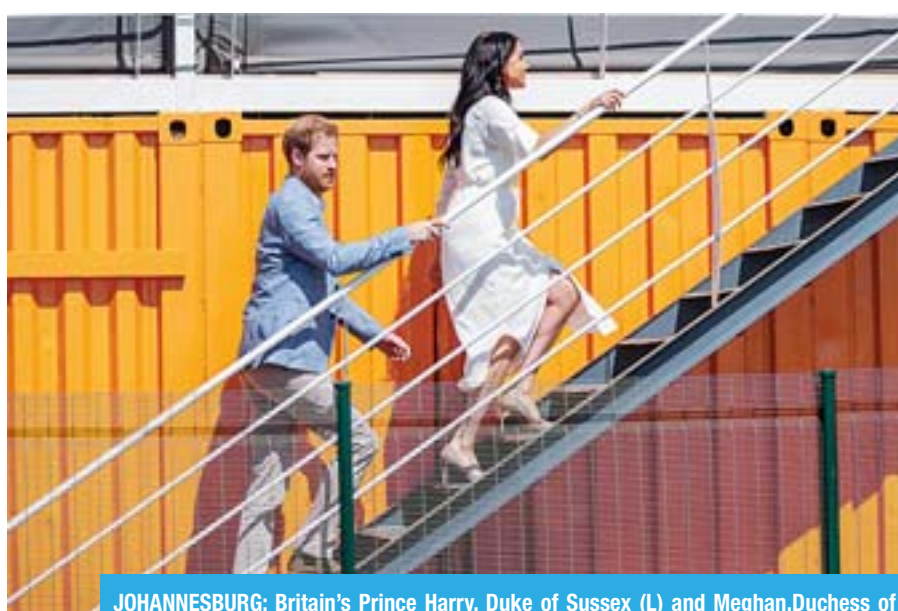
action for invasion of privacy against The Mail on Sunday after it published a letter from his wife Meghan to her father. It was accompanied by a stinging attack on the tabloid media over its coverage of Meghan — an exceptional move by a member of the royal family.

In it, Harry said the duchess was being hounded by the press in the same way as his mother, Diana, princess of Wales, was before her death in 1997. "My deepest fear is history repeating itself," he said. "My wife has become one of the latest victims of a British tabloid press that wages campaigns against individuals with no thought to the consequences — a ruthless campaign that has escalated over the past year. "There is a human cost to this relentless propaganda, specifically when it is knowingly false and malicious." It came as they wrapped up a tour of southern Africa on behalf of his grandmother Queen Elizabeth II — which was broadly well-received in the British press.

But Harry said positive coverage of the trip "exposes the double standards of this specific press pack that has vilified her almost daily". "I have been a silent witness to her private suffering for too long." Harry has previously criticized the "racial undertones of comment pieces" about Meghan, a mixed-race US actress whom he married last year.

### 'War on press unhinged'

Commentators have wondered whether Harry went solo or consulted



JOHANNESBURG: Britain's Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex (L) and Meghan, Duchess of Sussex (R) arrive at the Youth Employment Services Hub in Tembisa township. —AFP

with more senior royals such as Queen Elizabeth, and his father Prince Charles, before penning this week's outburst. Royal biographer Penny Junor claimed Harry's highly personal statement was "probably very ill-judged" and would make his relationship with the press "quite awkward" in future. While there have been some negative stories about the duchess, the author did not believe there had been a "ruthless campaign to do down Meghan".

She told PA that Harry "might

regret... poking the bear" with his "very over-emotional outburst". The Sun, in its editorial on Thursday, hit back at the prince and his "self-pitying petulance". "Harry's war on the press is unhinged. The Queen should have a word before he does the royals even more lasting damage," the paper said. "We will call out their hypocrisy when merited. And stories about Meghan's controversial family are justified. "Criticism is not 'bullying'. This precious pair simply need a thicker skin." —AFP

## Mumbai police detain 40 activists protesting tree felling for metro

MUMBAI: Indian police detained 40 protesters demanding that the Mumbai Metro Rail Corp Ltd (MMRCL) not cut some 2,700 trees to build a train parking shed for an upcoming subway line, a spokesman for the Mumbai police said yesterday. Over 400 people gathered on Friday night and tried to hug the trees, located in the Aarey Colony suburb, in an attempt to stop officials from cutting them. Police eventually removed the protesters and shut entry to prevent further inflow of people, activists said.

"They have been charged with obstructing a government servant from doing his duty and unlawful assembly. Around 200 policemen have been deployed at the location," Pranaya Ashok, a spokesman for the Mumbai police, told Reuters. The Bombay High Court had dismissed on Friday all petitions opposing the cutting of the trees, clearing the way for authorities to build a parking shed for Line 3 of a broader train network that aims to reduce traffic congestion in one of the world's most densely populated cities.

Ashwini Bhide, the Managing Director of the MMRCL, accused the protesters of trying to bypass the law. "If you lose a battle in court, better to accept it honorably than to take it to street," Bhide said in a tweet. The MMRCL has said in the past that there is no other viable location for the shed, and authorities have stressed that Line 3, slated to open in December 2021, will do more to reduce pollution in Mumbai than the cluster of trees. —Reuters