

Tokyo Brits gear up for three-day charity cycle ride to Fukushima

Morichika Nakamoto
KYODO

"Ten Brits, 10 Bikes, 300 km, 3 days ...!" — a group of British expats living in Tokyo will saddle up for a charity cycle ride this month to the disaster-stricken city of Minamisoma, Fukushima Prefecture, in the sort of fundraising drive that is common back home.

"People (in Japan) will say: 'Why are you cycling? I'll give you the money anyway,'" Robert Williams, 47, who launched Tokyo Brits earlier this year, said. "In Britain, people will give you the money only if you are going to do it. Some won't even give it to you until you've done it! It's just a different way of thinking."

The newly formed group, consisting of 10 members in their 40s and 50s who work in financial planning, recruitment and event management, came about through their shared interest in cycling.

Via its website — tokyobrits.com — the team has successfully collected ¥1 million in donations so far.

"If you take part in a cycle ride or run a marathon, you would always get sponsorship in the U.K.," said Nick Rees, a 40-year-old Tokyo Brits member. "You put yourself through pain but you know you can raise money through friends and family, and companies."

The cyclists have received backing from Wiggle Ltd., a leading British online cycling store that donated all the jerseys for the ride, as well as from global logistics company DHL International GmbH, which will provide two support vehicles to accompany the group en route to Fukushima, in addition to making a \$2,000 (roughly ¥200,000) donation.

The team's first-ever ride will serve as one of the bigger events for the Save Minamisoma Project, a fundraising campaign for the coastal city, which is located just north of the crippled Fukushima No. 1 power station and was devastated by

both the natural and nuclear disasters of March 2011. With some parts of the city lying within the 20-km evacuation zone around the No. 1 plant, nearly 17,000 of its 46,000 residents have evacuated and about 5,600 are still living in temporary housing.

The Minamisoma project was launched mainly by foreign volunteers soon after the 3/11 catastrophe to directly provide relief supplies to local residents, as few volunteers were deployed to Minamisoma amid high radiation levels, according to the organizers. Members of the project have delivered food

"There are a lot of Japanese volunteers helping in the area, giving out food. But I wonder in what other ways people outside (Tohoku) have been trying to help!"

and water to the city more than 40 times since three of the Fukushima No. 1 complex's reactors experienced core meltdowns, showering the surrounding area with radioactive fallout.

Having traveled to Minamisoma and other disaster-hit areas as a project member to deliver fresh vegetables, chiefly to the elderly, Rees said he feels they are "not forgotten but are in very difficult conditions without charitable donations like this," given that many are still without transport and find it hard to get to the nearest stores.

Setting off April 19, the Tokyo Brits team will peddle around 150 km on the first day of the tour before covering 90 km the

following day, including a tough 30-km mountainous leg so as to avoid the no-go zone. They will cycle 85 km on the final day.

To achieve their goal, the members have engaged in rigorous training sessions, such as 60-km rides along Tokyo's Tama River. "We've all been out on weekends and training pretty hard. Four of us did the first leg to Hitachi (Ibaraki Prefecture) a couple of weeks ago, actually, and it went fine," Rees said.

Some are experienced cyclists, but a few only started donning Lycra after talk of the trip came up. "We talked about using our common interest in a positive way for a good charitable cause," he said.

Given that residents in temporary accommodations in Minamisoma are still reliant on deliveries, which they have to line up for in advance, Williams said: "It's kind of shocking for us that we're still having to do this two years later. People shouldn't be denied food and water."

"We know the money is not going into a big hole," he said. "Lots of people donated money after the tsunami but there seems to be lots of political red tape. There's no messing about with this project — it goes straight to them and buys the food."

With the effort largely expat-driven so far, the group hopes to see more Japanese coming onboard. "There are a lot of Japanese volunteers helping in the area, giving out food, and it's great, but I wonder in what other ways people outside (Tohoku) have been trying to help," Rees said.

The team will use Facebook and Twitter to keep followers up to date on their progress, and there are plans for more events in the future as they look to attract female riders, as well as a more diverse mix of nationalities.

"I'd like the ride to be an annual thing but hope it won't be to give relief to the people in Tohoku, because the government should be doing that. We want them to be self-sufficient," Williams said. "At the end of the day, we're doing this for fun, but we take what we are doing for these people seriously."

