



RETURNING HOME. Toddlers play at a nursery school in Tamura, Fukushima prefecture, northeastern Japan after authorities allowed residents to return to live in their homes within a tiny part of the 12-mile evacuation zone around the Fukushima plant for the first time since Japan's nuclear disaster three years ago. The decision, which took effect April 1, applies to 357 people in 117 households from a corner of Tamura city after the government determined that radiation levels are low enough for habitation. (AP Photo/Kyodo News)

Japan lets first evacuees live in nuke no-go zone

By Yuri Kageyama
AP Business Writer

TOKYO — For the first time since Japan's nuclear disaster three years ago, authorities are allowing residents to return to live in their homes within a tiny part of the 12-mile evacuation zone around the Fukushima nuclear plant.

The decision, which took effect April 1, applies to 357 people in 117 households from a corner of Tamura city after the government determined that radiation levels are low enough for habitation.

But many of those evacuees are undecided about going back because of fears about radiation, especially its effect on children.

More than 100,000 people were displaced by the March 11, 2011 nuclear disaster, when a huge earthquake and ensuing tsunami damaged the Fukushima Dai-ichi plant, causing meltdowns in three reactors. Many of the displaced people live in temporary housing or with relatives, and some started over elsewhere.

Areas within the evacuation zone have become ghost towns, overgrown with weeds.

Temporary visits inside the zone had previously been allowed, and about 90 people were staying with special permission, according to Tamura city hall.

New stores and public schools are planned to accommodate those who move back.

"People want to go back and lead proper lives, a kind of life where they can feel their feet are on the ground," said Yutaro Aoki, a Tamura resident who works for a nonprofit organization overseeing the city's recovery.

Much of Tamura lies outside the evacuation zone. The city has a population of 38,000, including evacuees living in temporary housing.

Evacuees now receive government compensation of about 100,000 yen (\$1,000) each a month. Those who move back get a one-time, 900,000-yen (\$9,000) payment as an incentive. The monthly compensation will end

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U.S. first lady meets Chinese rural students via the web

By Didi Tang
The Associated Press

BEIJING — U.S. first lady Michelle Obama spoke to rural Chinese students via web conferencing last month on the last stop of her six-day China tour focusing on education and cultural exchange.

She was visiting Chengdu No. 7 High School in the southwestern province of Sichuan, an elite school known for its use of distance learning technology to bring quality education to impoverished remote regions in the mountainous province.

Mrs. Obama has largely avoided thorny, political issues on her China trip, although she made a statement that free expressions, choice of religion, and unfettered access to information are "universal rights" in a speech at the Stanford Center at Peking University in Beijing.

China has some of the world's tightest restrictions on internet discourse. Mrs. Obama's remarks did not call out China directly and have not drawn any governmental protest, but that part of her speech has been kept out of all official Chinese media reports.

While in Beijing, she also visited an elite high school, where more than 30 American students are studying as exchange students, and she held a private discussion with a handful of Chinese professors, students, and parents.

In addition, Mrs. Obama met with Chinese President Xi Jinping before Xi flew to The Hague for a nuclear security



FOCUS ON EDUCATION. U.S. first lady Michelle Obama, left, is greeted by Tibetan students and presented with a traditional Tibetan ceremonial long white scarf upon arrival at a Tibetan restaurant for lunch in Chengdu in southwest China's Sichuan province. Mrs. Obama, accompanied by her mother and two daughters, completed her six-day China tour last month. (AP Photo/Andy Wong, Pool)

summit and held a meeting with President Barack Obama.

Mrs. Obama ended her week-long trip with a Tibetan theme, having lunch in a Tibetan restaurant, meeting students, and tapping Tibetan prayer wheels.

Her staff said the restaurant choice in Chengdu city in southwest Sichuan province, which borders the Tibetan region, was in accordance with the American first lady's interest in the rights of minorities in China.

The rights of Tibetans is a touchy one between the Chinese and U.S. governments.

More than 100 people have self-immolated in ethnic Tibetan areas, including parts of Sichuan, since 2009 to protest Chinese restrictions on Buddhism and the

denigration of the Tibetans' spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama. President Barack Obama recently met with the Dalai Lama over the objections of Beijing, which reviles him as a separatist.

As Mrs. Obama entered the Zangxiang Teahouse in Chengdu, she tapped 11 metal prayer wheels that lined an entry bridge to the restaurant. Mrs. Obama, her mother Marian Robinson, and daughters Malia and Sasha were greeted by a group of students who presented the four with traditional Tibetan ceremonial long white scarves.

Mrs. Obama toured the former Imperial Palace, the Great Wall in Beijing, the Terra Cotta Museum in the ancient city of Xi'an, and the Chengdu Panda Base during her trip.

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