BABY, DON'T CRY

The ration-ality c

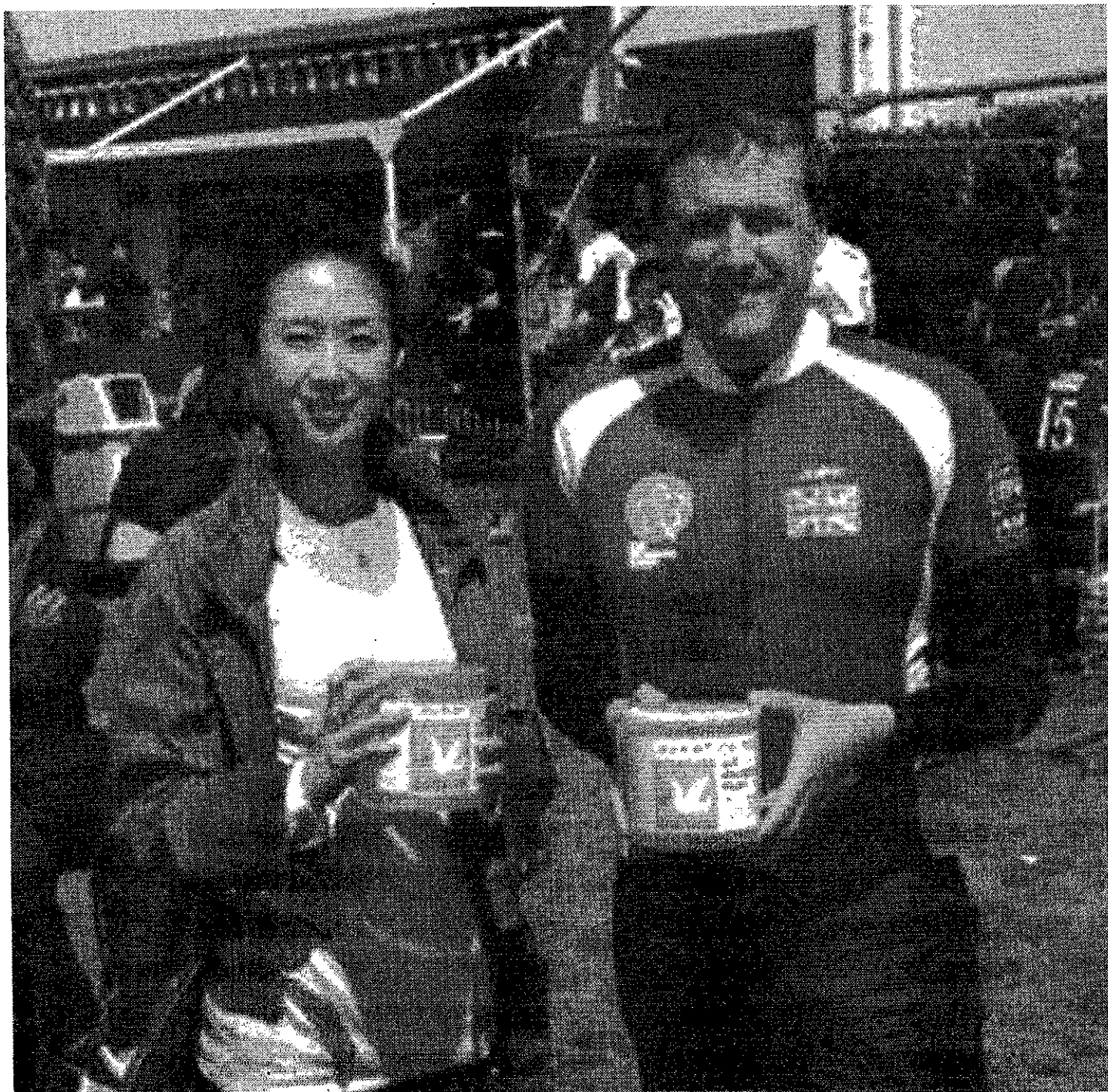
JAPAN
LITE

AMY CHAVEZ

Nomura Holding America Inc., the U.S. subsidiary of Tokyo-based Nomura



nunity



Riding to the rescue: Robert Williams of the Tokyo Brits expat group gathers donations with a volunteer of the Save Minamisoma Project during a sporting event at the Yokohama Country and Athletic Club on Sunday. This was part of fundraising for an upcoming charity cycle ride from Tokyo to Fukushima Prefecture to assist the disaster-hit coastal city. KYODO

y of toilets — trying to change the ‘plumbing code’

amount of comfort granted, and to which sex, however, remains to be seen.

No one has given exact details on why Nomura feels the need to make this change. Is the ratio of toilets really a problem, or is it just a political move? Have the male employees complained that there aren't enough toilets? Are men having to wait in lines? If so, how many minutes and what is

in line. Men's lines go quickly, mainly because they can just shimmy up to the urinal, urinate and leave. Women have to do the whole procedure sitting down, which is not such a good position for quick departure. And while you're there, you may as well check your email. So you'd think women would need more toilets than men, not fewer. Especially if Japanese Toto toilets

where people do their business. OK, it's mainly concerned with output, not input, but still, it's a supply and demand type of thing and, as they say, business is business.

The Japanese, who are well known for doing everything by the book and not allowing for exceptions, are now asking for just that. Just when they start thinking outside the box, they are getting chided by